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Out and Asian: How Undocu/DACAmented Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Youth Navigate Dual Liminality in the Immigrant Rights Movement

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Abstract: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) represent the fastest-growing racial category in the U.S., largely due to its increasing immigration from the Asia-Pacific region (AAJC 2015). Of the 10.9 million undocumented immigrants residing in the U.S., 14% (1.5 million) are from Asia (Migration Policy Institute 2014). In response to immigrant youth organizing, President Barack Obama initiated the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program in 2012, which offers temporary relief from deportation to approximately 2 million undocumented childhood arrivals (Ibid). Yet, the unique perspectives of AAPI youth have gone unheard, and their political activities have been rendered invisible in public discourse on undocu/DACAmented youth in the immigrant rights movement. This study aims to capture political identity formation through what I coin “dual liminality” that leads to political participation for undocu/DACAmented AAPI youth. It considers how their status as undocumented or DACA, as being marginalized from both mainstream and co-ethnic claims to belonging, helped them form a collective political identity and engage in political activities. The use of strategic storytelling (Polletta 2006) throughout the process of their political development also led to their return to organize co-ethnic communities against internalized stereotypes of both “Model Minority” and “Yellow Peril”. This study involves 12 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with politically active AAPI, ages 20–26, from four major cities on the East Coast, conducted between 2014 and 2015. The interviews demonstrate how these youths’ choices to reveal their status shape their collective identity formation that leads to their political engagement. Through strategic storytelling, they use their dual liminality to shape their narrative framing in both the immigrant rights and in AAPI communities, enhancing their political participation across inter-racial boundaries.

Keywords: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders; youth; undocumented; DACA; collective identity; liminality; social movement

1. Introduction

On 18 May 2007, University of California Los Angeles graduate and matriculating Brown University doctoral candidate Tam Tran testified to the U.S. House of Representatives in support of the DREAM (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) Act:

My parents escaped the Vietnam War as boat people and were rescued by the German Navy. In Vietnam, my mother had to drop out of middle school to help support her family as a street vendor. My father was a bit luckier; he was college educated, but the value of his education has diminished in this country due to his inability to speak English fluently. They lived in Germany as refugees and during that time, I was born. My family came to the United States when I was six to reunite with relatives who fled to California, because, after all, this was America. It is extremely difficult to win a political asylum case, but my

parents took that chance because they truly believed they were asylees of a country they no longer considered home and which also posed a threat to their livelihood. Despite this, they lost the case. The immigration court ordered us deported to Germany. However, when we spoke to the German consulate, they told us, “We don’t want you. You’re not German”. Germany does not grant birthright citizenship, so on application forms when I come across the question that asks for my citizenship, I rebelliously mark “other” and write in “the world”. But the truth is, I am culturally an American, and more specifically, I consider myself a Southern Californian. I grew up watching Speed Racer and Mighty Mouse every Saturday morning. But as of right now, my national identity is not American and even though I can’t be removed from American soil, I cannot become an American unless legislation changes [1].

In her testimony, Tam’s public narrative is a critical intervention to the mainstream markers of “undocumented”—Mexican, poor, uneducated, crossing the border “illegally,” and providing no benefit to the receiving nation-state. Her family’s migration story from Vietnam is unique, yet indicative of the circuitous paths migrants must navigate to reach their final destination.

Tam represents the conundrum of American immigration policy as it intersects with notions of belonging embedded in citizenship. She and her family epitomize the refugee definition of “statelessness” in the refusal of any nation-state to accept the responsibility of protecting them as citizens. Tam clearly feels only a vague, inherited relationship to Vietnam, a country onto which she has never set foot. In contrast, her sense of belonging to the U.S. grounds her in her claims to a cultural citizenship as an American, or “Southern Californian”. The legal liminality of her family’s situation translates into “living liminally” for years, as millions of undocumented immigrants and non-citizen refugees must navigate through the web of immigration policies. In a movement that consists of mostly Latinx youth, Tam’s story was their story, regardless of her race or national origin. As an Asian American undocumented activist, she represented a marginalized voice within the national immigration debates, even though her political participation marked a shift for an entire generation of undocumented activists to “come out.”

From Dual Liminality to Political Participation

This study examines how AAPI undocu/DACAmented [2] young people, 18–26 years old, negotiate dual liminal identities that lead to their political participation in as AAPI immigrant rights activists. The contribution this study makes to the literature on social movements lies in how it (a) articulates the juxtaposition of AAPI stereotypes of the model minority in the immigrant rights movement, and (b) in its directionality of political participation through the claiming a political identity through one’s experience of what I term dual liminality.

The concept of liminality by anthropologist Victor Turner (1969) in the study of tribal rituals of initiation that involve a process of separation, transition, and finally incorporation. Organizational scholars use it to analyze social and organizational settings, and I adopt Beech’s interpretation: “liminality can be defined as a reconstruction of identity (in which the sense of self is significantly disrupted) in such a way that the new identity is meaningful for the individual and their community [that] include experimentation, recognition, reflection” [3]. The liminal state occurs on the “margins” of society that often is fragmentary, experimental yet also reflexive,” [4] enabling them to create a juxtaposition of new and existing cultural resources that then translate the experiences into change [5].

