How a Community-Based Organization Creates *Ibasho*

for Asian American Immigrant Youth

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1. Introduction

While Asian American youth are often represented as a highly successful “model minority” with high academic and educational attainment, a number of these youth experience discrimination, racialization, and marginalization in the United States (Lee, 2009). Specifically, Asian American girls are highly at-risk population—Asian American girls and young women, ages 15-24, have the highest suicide rates across any racial or ethnic groups (National Center for Health Statistics, 2003). Studies have called attention to family pressures such as strict gender roles and expectations, body image struggles, and model minority stereotypes as primary forces in their lives.

Community-based organizations (CBO), as alternative educational settings, have played important roles in providing academic, social, economic, and emotional support to Asian American youth, including girls (Reyes, 2007). These organizations often value and integrate the knowledge, ability, and strength that youth bring, and have enormous potential to become *Ibasho*: places, spaces, and communities where these youth could feel a sense of belonging, safety, comfort, and acceptance (Sumida, 2003).

Based on two years of ethnographic fieldwork at a non-profit CBO that mainly serves low-income Asian American children and youth, this presentation explores the ways in which this organization creates *Ibasho* for Asian American girls.

2. Method

The main participants of this study are nine first, 1.5, and second generation Asian American girls (ages 13 to 17)—three Filipinas, two Vietnamese, two Chinese, and one Indian—who regularly participated in a CBO located on the East Coast of the United States. The mission of the organization is to improve the lives of low-income Asian American children and youth by providing them social, academic, and life-skill support.

As of 2009-2010, the organization has developed an array of programs, including after-school programs and mentoring programs for more than 300 students (K-12) in the larger community. My focus is on the after-school program offered at the public high school I call Maple High (pseudonym). One full-time staff member, an Asian American young woman, runs the program twice a week for about two hours, using one of the classrooms at Maple High. The program serves approximately 15 to 20 students, nine of whom are the main participants of this study.

The fieldwork mainly took place at this organization, where I conducted participant observations, interviews and focus groups.
during after-school programs, summer programs, and events. I also interacted with the girls' friends in and out of the school, CBO staff and volunteers, and the students at the Asian American youth organization.

3. Main Findings
While the Asian American girls in my study were often alienated from their family home, school community, and media, they co-created the after-school program into Ibasho. It was a temporal cocoon created in an empty classroom after the regular school hours at Maple High. The girls and their friends gathered in the classroom, had snacks, did homework, did some activities, and enjoyed their free time.

The CBO acknowledged the youth as cultural innovators and mediators including embracing the value of the popular culture that these youth enjoyed engaging, which became crucial factors of their Ibasho making. Unlike the structured and bureaucratic school system, the CBO had some freedom and leeway where they could align their programs to the students' lived experiences. The program coordinator often asked the students to suggest activities and events they desired to have during the program and provided free time where the students could gather and hang out.

The CBO also affirmed and celebrated Asian American identities and cultures which allowed the girls to connect to their ancestral and ethnic roots. The girls lived in a multi-ethnic neighborhood with a small Asian population so they appreciated being in a space with mostly Asians and learning about Asian cultures. The girls articulated their excitement of having a collective "Asian pride" at the organization.

Lastly, the CBO celebrated racial/ethnic diversity, inclusivity, and hybridity which the girls valued in their lives. For example, the program coordinator often encouraged the students to use multiple and hybrid languages. While the organization primarily targeted low income Asian American students, they were open to recruiting participants from diverse race/ethnicity.

4. Conclusion and Implications
The after-school program of the CBO became an important Ibasho where the Asian American girls felt a sense of belonging, safety, comfort, and acceptance. However, the CBO also had challenges to balance their mission as well as meeting the students' needs. Based on the findings, this presentation also suggests ways to support the development of CBO where immigrant youth can thrive.

<References>
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