

ASIAN AMERICAN STEREOTYPES AS CIRCULATING RESOURCE¹

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Abstract

Drawing on theories and methods in linguistic anthropology, this paper examines the ways in which circulating stereotypes of Asian Americans emerge as resources in conversations among Asian Americans. Specifically, this paper analyzes two video-recorded interactions at a videomaking project in Philadelphia's Chinatown to trace how Asian American teen participants *invoke* Asian American stereotypes, *orient* to them in various ways, and *reappropriate* them to: 1) position the self and other relative to stereotypes; 2) construct stereotyping as an oppressive practice to resist or as an interactional resource to celebrate; and 3) bring about interactional effects from widely circulating stereotypes (e.g., Asian storeowner) that are different from those from locally circulating typifications (e.g., Asian minivan driver), what I call *widespread typifications* and *local typifications*, respectively. By interrogating the very notion of stereotype as a performative resource, this paper illustrates how Asian American stereotypes can be creatively reappropriated by Asian American teens to accomplish meaningful social actions.

Keywords: Asian American, Identity, Stereotype, Circulation, Discourse analysis, Metapragmatics, Positioning

1. Introduction

Perhaps one of the most interesting things about stereotypes is not whether they are true or false, but rather that individuals *need* them to move about the world. Lippmann (1922), the first scholar to bring the topic of stereotypes to the social science table, refers to them as “pictures in the heads” of individuals looking out into their social world. He argues that we interact directly not with objective reality but with the representations we have created about that reality. To know that the substance in front of you is ‘water’, for example, is to already know that water is represented by the features: +liquid, +transparent, and so on. (Otherwise, every time you encounter ‘water’ you would have no idea what it is.) A description of such features can be called a ‘stereotype’, defined by Putnam (1975) as:

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a standardized description of features of the kind that are typical, or 'normal', or at any rate stereotypical. The central features of the stereotype generally are criteria—features which in normal situations constitute ways of recognizing if a thing belongs to the kind or, at least, necessary conditions (or probabilistic necessary conditions) for membership in the kind (1975: 230).

Along this line of reasoning, stereotypes are simply 'typical' features; at best, they are approximate descriptors that may or may not always be accurate or reliable. As such, if you are confronted with a substance that is +liquid but –transparent (because, perhaps, of a cloudy chemical treatment), you may still be able to recognize this substance as 'water' since +liquid is a required condition, but +transparent is a typical, not necessary, feature. Stereotypes, then, can be quite useful as we interact with objects and people in our daily lives.

Yet the common folk perception of 'stereotypes' in the U.S. is that they are essentializing, largely negative, ideas held by people and used to judge or oppress other people. This notion has also been taken up by several researchers in Asian American Studies (e.g., R. Lee 1999; S. Lee 1996; Hamamoto 1994; Marchetti 1993). Hagedorn (1994), noting that stereotypes of Asian Americans in mainstream media can be multiple and conflicting, argues that Asian American men are depicted as sexless, villainous and gentle, while Asian American women are portrayed as exotic, evil and submissive - what filmmaker Renee Tajima calls the dragon lady/lotus blossom dichotomy. Yet perhaps most research has been in response to the prevalent portrayal of Asian Americans as the "model minority" (CBS 60 Minutes, 1987; Newsweek, 1982). Although the model minority stereotype explicitly emerged in the 1960s, some scholars argue that it had its origins in the Cold War. At that time, Asian Americans were depicted as a successful case of ethnic assimilation in order to help contain what Robert Lee (1999) calls "the red menace of communism, the black menace of racial integration, and the white menace of homosexuality" (1999: 10). As the model minority stereotype later emerged explicitly during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, scholars argued that the myth of the Asian American "success story" (U.S. News and World Report, 1966) was used not only to set a standard for how minorities should behave, but also to silence the accusations of racial injustice by communities of color (S. Lee 1996). Thus, the model minority myth upholds the American ideologies of meritocracy and individualism, diverts attention away from racial inequality, sustains whites in the racial hierarchy, and pits minority groups against each other.

While such studies are extremely important in understanding the social impact of stereotypes and the consequences for Asian Americans in particular, there has been little work on stereotypes outside of this rather limited scope of research. Indeed some stereotypes may be hurtful toward individuals, but these same individuals can also reappropriate such stereotypes as a *resource* for accomplishing new social actions. This process is not unlike the reappropriation of ethnic epithets, such as 'nigger' by African Americans (Kennedy 2002) and 'chink' by Asian Americans (Reyes 2002), as solidarity terms under certain interactional conditions. Just as these practices can be controversial and confusing, particularly to those outside of the relevant ethnic grouping, the reappropriation of stereotypes can strike similar debates as to how previously pejorative and homogenizing representations of groups can take on new positive meanings. Using this idea of stereotype as resource, this paper is interested in

how people reappropriate stereotypes of their ethnic grouping as a means through which to position themselves and others in socially meaningful ways, accomplish new social actions and, in effect, assign new meanings to stereotypes.