One way that sociologists have understood the tensions between family, stigmatization, and immigrant mobilization has been through the concept of liminal legality [6]. Liminal legality refers to the in-between areas of political status that shape an immigrant’s life [7]. Menjivar (2006) applied Turner’s concept of liminality to how the experiences of uncertain legal status shaped the lives of Guatemalan and Salvadoran undocumented immigrants. In so doing, she advanced the notion of legal liminality by emphasizing the “‘grey areas’ between the dichotomies of legal categories” [8]. Moreover, the contradiction of their liminality as they socially and culturally integrate into mainstream society [9].

The entirety of their identity and, by extension, the possibilities in their future, when undocumented immigrant youth must navigate between systems of educational attainment, state surveillance, and family responsibilities or expectations upon entering adulthood [10]. While they achieve symbolic and material accolades as high academic achievers, they also experience structural barriers that act to exclude and criminalize them [11].

In dual liminality, the liminar, in this case the AAPI youth in my study, experiences two levels of this process, within their co-ethnic community and within the context of the society in which they thought they had some relation of belonging. The AAPI youth's response is to engage in advocacy through subject-making identity formation [12] in strategic storytelling that makes claims to belonging to both spaces [13]. In "coming out," or revealing their status for the first time and what it meant for them to live as an undocumented and AAPI person in a state of dual liminality, they develop a political consciousness within that subject-making process. The subjectivity they claim within the recognition of their intersectionality is not only self-healing from the marginalization in AAPI communities, but also a recognition of a collective identity based on immigration status over race and class. This leads to increased political participation that both complicates the DACA/DREAM narrative and leads the youth to challenge their co-ethnic communities on internalized stereotype of the Model Minority and the contradictory notion of the threatening "yellow peril" [14].

2. Methods

I conducted a twelve-month qualitative study on AAPI undocumented and DACA-eligible youth in the immigrant rights movement. Because of my ongoing work to support undocumented students on my campus, and my past work as a community activist in the immigrant rights movement, I was introduced to subjects through mutual acquaintances. Using the snowball method of subject recruitment, the individuals who accepted the invitation to be interviewed then introduced others in their own networks to me. Thus, there is potential bias in my subject pool from this recruitment method, in addition to the relatively small number of AAPI youth activists in this movement on the East Coast.

The study consisted of semi-structured interviews, ninety minutes to two hours each, and follow-up interviews for clarification, with 12 youth (nine males, three females) ages 20–26, formerly or currently undocumented AAPIs between fall 2014 and summer 2015, in four cities on the East Coast. Interviewees were active in what I define as political participation activities, such as organizing campus events, advocacy, and activism. As outlined in Table 1, of the twelve, four identified as Korean American, two as Pakistani American, two as Bangladeshi American, two as Vietnamese American, one as Indian American, and one as Filipino American. Nine of the individuals learned of their status in adolescence, while two knew from the time they were in middle school. One person made the decision to remain in the U.S. after their international student visa expired.

The analysis of the interviews is also informed by semi-structured interviews with secondary subjects of eight AAPI adult allies from local and national organizations during the same time period, and by news media on AAPI undocumented youth from the *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, and *Dallas Morning News*, gathered with the assistance of an undergraduate research assistant. These stories helped to triangulate the interviews in my study and supported the potential generalizability of the pathway to political participation model I introduce for AAPI immigrant youth. All names of individuals, cities, and organizations have been changed to protect the identity of interview subjects, and all gave oral consent for the interviews based on approved consent forms from my institution's Internal Review Board. While I describe the general political activities of the interviewees, I do not divulge the details of their political participation in order to protect their identities and the identities of other undocumented youth in the organizations.

The interviews were transcribed and first coded using the pre-determined categories of identity formation, cognitive liberation (or political consciousness), political activities, and framing processes. Then the data was coded for themes specifically related to AAPI experiences using a grounded theory

approach, whereby themes emerged organically from the data. While we often think of political participation as defined by electoral politics, the particular location of non-citizen youth precludes them from engaging through the electoral system. Instead, I use political participation to include all the activities of social movements to promote active involvement in terms of self-advocacy, individual transformation, advocacy activities, and direct action, or the vast “repertoire of contention” in social movements [15]. Particular activities have been categorized and defined by the interviewees themselves (see Table 2).

Table 1. Demographic Information of Primary Subjects.

Pseudonym	Gender *	Ethnicity *	Time of Discovery in School	City	Type of Organization (See Table 2 for Organizational Activities)	Became Leaders in These Activities? Y = Yes; N = No
Angela	F	Korean	High	A	College campus	Y
Yez	M	Bangladeshi	High	A	College campus, Multi-racial activist	Y
Phil	M	Filipino	High	A	College campus, Co-ethnic advocacy	Y
Han	M	Korean	High	B	College campus, Co-ethnic advocacy	Y
Dee	M	Korean	High	B	Co-ethnic advocacy	Y
Song	F	Korean	High	B	College campus, Co-ethnic advocacy	N
San	M	Pakistani	High	C	Co-ethnic activist	N
Sid	M	Pakistani	Middle	C	Co-ethnic activist	Y
Pat	M	Bangladeshi	Middle	C	Co-ethnic activist	Y
Ron	M	Indian	High	D	College campus, Multi-racial activist	N
Nguyen	F	Vietnamese	High	D	Multi-racial activist	Y
Viet	M	Vietnamese	Adult	D	College campus, Multi-racial activist	Y

* Subjects self-identified their gender, ethnicity, and racial identification (AAPI).

Table 2. Types of Political Participation by Primary Subjects.

Activity	Description	Number of Subjects
College campus organizing	Campus events, meetings, safe space storytelling, information sessions, workshops to build community and educate students about the experiences of undocu/DACAmented youth and their families and to share resources with undocu/DACAmented students	9
Advocacy	Educating lawmakers, advocating for specific policies, organizing visits of students to state house, public speaking to advocate for in-state tuition for undocu/DACAmented students or for the national DREAM Act	10
Activism	Media campaigns, letter campaigns, petition drives, direct action to pass in-state tuition for undocu/DACAmented students or for the national DREAM Act	11

We found that the interviewees had complicated and ambivalent relationships with their co-ethnic communities, with the exception of those who identified as South Asian and Muslim and had participated in pan-South Asian organizations facing post-9/11 targeting by ICE and other government agencies. Otherwise, the emergence of an undocumented identity took precedence to their articulations of a strong ethnic identity formation and organizing efforts within their co-ethnic communities [16]. In essence, their activities and articulation of their identities transgressed race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation to find currency and motivation for action based on an imposed immigration status. As a qualitative study with a difficult-to-reach, vulnerable population, this study is limited in its generalizability. Given the small population of undocu/DACAmented AAPI youth who are politically active, however, this study does offer a unique perspective that can contribute to the scholarship on the intersections of race, immigration status, and political participation.

3. Results

3.1. A Latinx-Framed Immigrant Rights Movement

The dominant narrative framing of the DREAM Act movement tends to perpetuate, or even exacerbate, the binary of “good” and “bad” or “deserving” and “undeserving” immigrants that divides DREAM-eligible youth from other undocumented populations. Self-produced testimonies like Tam’s reveal a growth of political consciousness among the youth since the movement took hold in the late 1990s [17]. This consciousness allows young people to situate themselves within the complicated realities of immigrants and refugees, and encompasses their potential slippage between class orientation, race, and immigration status. Even though counter-hegemonic narratives like Tam’s encourage a new rendering of these childhood arrivals, perspectives of Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) youth activists in the movement remain largely invisible [18]. While the racialization of Asian Americans has historically been conceptualized as simultaneously “forever foreigner” in relation to the dominant black-white binary and “model minority” immigrant who thrives by “pulling themselves up by their bootstraps” without government assistance [19], political debates on immigration policy for immigrant rights are dominated by concerns of the “Latinx threat” [20].

The DREAM narratives stressed the potential of these “model” youth as a “valorized social status” that is exceptional in comparison to other undocumented immigrants [21]. They are either at the top of their classes or enrolled in the military, and contribute to the “American Dream” of the nation-state, both in its economic and security agendas. However, the framing of the campaign has been simultaneously problematic in its reproduction of non-DREAMer immigrant stereotypes [22]. Specific to Asian Americans, the emergence of the Model Minority Myth narrative in the 1960s followed a similar narrative sequence in an attempt to roll back government programs gained during the Civil Rights Movement. In the wake of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, mass media touted hard-working Asian immigrants who came here with virtually nothing, endured racism and marginalization, and yet became successful entrepreneurs and Ivy League graduates. The movement has been effective in that, in an acutely anti-immigrant climate, a critical mass of youth was able to make historic inroads for the status adjustment of undocumented students. Yet, questions remain about how Asian American stories and youth fit into this movement while challenging their own racial stereotypes.

3.2. Dual Liminality in “Discovery” of Undocumented Status as AAPI

Much of the literature on undocumented youth has focused on their initial moment of realizing that they are undocumented, or “discovery,” and the tremendous life-altering impact it has on their developmental transition into adulthood and socio-economic mobility. Gonzales explains daily reality as an undocumented youth as one of tremendous emotional impact, as they must come to terms with their new status as “underserving” adult immigrants:

Blocked mobility caused by a lack of legal status renders traditional measures of inter-generational mobility by educational progress irrelevant: the assumed link between educational attainment and material and psychological outcomes after school is broken. College-bound youths’ trajectories ultimately converge with those who have minimal levels of schooling. These youngsters, who committed to the belief that hard work and educational achievement would garner rewards, experience a tremendous fall. They find themselves ill prepared for the mismatch between their levels of education and the limited options that await them in the low-wage, clandestine labor market [23].