Drawing on theories and methods in linguistic anthropology, this paper examines the ways in which circulating stereotypes of Asian Americans emerge as resources in conversations among Asian Americans. Specifically, this paper analyzes two video-recorded interactions at a videomaking project in Philadelphia's Chinatown to trace how Asian American teen participants *invoke* Asian American stereotypes, *orient* to them in various ways, and *reappropriate* them to: 1) position the self and other relative to stereotypes; 2) construct stereotyping as an oppressive practice to resist or as an interactional resource to celebrate; and 3) bring about interactional effects from widely circulating stereotypes (e.g., Asian storeowner) that are different from those from locally circulating typifications (e.g., Asian minivan driver), what I call *widespread typifications* and *local typifications*, respectively. The relationships among these actions reveal how they rely on one another for their meaningfulness. Positioning the self and other, for example, is part and parcel of how stereotypes are used to resist oppression and celebrate identities. Likewise, the interactional effects of widespread and local typifications rely on whether these specific typifications are used to resist or celebrate. By interrogating the very notion of stereotype as a performative resource, this paper illustrates how Asian American stereotypes can be creatively reappropriated by Asian American teens to accomplish meaningful and interrelated social actions.

2. Metapragmatic stereotypes

Previous work on stereotypes has largely been the domain of social psychology. Social psychologists recognize that stereotypes are not simply mental phenomena, but consensually shared in a society (Stangor and Schaller 1996). Research in this area has asserted that stereotypes not only help individuals organize and simplify their environment; they also fulfill social functions (Leyens, Yzerbyt and Schadron 1994). There have been attempts to categorize these functions of out-group stereotyping (Tajfel 1981), and to delineate levels of analysis ranging from individual representations in the mind to collective representations shared by members of a "cultural group" (Stangor and Schaller 1996). Using data primarily from experiments and questionnaires, the individual approach is concerned with the meaning of stereotypes to individuals, while the sociocultural approach is concerned with the transmission of stereotypes and their societal consensus. Such quantitative measures are of some use, but fail to account for *functions* of stereotypes beyond static rules, stereotypes of the *self* and how people reappropriate them for meaningful action, and the level of *interaction* by focusing either too narrowly on the individual or too broadly on society.

This is not to say that social psychologists have completely overlooked the importance of analyzing language in stereotype research. Maass and Arcuri (1996) recognize that "stereotypes are closely - if not inseparably - linked to language" (1996: 220). And since any instance of stereotyping uses as its vehicle language or other semiotic modalities, they also suggest that "our knowledge of stereotypes will remain incomplete without an analysis of the language" (1996: 220). Although there

has been some discourse analytic research on stereotypes that comes out of a social psychology tradition (Giles 1977; van Dijk 1987; van Langenhove and Harré 1994), there is still a heavy reliance on analyzing decontextualized language, such as counting the number of ethnic slurs in a dictionary (e.g., Stangor and Schaller 1996).

Stereotype research in linguistic anthropology (e.g., Agha 1998), philosophy (e.g., Putnam 1975), sociolinguistics (e.g., Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985) and linguistic ethnography (e.g., Tusting, Crawshaw and Callen 2002) take into account important philosophical, ethnographic and discourse perspectives that are overlooked by social psychologists. In this paper, I draw primarily on theories and methods in linguistic anthropology to argue that stereotypes function *metapragmatically* (Silverstein 1993; Agha 1998) to enable interactants to perform social actions. Agha (1998, 2004), building on Putnam (1975) and Silverstein (1976, 1993), argues that “[s]ince our ideas about others are ideas ABOUT pragmatic phenomena, they are in principle metapragmatic constructs. In particular, such ideas are METAPRAGMATIC STEREOTYPES ABOUT PRAGMATIC PHENOMENA” (Agha 1998: 151). By definition, metapragmatic phenomena must take as their object pragmatic signs (Silverstein 1993). A pragmatic sign is any behaviorally deployable concomitant of action, such as owning a store, driving a car, having a visible skin color, or employing some distinctive type of speech. Metapragmatic stereotypes mediate between two pragmatic orders. Not only do metapragmatic stereotypes *construe* pragmatic behavior, such as recognizing and reifying a particular behavior as rigidly linked to social categories of persons, they also *enable* pragmatic behavior, making such metapragmatic stereotypes “reportable, discussable, open to dispute; they can be invoked as social standards, or institutionalized as such; they allow (and sometimes require) conscious strategies of self-presentation; they serve as models for some individuals, counter-models for others” (Agha 1998: 152). In other words, as metapragmatic stereotypes travel from interaction to interaction, they enable interactants to generate pragmatic behavior, such as arguing, celebrating or denying someone a taxi ride because of the color of their skin. Metapragmatic stereotypes, then, circulate as models that we can invoke to perform social actions.

3. Situating stereotypes

Sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists have long recognized that interactions do not occur in vacuums, isolated from and uninfluenced by their surrounds. Rather, interactions are situated in particular settings and guided by particular contextual aspects that greatly influence how discourse unfolds. The following interactions are no exception. The teens are voluntarily participating in a videomaking project at an Asian American community arts organization after school. They are drawn to this particular program and institution for several reasons - an interest in video, art or activism, or because they want to be with their friends, meet new people, or be among those racially or ethnically similar, to name just a few. It is important to consider that the videomaking project occurs in a distinctly- and explicitly-Asian American institution, which may influence the types of interactions that are produced in it. It is equally important to consider the ways in which these interactions unfold as guided by the particular activity that the teens are engaged in. The next three sections describe

the institution and the particular circumstances surrounding each of the two interactions which serve as the data for this paper.

3.1. An Asian American teen videomaking project

The setting for this study is an Asian American teen videomaking project at the Asian Arts Initiative², a community arts organization located near Philadelphia's Chinatown. Like many other community arts organizations, the Asian Arts Initiative is grounded in the belief that political activism through the arts can lead to social change. Willis (1990) states that "[t]hrough subordinated and often marginalized, the many strands of the community arts movement ... share the continuing concern to democratize the arts and make them more a part of common experience" (1990: 4). By offering several programs for Asian American adult and youth constituencies, the Asian Arts Initiative fosters a sense that art belongs to everyday people and can help build a collective political and cultural voice for underrepresented populations.