The subjects of this study often described this period of recognition as “outsider racialization” [24], whereby they no longer fulfill the credentials of belonging to the national citizenry or the AAPI community.

When Song had to admit to her high school counselor that she didn’t have a Social Security number, she shared, “It was the most dehumanizing thing to have to call myself ‘illegal’”. This

common symbolically imposed identification as “criminal” was compounded by the real fear of deportation for one’s entire family, as San stated: “I was constantly in fear of my parents being deported, of ICE coming to our door. I didn’t know if my family would be home or in custody when I came home from school”. Even when they did everything to realize the false image of the Model Minority, as in Yez’s case, the consequences were the same:

We did everything we were supposed to: ‘the right way.’ We waited for 12 years in the backlog. We went through the asylum process, and we still got deported. My mom was considered a “high risk” because she was educated, economically stable, and had been in the US for a long time. The very attributes that measured our integration became the criteria for our surveillance and deportation.

A-API youth whose families had participated in co-ethnic social and religious spaces felt suddenly ostracized. For Angela, the religious community that her family sought out upon immigration became a complex weave of relationships. While it provided an informational channel for legal advice, it was also a place where “no one really talked about their immigration problems due to family shame; you just knew vaguely that other people were going through them, too,” and even then, “everyone’s situation was different, so we were on our own. And there was competitiveness. One girl’s mom got so mad at us because I qualified for DACA and her daughter didn’t meet the cut-off date. She had no other option but to join the military”. Yez shared, “The person I was most afraid to come out to was my best friend, who’s Indian, because he totally believed in the Model Minority. Social class divides our community, and it’s a taboo issue”. The interviewees repeatedly expressed emergent feelings of fear and of one’s inability to lead a normal life, whether it be as a teenager, as a member of one’s community, or in the safety of one’s daily routine from institutional violence (ICE enforcement) [26]. Clearly, the youth understood their marginal status as both based in their immigration status but also as a rejection of what they had internalized to be the essence of an A-API identity. The experience of dual liminality forced them further reject their understanding of an A-API identity as passive subject in order to advocate for themselves.

While in high school, interviewees stated that they knew of no one who had been able to offer a clear path forward. No one they knew openly shared information about how they entered the next stage of their life: college acceptance and matriculation. No teacher or counselor had guidelines or instructions, and no college prep manual had pathways to college for undocumented students. The realization came that they had to build their own networks and learn to navigate the system as their own advocates. Angela remembered:

Some days, I would call five times a day, and I would get four different answers. Then there would be one person who gave me a hopeful response. That’s always the one I chose to follow . . . I could have gone to school in Korea as my only other option, but I would not see my family again for at least 12 years. At 18 that’s scary. Other kids just hope they don’t have a bad dorm mate.

This critical moment of “discovery” had a profound impact as the youth realized they had been “living in a dream.” It thus became a point of political awakening for them. In response, they aimed to take control of their lives, out of an effort to find stability and out of basic necessity. An opportunity emerged as they developed critical skills for them as activists in the future. From a social movement perspective, their isolation and social rejection galvanized their development of a political consciousness that transcended their personal experiences.

For the interviewees who identified as South Asian Muslim, this point of entry predated the realization of their undocumented status. In the post-9/11 context, Sid, San, and Pat participated in a youth program that was part of a larger organization addressing the racial profiling, criminalization, and immigration enforcement/surveillance of their community since 2001 [26]. Because of the ongoing conversations of the organization’s membership and of the youth program, Sid felt he had a practical understanding of his options and a network of support with the revelation of his status as a teenager:

I was part of [youth group] after 9/11 and that was my support network and my information channel. I knew that [Malcolm X] college was going to be my only option even before this because of my family's forced "voluntary" deportation after 9/11. In the youth program, we were constantly talking about ICE and immigration strategies, so learning what I had to do was not that different. It wasn't much of a change for me, but I am in and out of school and working full time at a restaurant.

In contrast to others in this study, these three had been mobilized in a different political context (post-9/11 governmental targeting of South Asian, Arab, and Muslim Americans). To them, these events prepared them to have a clear analysis of their situation, and an institutional and broader network of information sharing, resources, and opportunities to move forward.

3.3. My Story is Your Story: Shared Liminality as a Means of Collective Identity Formation

The navigation between co-ethnic community and the federal immigration enforcement system expresses the fluidity between meeting the social and legal expectations of the "deserving" undocumented child, and the fluctuating roles of an adult (read "undeserving") immigrant [27]. Nakano Glenn (2011) applied the concept from childhood arrivals to undocumented immigrant student activists [28]. This group navigated the peer and family networks, schools, work, and political organizations at the point in their lives that they were transitioning to adulthood. Legal liminality for these AAPI organizers places them on the borderlands of the "extended family" (their co-ethnic communities) and the institutions within which they sought support. Consequently, their self-advocacy has led to creative responses that move beyond their racial and ethnic identities to a collective identity that builds self-sustaining resources to meet its particular communal needs as undocu/DACAmented youth.

Nine of the 12 youth in this study did not find any organizations or "safe spaces" for undocumented AAPI, as their liminality situated them in the crevices of co-ethnic institutions and communities. They came to the conclusion that to change their "pre-determined" trajectory, they had to form resource and support networks by themselves with undocumented peers. Some were able to do this with the support of mentors (teachers, counselors, staff) and Latinx or multi-racial organizations. Angela came out to a college professor her first semester of college, which led professor and student to work together to start a student group. The students then organized events for students to come and learn about opportunities, resources, and changes in immigration law. Angela and her peers focused on educational resources first: how to speak to high school and admissions counselors, how to navigate financial aid offices, alternative ways to find financial aid, how to navigate college without status, how to overcome obstacles to opportunities such as internships, study abroad, etc., and offering updates on immigration laws. The sharing of resources built trust among the students as they began to share their own stories and experiences navigating the higher education system. These initial stories to gain information slowly made way for support circles in which students would regularly gather and share their concerns, obstacles, and give each other emotional and other kinds of support. Eventually, with the matriculation of other activist students, the students at her school, though not led by her, decided to organize off campus with cycles of Congressional visits and protests for a state DREAM Act.

Phil found that other undocumented students shared many of his life experiences. This clarified for him how his identity as undocumented overshadowed his ethnic identity: "We shared the identity of being undocumented, and that became more important, more defining of who we were, than race". Like Phil, five of the youth found themselves in largely Latinx or multi-racial formations where their immigration status spoke to a shared set of values, priorities, experiences, and vocabulary that many in their own AAPI community spaces did not articulate publicly. Nguyen moved from an area with a large co-ethnic Vietnamese community to Hope City for this very reason. As she pointed out, "I just looked online because I didn't know what else to do. I found this group that had all this information I didn't know before, and I said, okay, Hope City is where I'm going. I just packed up my bags and moved here. For the first time, I felt I was with people who understood what I had been going

through". The contradictions of their "Model Minority" identities in Asian American spaces forced them to feel isolated as they suppressed their stigmatized status, which implied the antithesis of what it means to be an "AAPI" overachiever and docile subject that "followed the rules."

In contrast, when Viet learned of a local Latinx group that worked with undocumented youth, he immediately contacted them. He quickly found that there were many other youth who had similar stories and needed the resources and support network that this group offered. Through this perspective, he learned to be an organizer: "They trained me how to talk to other youth by giving me information in a way I understood and taught me how to motivate others advocate for themselves". Viet learned basics of organizing events, protests, and rallies, and how to frame his story to media and political stakeholders to align with that of other Latinx youth in his organization. After Yez's story made local media outlets in his personal attempt to gain amnesty, he was recruited into a largely Latinx organization: "Danielle heard about my story and invited me to a meeting with other undocumented youth to share my story. I was shocked that there were others like me!" Yez understood his peers based on their shared imposed identity, and, while he had grown up with co-ethnics and other South Asian youth, awareness of his status became a barrier in his adolescence to associate with the youth. He described his newly found group as feeling like he "found a home". It was through the mentorship of the Latinx organization's staff that he learned about his individual situation as part of a larger system of oppression, and gained the capacity to advocate for broader policy and social changes beyond his own case.

The trajectory of political participation differed slightly for subjects who began in co-ethnic organizations that had a political component. Han, Song, and Dee partook in a co-ethnic organization that focused on advocacy for Korean Americans as undocumented and DACA youth. Because the organization already had political education programming and engaged in activities to change policy, these three individuals were relatively more willing to participate in advocacy activities themselves, including going on a national storytelling tour with an inter-racial coalition to build support for immigration reform. However, their willingness to make themselves public figures or volunteer for direct action differed. Han and Dee became very vocal and regularly volunteered for direct action initiatives to increase pressure for immigration reform policy, and regularly took leadership positions in organizing rallies or contingents to broad-based protests for immigrant rights locally and regionally. Song was less likely to do so, fearing reprisal both from her family and from ICE and receiving much more pressure from her family to not participate than the two men. Instead, she focused on assisting with the internal political education of the youth in her organization as part of its programming arm.

For Pat, Sid, and San, their pre-existing interactions and membership in the same progressive South Asian youth organization had prepared them for this time in their lives as activists. Their political understanding of what they called the "isms" (imperialism, capitalism, racism, sexism, heterosexism) of historical oppression as it applied to them as immigrant, working-class youth of color meant that they had a language and a world-view to contextualize their situation as they entered adulthood. Their conceptualization of "Asian American" was through the racialized lens of "terrorism" and the historical racialization of AAPI's as the "Yellow Peril" threat. As such, their identities of "undocumented" and "AAPI" intersected at the point of criminalization through the post-9/11 anti-terrorism programs that included ICE enforcement. Pat and Sid had taken leadership roles in citywide coalitions as well as being lead campaign organizers for their organization. San acted in a participatory role in the organization in general, but was an active participant in youth circles and clearly someone the organization was training for leadership.