This paper is part of a four-year ethnographic and discourse analytic study of the Asian American teen videomaking project at the Asian Arts Initiative. This project, which engages a new group of about 15 teens each year, meets weekly from February to June. Teens, with the help of adult artists and volunteers, critically discuss issues relevant to their lives and communities, create a script based out of these discussions, then shoot and edit a 15-minute video that reflects their real-life experiences and perspectives. These videos are then screened at conferences and in classrooms. Having families that immigrated from Cambodia, Vietnam, or Laos, the teens are assigned to or assign themselves to the not unproblematic ethnic grouping of 'Southeast Asian American' (see Bucholtz, this issue). Depending on the interactional circumstances, teens will use different "tactics of subjectivity" (Bucholtz and Hall 2004) to racially or ethnically self-identify. When teens identify as 'Asian' or 'Asian American', they are exemplifying the process of *adequation* to foreground a similarity of identity based on a racial grouping. However, when teens identify by ethnicity alone, for example, 'Vietnamese' or 'Cambodian', they are, in part, drawing on the process of *distinction* to highlight differences among Asian ethnic groups. There are several teens that identify as 'mixed', which typically means that they are multiethnic, but it can also mean that they identify as one ethnicity but their families came from an area that was primarily another ethnicity, for example, ethnic Chinese from Cambodia. Most of the teens would be identified as 2nd generation or "1.5 generation" (Rumbaut and Ima 1988), meaning they were born in another country but immigrated to the United States as young children. Many immigrated from refugee camps and processing centers in Thailand or the Philippines to poor urban neighborhoods in Philadelphia. Over the years I have been a volunteer and coordinator of the videomaking project, and also a staff member of the Asian Arts Initiative. Data collection methods include participant observation, fieldnotes, interviews, and audio- and video- recording of interactions at project sessions and video screenings.³

² The Asian Arts Initiative has requested that the name of the organization not be changed in publications resulting from this research.

³ This paper analyzes interactions at project sessions, but see Reyes (2002) for an analysis of a screening discussion where stereotypes about culture are invoked.

Although the participants in this study and I oftentimes use ‘Asian American’ to describe the institution as well as the participants, I do not wish to present this label as unproblematic. As a pan-ethnic unifying marker in theory, ‘Asian American’ can also be understood as one of divisiveness in practice. Although it can be a strategic label for political mobilization, many note that ‘Asian American’ has been commonly understood as representing only Chinese and Japanese Americans (Espiritu 1992: 50-51), thus excluding Southeast Asian Americans, like those in this study. Not only are labels such as ‘Asian American’ exclusionary, they can also be gravely misleading. As Lowe (1996) argues, “important contradictions exist between an exclusively Asian American cultural nationalist construction of identity and the material heterogeneity of the Asian American constituency, particularly class, gender, and national-origin differences among peoples of Asian descent in the United States” (1996: 38). Despite the ways in which the diversity among Asian ethnic groups complicates a unified formation of Asian American identity, the teens in this study commonly identify as ‘Asian’ or ‘Asian American’, thus participating in the local construction of this unifying, yet homogenizing, label.

3.2. A brainstorming activity

This first interaction I present occurred during a project session in February 2001. This session was early in the project year, and used to help explore possible themes for the video. Teens and adult artists and volunteers were divided into four small groups. Each small group had a private area and was given a large piece of paper upon which to draw a large head in the center. After drawing the head, each group had to choose from a list of five statements. The following interaction is from one of the small groups, which consisted of two ethnically ‘mixed’ Cambodian-Chinese boys, Moeun and Dan, and one ethnically ‘mixed’ Cambodian-Vietnamese-Chinese girl, Anh, who were joined by the scriptwriting artist, Didi, an Indian woman, as well as a project volunteer, Kelly, a Vietnamese woman.⁴ All five were sitting in a circle around the piece of paper. They chose the statement ‘I feel different’. When Anh was about to write on the inside of the head ‘mean’, which teens claimed is something that their siblings think of them, Didi stopped her and said, ‘no, this [pointing to the inside of the head] is what you really are and this [pointing to the outside of the head] is what people think’. Didi’s directions made the activity particularly conducive to eliciting stereotypes as it involved an explicit distinction between what others think of the teens and what the teens think of themselves.

The following transcript begins with Moeun, who offers a suggestion for something to write on the outside of the head.

(1) ‘Put owns a Chinese restaurant’⁵

Moeun: oh (.) put owns a Chinese restaurant

⁴ All names used for participants in this paper are pseudonyms.

⁵ See Appendix for transcription conventions.

- 56 Anh: ((turns lips down, wrinkles forehead downward))
 Didi: o:h ok[ay(.) yeah that's a good idea heh heh
- 58 Moeun: [heh heh
 Anh: owns a store? ((picks up marker))
- 60 Moeun: yeah
 Didi: yeah
- 62 Anh: I own a s- my parents own a store ((leans in to
 write on paper, with lips still turned down and
 64 forehead wrinkled downward))
- Moeun: cause- Asian peop- cause like [Asian people=
 66 Kelly: [stereotypes
 Moeun: =yea:::h
- 68 Dan: they always got to own something
 Moeun: yea::h
- 70 Kelly: grocery store heh heh
 Anh: yeah I own a grocery store ((turns lips down,
 72 wrinkles forehead downward))
- Moeun: my parents too heh heh
- 74 Anh: ((turns lips up))
 Dan: drives minivan
- 76 Moeun: heh heh
 Anh: o:h [yeah heh ((gazes at Moeun, points to Dan))
- 78 Moeun: [hell yeah hell [yeah if you don't drive=
 Didi: [heh heh
- 80 Moeun: =one you ain't Asian ((gazes at Anh, points to
 Dan)) (1.9) drives minivan (4.6) heh heh
- 82 Anh: my brother drives (psycho) people to work every
 mo(hh)rning
- 84 Moeun: heh heh

About a minute later, Olive, another project volunteer, came into the room. She was curious about why they had 'minivan' written down. 'That's a stereotype?', she asked. Moeun replied, 'That's what people think'. Anh clarified, 'They think we drive minivans'. Anh then paused and in a contemplative voice uttered, 'But we do'. Dan replied, 'They shouldn't think that though.'