Regardless of their point of entry in the political participation pathway, the youth in this study reached a point of political, or oppositional, consciousness through their self-advocacy and collective identity formation. While it is compelling to consider gender as a variable for the extent of their political participation, the subject pool is too small to make any conclusive claims about gender differences. They did consistently believe, however, that they could change their life trajectory and

social condition through one of these forms of political activity and by changing the narrative through which people viewed them.

3.4. Framing Liminality: Strategic Storytelling as AAPI Undocu/DACAmented Youth

Framing processes are “the collective processes of interpretation, attribution and social construction that mediate between opportunity and action” necessary to encourage consensus of public opinion or to facilitate “cognitive liberation”, the final critical step to sustaining a movement [29]. Recent scholarship looks at the concept of framing processes in particular as a dynamic set of relationships as well as social networks and individual interactions [30]. Polletta (2006) contends that it is the cultural identity in these sites of interaction that allows for counterhegemonic or oppositional collectivity to develop [31]. The site of contestation then lies in the existence of “oppositional communities” [32], and these communities can exist in reaction to imposed identities of oppressed, liminal communities to articulate a new collective identity [33]. The AAPI youth in this study communicate a “double consciousness” [34] of dual liminalities embedded in the simultaneity of the intersectional identities of race and immigration status. This perspective allows them the power to view their circumstances from under-represented perspectives within immigration policy discourse, and then shift the imposed trajectories of their lives through strategic storytelling.

Because collective identity formation plays a critical role in the emergence of social movements, particularly mobilizing activities, the transformative potential entailed in the collective identity, bolsters the possibility of substantive collective action [35]. The symbolic, emotional, and moral articulations and specific dynamics within spheres of the environmental, the relational, and the cognitive play significant roles in the process of collective identity formation and subsequently collective action. Hughey (2015) urges scholars to understand frames beyond their original boundaries:

Frames matter. But as a solitary explanation they are incomplete and not nearly specific enough to explain action and order. Paying attention to racial identity accountability obligations and the expectations of interactive scripts means explicitly addressing the role of movement actors’ beliefs, assumptions, and patterned habits beyond their formal organizing as their lives relate to existential notions of being, purpose, and value [36].

These conceptualizations of identity formation that re-appropriates their sense of liminality inform the way in which AAPI youth author self-generated narratives in relation to other undocumented youth within a discourse of a racialized identity (Model Minority AAPI) that is imbued with social expectations of socio-economic success [37].

Framing processes are critical sites where the cultural is most influential. Framing involves both the articulation of one’s political consciousness and the concretization of a collective identity that motivates sustained action. Building upon this conceptualization of framing processes, Polletta points to the literature on narration and movement building: “Storytelling differs from reason-giving in ordinary conversation in at least four ways. Stories integrate description, explanation, and evaluation; they are detached from the surrounding discourse; they are allusive in meaning; and they are interactive in the sense that they elicit more stories in response . . . One challenge is to get deliberators to listen as well as speak (Barber 1988; Bickford 1996)” [38]. Thus, Personal narratives allow us situate the impact of policy-making on our daily lives. Moreover, Negron-Gonzales (2009) argues that narratives engage in framing processes that are both liberating and incite collective action through cognitive liberation: “*Testimonios* are one way in which the undocumented students . . . negotiate the tension between the dominant societal discourse about immigration and their own lived experiences as undocumented. This negotiation . . . can be generative of oppositional consciousness and engagement in activism” [39]. The sites and effect of public narratives, however, have reached a pervasive and critical historical juncture in their ability to affect public opinion through alternative and social media sites.

The interviewees in this study were strategic about when, how, and with whom they shared their stories. Most individuals only revealed their status when it was absolutely necessary in order to

achieve a goal or gain resources that they desperately needed. When asked what kind of tactics they used in their organizing of other undocumented youth, all participants talked about storytelling as a way to create “safe space”. The main goals of most events and meetings were to share information, share opportunities for collective action, and share personal narratives. The youth often would have either weekly or monthly meetings where they would come together and talk about their experiences. Both intentionally and spontaneously, individuals would “come out.”

The initial impression that individuals had in hearing their peers’ narratives was the diversity of the stories. When asked if and how the narratives of AAPI undocumented youth challenged current stereotypes of undocumented and DACA youth in general, Angela responded, “No one I know fits the media’s narrative of undocumented immigrants”. Phil concurred: “Everyone’s story is unique. There’s no one narrative. Even people I know from Mexico, their stories are not how the media tells it. It’s nuanced”.

The interviewees went on to express the liberating experience of being in a room full of people who shared their “secrets” and the pain of living “in the shadows”. Phil continued: “More than anything else, it’s the times when we share our stories that make us feel safe, and like a community. Like we belong to something. I never felt that way in the [community] I belonged to growing up”. The strategy to intentionally create safe spaces for storytelling allowed the youth to bond as a collective identity across racial, gender, and class lines, and directly led them to possibilities of thinking about collective action.