3.3. A scriptwriting activity

This next interaction occurred at a scriptwriting session about one month later in March 2001. The teen scriptwriters were one Chinese girl, Sara, one 'mixed' Chinese-Burmese (ethnic Chinese from Burma/Myanmar) girl, Cindy, one ethnically 'mixed' Cambodian-Chinese girl, Enoy, one Lao boy, Rod, and one Haitian girl, Jill, who is the only non-Asian participant in the videomaking project. The scriptwriting artist, Didi, an Indian woman from the previous interaction, also appears here. They are writing the first scene of the script for the video they will be shooting in a few months. In the interaction I analyze here, the scriptwriters are trying to decide what one of the main characters in the video is going to say to his sister in the first scene, which takes place on a basketball court after school. They want the teenage boy, who is Chinese, to call his sister to him, so the scriptwriters are thinking of reasons why he would need to do that.

The activity of scriptwriting, like the activity described in the previous section, can also be conducive to invoking stereotypes. Storytelling conventions and prior media representations of Asian Americans can function to restrict possibilities when developing characters in a script. As Didi, an experienced filmmaker, has said about scriptwriting, 'The first lines that come to your mind are usually stereotypes'. This interaction is no exception to her observation, but it is unlike the previous interaction in at least two ways. First, this scriptwriting activity is not asking for explicit distinctions between what others think about the teens and what the teens think about themselves. There is no specific discussion of whether the proposed reason for the boy calling his sister should or should not be a stereotypical idea about Asians. Second, as opposed to the previous activity in which what the teens discussed was mainly for their own benefit, the writing of a script for a video that is going to be viewed by audiences might influence the kind of material that participants would want to include. Although the teens might not necessarily be wholly attuned to the potential consequences of their representations, the Asian Arts Initiative as a community organization is particularly sensitive to issues of representation. Thus the potential reproduction of stereotypes is carefully monitored.⁶

Before the interaction represented in the following transcript, Didi has asked the scriptwriters to come up with a line for the boy to say to his sister. Jill offers a suggestion.

(2) 'Mom needs you at the store'

Jill: like mom [needs you at the- the store or=
 86 Didi: [I
 Jill: =something (0.8)
 88 Didi: mom needs you at the store? or (0.7)
 Enoy: I don't know (?)
 90 Jill: a lot of Chinese people do own a restaurant
 Sara: no they're not [owning a restaurant they're=₁
 92 Enoy: [all right mom needs you to=₂
 Sara: ₁=not owning a restaurant
 94 Enoy: ₂=watch- mom needs you to watch the store. they
 got to own something in their [life tell me=
 96 Sara: [no no
 Enoy: =your parents don't own anything in their life
 98 ((waving pencil with quick downward motions in
 front of Sara's face))
 100 Sara: (?) in their life? they don't own anything now,
 they did [but-
 102 Enoy: [see see there you go ((waving pencil at
 Sara again, turns lips up, gazes at Jill))
 104 Sara: but that's so:- [that's so stereotypical you=

⁶ This is not to say that the Asian Arts Initiative does not allow stereotypes in the teen-created videos, but they do encourage critical discussion about why people produce them, why the teens might reproduce them, and what the repercussions of putting them in the videos might be.

Jill: [it's what.
106 Sara: =cannot do that no [way no ((slaps pencil=₁
Enoy: [heh heh yep all right=₂
108 Sara: ₁=down, puts hands under table))
Enoy: ₂=(puts hands under table, then brings them back
110 up)) tell me tell me- um
Sara: no: ((puts hands palms facing out toward Enoy))
112 Enoy: [they always- always no matter they got to own=
Didi: [what we have to do is-
114 Enoy: =some kind of store
Jill: I know ((counting on fingers)) nail salon,
116 res[taurant, (???), hair salon
Enoy: [((gazing at Jill, counting on fingers)) hair
118 salon always (.) there's no joke- Manhattan bagel
(.) my uncle got a bagel store what the hell is
120 that? heh heh
Rod: [heh heh
122 Jill: [heh heh
Sara: that's new that's new
124 Didi: ok look it's really important-
Enoy: they comin' up man ((turns lips up, raises hand
126 palm up in front of Sara))
Sara: ((places head face down on table))
128 Didi: u::h
Rod: Asian bagel store ha ha

4. Identifying stereotypes

Before analyzing how teens orient toward and reappropriate stereotypes, we must first identify what qualifies as a stereotype and if it is indeed invoked. As pointed out earlier, a stereotype can be fundamentally defined as a *typical feature of a kind* (Putnam 1975). The problem of identifying stereotypes engages two central questions: 1) what counts as typical?; and 2) what counts as a typification? One way to discover what counts as *typical from the participant perspective* is to examine certain discursive features that index typicality, for example, adverbs such as 'always'. One way to discover what counts as a typification is to analyze two elements in an interaction: *Reference* and *predication* (Wortham and Locher 1996); for the particular purposes of this paper, this means relating some aspect of behavior (predication) to a particular social category of persons (reference).