However, the interviewees unanimously articulated the need for challenging the Model Minority Myth narrative as part of their role in their co-ethnic communities and in the immigrant rights movement. Han pointed out, “As Koreans, we have a lot of shame for our families and embarrassment for ourselves, so we don’t tell our stories. When we do, we want it to be the Model Minority. That’s why we have to challenge it”. Ron interpreted the myth as a class-oriented stereotype as much as it is racially marked: “We have to tell a different story and break down the Model Minority. We have to challenge our own communities along class lines, too”.

In one of his first interviews with the news media, Yez remembered differentiating himself from other racial groups and from co-ethnic Muslims in order to feel justified in making claims to America as a “deserving” Model Minority immigrant. Since he began participating in the movements for DACA, DREAM Act, and in-state tuition, he has been in numerous multi-racial storytelling circles. These interactions have fundamentally changed his perception of himself, his relationships with other undocumented youth, and his orientation toward sustained alliances. He reflects: “After I heard other people tell their stories, and after making so many friends who are Black and Latinx and undocumented, I can never throw my peers under the bus again. I can never say I’m the Model Minority and better or different”. Like his AAPI peers, Yez mostly grew up with very few primary relationships outside his ethnic and class orientation. The opportunity to “come out” and to organize spaces for undocumented peers to do the same allowed the youth to interact in multi-racial spaces that viewed their immigration status as a primary identity.

Their shared liminality served three strategic purposes. First, “coming out” provided them with potential allies and advocates to help them navigate or attain the necessary information and resources for their next step, usually accessing higher education. By providing spaces for shared experiences to be expressed, they formed collective identities that were based on articulations of shared histories, fears, values, and dreams deferred, or relative deprivation. The formation of a collective identity sustained their ability to organize, but it also helped them reflect on their own biases and thus, to shift their cognitive orientation to a deeper analysis of structural inequities. Finally, in recognizing the power of their stories, the youth learned to strategically frame their narratives to media and policy makers to achieve particular legislative goals. They drew alliances with their peers and communities across racial and class divisions. In these ways, they reclaimed a sense of agency over their narratives and over their lived experiences, rather than feeling overcome by fatalistic despair.

4. Discussion: Dual Liminality, Liminal Narratives, and Political Participation

This study demonstrates the potential pathway of undocumented AAPI youth's political participation in the immigrant rights movement that begins with dual liminality, as outlined in the pathway model below (see Figure 1). The initial point of departure, regardless of the age at which they know of their status, occurs when they are toward the end of their high school career and are about to transition into "adulthood", with markers such as driving, seeking employment, and applying for college. During this period, there is a perceived sense of being rejected or disavowed of their rights as members of society generally and of their ethnic and racial communities specifically, or a sense of relative deprivation compared to their peers with citizenship and AAPI identity (Box 1). They often interpret this experience in conflation with their racial identity as "outsider racialization" for the first time, and endure a period of dejection or even depression at the perception of dual liminality. At this moment, they make the transitional decision to reveal their status to someone of relative power with hopes of guidance and assistance (Box 2).

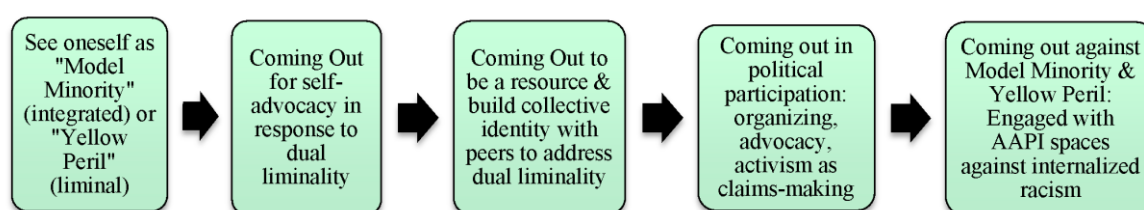


Figure 1. AAPI Immigrant Youth Pathway of Political Participation through Coming Out in Response to Dual Liminality.

As a result, their self-advocacy to research options and build collective knowledge that transforms them from feeling disempowered into seeing themselves as a resource for other undocumented youth struggling to navigate college or DACA applications. With their new role as a mentor or resource for their peers, they begin their trajectory as organizers, usually through event planning, distribution of resources or informational materials for undocumented youth, and creating gatherings in "safe spaces" that allow youth an opportunity create a collective identity based on their undocumented status. Within these gatherings, the youth offer their stories to others for very personal reasons, resulting in what many call a cathartic moment. By listening to their peers' narratives, they heighten their political consciousness about other racial and religious groups, shifting their sense of dual liminality to a shared sense of collective belonging (Box 3).

The solidarity that emerges from these spaces creates the momentum for youth to participate in advocacy initiatives or activist campaigns for immigration reform [40]. In doing so, they learn how to more strategically divulge their lives to media and policy makers, merging their cultural and social repertoire, or toolkit, as change agents (Box 4). The final stage of this process involves the youth becoming politically active in two ways. First, they see themselves as part of a movement whose objectives and vision are intertwined with other movements such that they participate in multi-racial and cross-sectional causes. Secondly, after feeling shame and ostracization from their co-ethnic communities, many youth return to AAPI community organizing with the goal of dismantling the Model Minority stereotype that they believe leads to racial, class, and immigration status divisions. At this point, their narratives shift from one of immigration focus alone to challenging the Model Minority stereotype (Box 5). In other words, they re-integrate themselves in two ways: as part of the democratic process beyond the electoral rituals from which they have been excluded, and in re-entering their ethnic and racial (AAPI) communities as equally "deserving" immigrants by challenging the embedded stereotypes of AAPI's [41].

Some differences have been found depending on the kind of organizations the youth interact with at the beginning of their process. Subjects who identified as South Asian and Muslim participated in

co-ethnic organizations formed out of post-September 11 racial and religious profiling were already entrenched in experiences of collective dual liminality that created alternative perceptions of belonging. Thus, they were much quicker to adapt, and it catapulted them into political participation in inter-racial spaces. Those who were recruited or mentored by progressive organizations that had a pre-existing political education infrastructure also progressed more quickly through the pathway laid out in Figure 1.

As a qualitative study with a difficult to reach, vulnerable population, this model has some limitations in its generalizability from a quantitative perspective, and I would agree that more studies need to be conducted on this topic. I adopt the standpoint that the phenomena of undocu/DACAmented AAPI youth political participation in a largely non-AAPI movement, both discursively and demographically, justify the model's potential generalizability for AAPI immigrant youth political participation because "when they do develop, certain consequences may well follow because these consequences are the logical outcomes of the phenomena" [42]. In short, the pathway approach allows us to consider the short, medium, and long-term effects of each connection within the pathway that reflects the unique and interpretative circumstances for which qualitative studies best capture. While scholars have documented the engagement of past generations of AAPI movement leaders that stem from ethnic-specific to pan-ethnic AAPI to inter-racial coalitions, this study marks a potential generational shift of collective identity formation grounded in the dual liminality that intersects immigration and AAPI social positionality.

5. Conclusions

AAPI youth offer a unique contribution to our understanding of immigrant youth and their potential process toward political participation. Three main conclusions emerge from this study that demonstrate my contribution to understanding undocu/DACAmented AAPI youth political participation in the immigrant rights movement. Immigration status sparked emotive responses of outsider racialization in the national belonging, as well as an imposter syndrome as an AAPI Model Minority or a collective ostracization as Yellow Peril that leaves them in a stage of legal and social "dual liminality", at the borders of national belonging and of their community. Secondly, their undocumented identity eclipsed racial and ethnic affiliations to form a collective identity, based on an imposed status, that motivated them toward collective action vis-à-vis campus organizing, advocacy, or activism for immigrant empowerment and immigration reform. The youth who began their political engagement in multi-racial spaces do not simply remain in those spaces. Instead, they often express desire to return to their own co-ethnic communities to advocate for multi-racial issues and to challenge their own communities' stereotypes about the Model Minority and Yellow Peril. Finally, those who participated in politically active organizations from the beginning tended to be more engaged in advocacy and activist activities sooner, and to take part in a wider variety of activities.

Strategic storytelling was key to the process of responding to dual liminality. It gave agency to the youth in terms of with whom they chose to share their status, when, and with what intention. It coalesced their sense of belonging with other undocumented youth, and it helped them learn to shift the discourse on immigration, as well as on AAPIs. The youth demonstrated how personal narratives create universal human connection across racial boundaries, as a way of asserting power to reclaim one's humanity and re-appropriate imposed identities. Through their political participation and strategic storytelling, these AAPI youth have made critical connections between social, economic, racial, and immigrant oppression. This work has led them to increased political participation in the immigrant rights movement, and to increased concern for dialogue with the co-ethnic communities from which they had felt disassociated. Their experiences from dual liminality to collective identity formation and empowerment through strategic storytelling led directly to their re-prioritization of co-ethnic community engagement to debunk their community's myths of itself and others. Unlike previous generations of AAPI activists who were first grounded in their ethnic communities, the experience of

dual liminality due to the immigration status of this generation of AAPI leaders instigated their political participation process that then led to their critical engagement in their own ethnic/pan-ethnic spaces.

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 - Were under the age of 31 as of 15 June 2012;
 - Came to the United States before reaching your 16th birthday;
 - Have continuously resided in the United States since 15 June 2007, up to the present time;
 - Were physically present in the United States on 15 June 2012, and at the time of making your request for consideration of deferred action with USCIS;
 - Had no lawful status on 15 June 2012;
 - Are currently in school, have graduated or obtained a certificate of completion from high school, have obtained a general education development (GED) certificate, or are an honorably discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or Armed Forces of the United States; and
 - Have not been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, or three or more other misdemeanors, and do not otherwise pose a threat to national security or public safety. (USCIS DACA Guidelines 2012)
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