A typification need not be typical. For example, 'he drives people to work' has the referent 'he' and the predication 'drives people to work', but there is nothing in this phrase that indicates that it is typical. If this phrase were accompanied by 'always', as in 'he always drives people to work', then this typification would become typical, but not necessarily *stereotypical*, as we shall see. For the purposes of this paper, I focus only on such typifications that are also identified as typical by participants. In the following excerpts taken from the two full transcripts above, I use a triadic model to identify instances where reference (dotted), predication (dash), and what I call 'typicality devices' (**bold**) together form *stereotypes from the participant perspective*. I will focus only on references that index Asian ethnic groups (often anaphorically through nonpronominal indexicals such as 'they'), predications

that describe behaviors of those references, and typicality devices that index these typifications as typical.

(3) Reference: ‘Chinese people’; predication: ‘Do own a restaurant’; typicality device (plural quantifier): ‘A lot of’

90 Jill: **a lot of** Chinese people do own a restaurant

(4) Reference: ‘Asian people’ anaphorically indexed by ‘they’; predication: ‘own something’; typicality devices (adverb): ‘always’, (aspect marker): ‘got to’

Moeun: cause- Asian peop- cause like [Asian people =
66 Kelly: [stereotypes
Moeun: =yea::h
68 Dan: they always got to own something
Moeun: yea::h

(5) Reference: ‘Chinese people’ (line 90) anaphorically indexed by ‘they’; predication: ‘own some kind of store’; typicality devices (adverb): ‘always’, (phrasal adverb): ‘no matter’, (aspect marker): ‘got to’

112 Enoy: [they always- always no matter they got to own=
Didi: [what we have to do is-
114 Enoy: =some kind of store

(6) Reference: ‘Asian people’ (line 65) anaphorically indexed by ‘you’; predications: ‘don’t drive one’ (‘minivan’ line 75), ‘ain’t Asian’; typicality device (conditional embedded clause): ‘if you don’t ... you ain’t’

78 Moeun: [hell yeah hell [yeah if you don’t drive=
Didi: [heh heh
80 Moeun: =one you ain’t Asian ((gazes at Anh, points to

The triadic model is not sufficient for identifying mainstream stereotypes but is necessary for identifying explicit *stereotypes from the participant perspective*.⁷ In Examples 3-5, the ‘Asian storeowner’ is recognized as a stereotype from the perspective of participants in both interactions. But whether it is a stereotype relies on knowledge of its circulation beyond these two interactions. The image of the Asian storeowner does, in fact, circulate at the societal level, from representations of Asian storeowners in mainstream entertainment media, such as Apu on the ‘The Simpsons’, to news media portrayals of events, such as the Los Angeles riots, which highlighted the visibility of Korean shop owners (Sethi 1994). Thus, we can say that the Asian storeowner is, indeed, a stereotype, or what I call *widespread typification* because of its societal circulation. In Example 6, on the other hand, teens from the first interaction seem to formulate what they interpret as a stereotype, that of the ‘Asian

⁷ The triadic model identifies only stereotypes which are explicitly presented as such by participants. Stereotypes that are invoked from utterances that do not employ typicality devices are outside the scope of this paper. For example, ‘she was a dragon lady yesterday’ may invoke the dragon lady stereotype of Asian American women without the explicitness of typicality devices.

minivan driver'. Yet since the image of the Asian minivan driver has a limited scope - as narrow as this particular interaction to as wide as perhaps Asian communities in the Philadelphia area - do not define it as a stereotype, but as a *local typification*.

In addition to this triadic model, denotationally explicit metapragmatic signs (Silverstein 1993) (**bold**) and their subsequent uptake (dotted) are another way to discover how participants identify stereotypes.

(7) Denotationally explicit metapragmatic sign: 'Stereotypes'; uptake: 'yea::h'

66 Moeun: cause- Asian peop- cause like [Asian people=
 Kelly: [stereotypes
 Moeun: =yea:::h

(8) Denotationally explicit metapragmatic sign: 'stereotypical'; uptake: 'heh heh yep'

104 Sara: but that's so:- [that's so **stereotypical** you=
 Jill: [it's what.
 106 Sara: =cannot do that no [way no ((slaps pencil=
 Enoy: [heh heh yep all right

With the Asian storeowner identified by participants and myself as a stereotype that is invoked in both interactions, I will now examine how the teens orient toward this stereotype and reappropriate it for meaningful effects.

5. Positioning the self and other relative to stereotypes

One thing that the teens do with stereotypes is use them to position themselves and others in socially meaningful ways. There are two kinds of positioning at issue here: 1) teens positioning themselves and others as inhabiting the stereotype; and 2) teens positioning themselves with respect to each other in socially meaningful ways. The first issue is concerned with the relationship between the "denotational text" and "interactional text" (Silverstein 1993), that is, with how the events discussed in the denotational text (i.e., stereotypes) relate to the participants in the interactional text (i.e., the teens). "Interactional positioning" (Gergen and Kaye 1992; Wortham 2001), which is primarily concerned with how the interactants are positioning themselves with respect to each other in the interactional text, can be operationalized to explore the second issue. The fact that the Asian American teens invoke an Asian American stereotype foregrounds the potential for inhabiting this stereotype since the teens, though ethnically diverse, do draw on the process of adequation to identify as 'Asian' or 'Asian American'.

In the following excerpts, both Anh and Sara are the first to position themselves as inhabiting the Asian storeowner stereotype by admitting that their families own or have owned stores. In order to inhabit a stereotype, I argue, one must locate herself or be located as a member of both the reference (in this case, 'Asian') and the predication (in this case, 'owns store'). Since Anh and Sara both identify or are identified as 'Asian', they are indeed members of the reference; in the following excerpts, they become members of the predication as well. Whereas Anh willingly

inhabits the stereotype, Sara is almost forced by Enoy who demands from her, 'tell me your parents don't own anything in their life' (lines 95-97).

(9) Anh inhabits the stereotype

62 Anh: I own a s- my parents own a store

(10) Sara inhabits the stereotype

100 Sara: (?) in their life? they don't own anything now,
they did [but-

As Anh and Sara inhabit the stereotype, they also resist the stereotype. To signal resistance, Anh uses mostly paralinguistic cues, while Sara uses both paralinguistic and linguistic ones. Through her use of facial expressions, such as frowning and wrinkling her forehead downward (lines 56, 63-64 and 71-72), Anh displays resistance and perhaps irritation toward Moeun's suggestion to write 'owns a Chinese restaurant' (line 55) on the piece of paper. Sara, on the other hand, uses some gestures, such as slapping her pencil down (line 106), but mostly uses denotatively explicit responses to resist scripting the Asian storeowner stereotype, for example, 'they're not owning a restaurant' (lines 91 and 91-93), 'you cannot do that' (lines 104-106) and 'no (way)' (lines 106 and 110). By performing these moves of resistance, Anh and Sara are also interactionally positioning themselves in opposition to others, particularly Moeun and Enoy, who support the relevance of the stereotype in their respective interactions.

As Anh and Sara display resistance, the other interactants use the stereotype as a resource for creating relationships with each other as they interactionally position themselves as unified in support of the stereotype. In the first interaction, Didi ratifies Moeun's contribution, 'owns a Chinese restaurant', with 'o::h okay yeah that's a good idea' (line 57). Kelly and Dan also align with Moeun by laughing with him and providing supporting information that 'owns a Chinese restaurant' is appropriate to write on the outside of the head. When Moeun says, 'cause like Asian people' (line 65), both Kelly and Dan collaborate with Moeun in the typifying of Asians; Kelly says, 'stereotypes' (line 66) and 'grocery store' (line 70), and Dan says, 'they always got to own something' (line 68). In the second interaction, after Jill suggests a line for the script, 'like mom needs you at the store' (line 85), Enoy positions herself with respect to Jill as she agrees with her contribution, 'all right ... mom needs you to watch the store' (lines 92-94). In addition, Enoy and Jill, in one instance, jointly count types of stores that Asians own, 'nail salon, restaurant ... hair salon' (lines 115-118). Moeun, Didi, Kelly and Dan, in the first interaction, and Enoy and Jill, in the second interaction, perform clear discursive patterns as they align in terms of assessments (Goodwin and Goodwin, 1992) - joint laughter, cooperative completion of sentences, collaborative typification of Asians - that interactionally position them as aligned with one another, but aligned against Anh and Sara, respectively.

Anh and Sara's resistance breaks, however, when Moeun and Enoy co-inhabit the stereotype with them. This illustrates how interactional positions are momentary and may shift under certain interactional conditions.

(11) Moeun co-inhabits the stereotype

73 Moeun: my parents too heh heh

(12) Enoy co-inhabits the stereotype

120 Enoy: Manhattan bagel (.) my uncle got a bagel store
what the hell is that? heh heh

When Moeun co-inhabits the stereotype by admitting that his parents also own a store, Anh's resistance breaks. Anh seems pleased as she begins to smile (line 74), a facial signal new for her in this interaction. When Dan says, 'drives minivan' (line 75), as another example of what others think of them, Moeun and Anh immediately align with each other. This is illustrated by their mutual eye gaze (lines 77 and 80), simultaneous pointing towards Dan (lines 77 and 80-81), and verbal agreement ('yeah' in lines 77 and 78). Goffman (1963), Goodwin (1981) and others argue that "gaze is not simply a means of obtaining information, the receiving end of a communication system, but is itself a social act" (Goodwin 1981: 92). As Anh and Moeun gaze at each other, they are doing more than communicating; they are accomplishing a mutual orientation toward the invocation of Asians driving minivans. Anh admits that her brother drives a minivan, but does so with more humor and less resistance than when she inhabited the Asian storeowner stereotype; laughter breaks through Anh's words as she says, 'my brother drives (psycho) people to work every mo(hh)rning' (lines 82-83). Although owning a minivan may not seem to the outsider as relating to the topic of employment, it achieves such local meaning in this interaction. Anh's brother picks up Southeast Asian workers on certain corners in South Philadelphia and drives them to work in the blueberry fields, garment factories, and other sweatshop labor. For this group of teens, owning a minivan is a narrowly circulating local typification that indexes low-income employment.

When Enoy co-inhabits the stereotype by admitting 'my uncle got a bagel store' (lines 118-119), Sara's resistance also breaks. Rod and Jill join Enoy in laughter (lines 121-122) as the comic value of her inhabiting this stereotype may rely on the fact that her uncle owns a bagel store and not a Chinese restaurant, which has been listed as a typical occupation. Then, just as Anh's alignment shifted in the previous interaction after someone co-inhabited the stereotype with her, Sara's alignment begins to shift as well. Sara ratifies Enoy's statement by uttering, 'that's new that's new' (line 123), amidst the laughter. Seemingly pleased that she was able to break Sara's resistance a little, Enoy smiles, raises her hand in front of Sara's face and says, 'they comin' up man' (lines 125-126). Finally, Sara, perhaps signaling that she has finally given up, places her head face down on the table (line 127).

6. Stereotypes as oppressive practice vs. celebratory resource

In addition to reappropriating stereotypes in order to position themselves and others in socially meaningful ways, the teens also construct stereotyping as an oppressive practice to resist or as an interactional resource to celebrate. When stereotyping is characterized as oppressive practice, it seems an obvious resource for resisting mainstream homogenizing representations of Asians as well as resisting attempts by

participants within an interaction to homogenize Asian people. It is perhaps seen as acceptable to stereotype one's own ethnicity, because a person is assumed to know more about her own ethnicity or because she is seen as not being able to oppress her own (see Chun, this issue). Yet as revealed by their anger and resistance, Anh and Sara interpret others in the interaction as perpetuating stereotypes that serve to oppress Asian people. Anh constructs a stereotype as oppressive through its characterization of perpetuating only 'false' things about Asians, but displays confusion when stereotypes have elements of 'truth'. For example, when Olive asked the teens why they had 'minivan' written down on their paper, Anh said, 'they think we drive minivans', then in a contemplative voice uttered, 'but we do'. Anh appears to have a moment of confusion. She recognizes that 'they' think the teens drive minivans, but she also notes that it is 'true' for her and so is in the moment trying to figure out if 'true' characterizations of behavior qualify as stereotypes. Unlike Anh, Sara seems to argue that regardless if a stereotype is 'true' or 'false', it is still 'stereotypical' (line 104) and thus oppressive and homogenizing.

When stereotypes are characterized as celebratory resource, they become resources for building social relationships and resources with which to identify. As explained above, Moeun and Dan and Jill and Enoy construct alliances that defend the relevance of a stereotype in their respective interactions. In addition, the teens collaboratively build stereotypes in ways that make them more accessible as resources with which to self- and other-identify. They do this by broadening a predication or reference (**bold**) so that it better applies to their experiences.

(13) Predication broadens from 'owns a Chinese restaurant' to 'owns a store'

- Moeun: oh (.) put **owns a Chinese restaurant**
 56 Anh: ((turns lips down, wrinkles forehead downward))
 Didi: o::h ok[ay(.) yeah that's a good idea heh heh
 58 Moeun: [heh heh
 Anh: **owns a store?** ((picks up marker))
 60 Moeun: yeah

(14) Reference broadens from 'Chinese' to 'Asian'

- 90 Jill: a lot of **Chinese** people do own a restaurant
 ...
 129 Rod: **Asian** bagel store ha ha

As these excerpts reveal, predications and references can broaden so as to become increasingly more applicable to interactants. After Moeun says, 'put owns a Chinese restaurant' (line 55), Anh goes out of her way to make sure that Moeun also means 'store' (line 59). By broadening the predication, Anh is able to construct the stereotype as applicable to her since her family owns a store, not a restaurant. In the second interaction, as the ethnicity of the characters in the script is explicitly 'Chinese', Jill typifies only Chinese people when she says, 'a lot of Chinese people do own a restaurant' (line 90). But then Enoy applies this stereotype to her own experience by mentioning that her uncle, who is ethnically 'mixed', owns a bagel store (line 119). Rod says, 'Asian bagel store' (line 129), which reveals that this

stereotype has indeed widened to apply to Asians, not just to Chinese people. These stereotypes, then, are formulated to be maximally applicable and available to the teens as meaningful resources to form relationships and resources with which to identify.

7. Interactional effects of widespread stereotypes vs. local typifications

When a *widespread typification* (e.g., Asian storeowner stereotype) is invoked in these two interactions, it brings about different interactional alignments and effects than those from a *local typification* (e.g., Asian minivan driver). A circulatory account of how stereotypes are formed and maintained can partly explain this. A typification of behavior, for example, ‘all Asians own stores’, circulates as it travels through “discursive chains” (Agha 2003), that is, travels as a speaker tells this message to a hearer who in turn becomes a speaker who tells it to another hearer and so on. If a typification does not travel through discursive chains or only at a scale that reaches a limited number of people, it remains a *local typification*. Only after a typification has circulated widely in discursive chains at the societal level can it develop into a stereotype or *widespread typification*. Such widespread typification is indeed fragile and maintained only through continuous streams of discursive chains. Otherwise, a stereotype can fade if discursive chains break, they become filled with counter-messages, or their speakers and hearers die out.⁸ It is important to note that these speakers and hearers need not be individuals, but can be vehicles through which material signs circulate. For example, stereotypes can circulate through various popular media, such as film, television, magazines and newspapers, which can perpetuate the distribution of value regarding Asian Americans. Importantly, this process is not neutral since those who have the power to control these signs and sign vehicles play a crucial role in the political economy of texts (Gal 1989; Irvine 1989; Bauman and Briggs 1990).

In both interactions, widespread stereotypes and local typifications emerge in succession and bring about different kinds of alignments. Anh and Sara, who display resistance toward the widely circulating Asian storeowner stereotype, radically shift their alignment after stereotypes are co-inhabited and after local typifications, ‘drives

⁸ This does not mean, however, that stereotypes cannot resurrect. For instance, Gilbert (1951) found that in 1933, Princeton students thought that the Japanese were intelligent, industrious and progressive, but in 1951, they saw the Japanese as sly and shrewd. Then in 1969, other researchers showed that the stereotypes had returned to what they were in 1933 (Leyens et al. 1994). This example reveals the cyclical nature of stereotypes as dictated by historical events, such as the Japanese defeating the Russians in 1904, World War II, and Japan’s emerging presence in the global market in the 1960s.

minivan' (line 75) and 'got a bagel store'⁹ (line 119), are added in next-turn behavior. Both of these less indexically rigid local typifications (dotted) are contextualized with comic value by the subsequent laughter (**bold**).

(15) Laughter after local typification: 'drives minivan'

Dan: drives minivan
 76 Moeun: **heh heh**
 Anh: o:h [yeah **heh** ((gazes at Moeun, points to Dan))
 78 Moeun: [hell yeah hell [yeah if you don't drive=
 Didi: [**heh heh**
 80 Moeun: =one you ain't Asian ((gazes at Anh, points to Dan)) (1.9) drives minivan (4.6) **heh heh**

(16) Laughter after local typification: 'got a bagel store'

118 Enoy: hair salon always (.) there's no joke- Manhattan
 bagel (.) my uncle got a bagel store what the
 120 hell is that? **heh heh**
 Rod: [**heh heh**
 122 Jill: [**heh heh**

These local typifications are critical in breaking the interactional frame (Goffman 1974) from serious resistance to comic event, which results in Anh's compliance and Sara's surrender. As noted earlier, Anh and Sara interpret the Asian storeowner stereotype, which is dispersed throughout society by media corporations, as oppressive and homogenizing; local typifications, on the other hand, may be seen as novel, innocuous and not in need of active resistance as they circulate locally in interactions with friends and provoke laughter. Constructing a common identity as they index in-group knowledge, these local typifications function to create a sense of community by distinguishing between those who know this local 'fact' about Asians from outsiders who do not. The teens display no problem with a local typification perhaps because it is within their control; communities outside of their own are unaware of it and thus cannot use it against them as they go about the world. If 'Asian minivan driver' began to circulate widely in societal speech chain networks, it might no longer generate laughter among participants because it would no longer function to index in-group knowledge. Instead, the image of the Asian minivan driver would become another stereotype to contend with, yet also another stereotype to reappropriate as an interactional resource.

⁹ Owning a bagel store may not technically qualify as a local typification, since a bagel store is still a store and can fall under the Asian storeowner stereotype. However, the *atypical* ownership of a *bagel* store, as illustrated by Enoy's 'what the hell is that?' (line 120), as opposed to the *typical* ownership of a 'nail salon, restaurant ... hair salon' (lines 115-116) is what I am arguing here.

8. Conclusion

This paper examined the ways in which metapragmatic stereotypes are circulating resources that can be creatively recontextualized in interaction. Analyzing video-recorded interaction, I examined the ways in which participants at an Asian American teen videomaking project invoked the widely circulating stereotype of the Asian storeowner, oriented toward it in radically different ways, and reappropriated it to various interactional effects. Specifically, teens employed stereotypes: To position themselves and others in relation to stereotypes or in relation to each other; to resist oppressive practices, form social relationships, or celebrate a means of identifying, or; to bring about different interactional alignments between stereotypes and local typifications. Oftentimes interactionally achieved identities were temporary and shifted according to how the discursive processes above unfolded and related to one another. This illustrates how stereotypes and identities can become active and mutually informing processes. Whether teens use stereotypes to resist others and homogenizing representations of Asians or to celebrate a common identity together in opposition to others, the teens reveal how stereotypes can be incorporated into people's lives to various effects, and sought out as a means of identifying and imagining oneself, others and connections between individuals and groups.

Still, as with the reappropriation of ethnic epithets, the Asian American teens who draw on Asian American stereotypes at the videomaking project raise compelling issues regarding the nature and circulation of stereotypes on a wider scale. Of course, the teen-created grassroots videos have very limited circulation and the teens themselves are not in influential positions to control signs and sign vehicles at the societal level. Yet by celebrating stereotypes or identifying with them, are the teens somehow participating in homogenizing their own communities, uncritically perpetuating sweeping stereotypes of Asian behavior? Or are the teens, as emerging videographers, reclaiming historically pejorative typifications to create a more critical Asian American political production, whether deliberately or not. Indeed, the teens straddle at least two possible representations of Asian America: 1) a 'homogeneous' Asian America, which conforms to wider mainstream discourses that lumps all Asian Americans together and essentializes them as, for example, storeowners; and 2) a 'heterogeneous' Asian America, which is aligned with Espiritu (1992) and Lowe's (1996) conceptualization of a shifting, evolving and richly diverse, sociopolitically constructed racial category.

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Appendix

Following Bucholtz (2000), courier font is used for transcribed segments. Transcription conventions are adapted from Goodwin (1990):

<u>word</u>	(underline) utterance stress
word?	(question mark) rising intonation
word.	(period) falling intonation
word,	(comma) falling-rising intonation
word-	(dash) abrupt breaks or stops
wo:rd	(colon) elongated vowel or consonant
°word°	(circles around utterance) utterance is quieter than surrounding talk
wo(hh)rd	(hh) laughter breaking into utterance
(.)	(period in parentheses) a pause under 0.5 seconds
(0.5)	(number in parentheses) a silence measured 0.5 seconds and above
[word	(brackets) simultaneous talk by two or more speakers
[word	
word=	(equal sign) continuous talk
=word	
word= ₁	(equal sign with numeric subscript) continuous talk that latches by numeric subscript
₁ =word	
(word)	(parentheses) doubtful transcription or conjecture
(?)	(question mark in parentheses) inaudible utterance(s)
...	(ellipsis) break in transcript; omitted lines
((word))	(double parentheses) transcriber comment