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The Pursuit of Happiness: Asian Americans in Music

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Abstract

It is critical that we observe the expanding Asian American landscape in the context of today's evolving music business. The purpose of this research paper is to analyze how and to what extent parental expectations, peer pressure, and levels of self-identity affect the career outcomes Asian Americans in their pursuit of music careers. The data analyzed consisted of five personal interviews, all of whom are involved in music production and/or performance. It was concluded that familial pressure impacted participants more so than peer pressure in their adolescence and self-identity became a more influential factor in adulthood. Additionally, the advancement of technology has generally provided a more accessible platform for creatives, leaving artists to experiment with various resources and platforms. Rather than separating "traditional" and "nontraditional" careers, there may be an budding trend in integrating both pathways.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Electronic music producer Chris Gavino, better known as Manila Killa, discussed the influence of his family upbringing on his education and music career. In an article written by Gavino for The Green Room, he shared:

> Having financial security and a fruitful career that is able to provide for one's family is the main goal for many children of immigrants. I was no exception to this; it was expected for me to "follow" the path that everyone in my family was following. (C. Gavino, 2018)

Gavino continued to reflect on the internalization of his cultural identity and his own expectations for the professional world, which was to enter college as an accounting major with the hopes of interning for one of the "Big Four" accounting firms and graduating with an immediate job offer.

The 25-year-old producer was born in Washington, D.C. to Filipino immigrant parents who moved to the United States in the hopes of a better life. While Gavino has since found success playing in front of thousands of fans at massive music festivals and founding the music collective Moving Castle, his story still resonates with millions of other Asians in the United States.

I, myself, am a second-generation Chinese American creative. As a child, I began piano lessons at a young age and became self-taught on the guitar. I eventually took on school choir, musical theatre, and explored the possibilities of audio production. Much of my professional experience now has been in the business of music. And like Gavino, I have experienced similar parental pressures and cultural expectations growing up.

I was always curious about what the Asian American identity meant in music and where I, along with many of my peers, fit in. I became especially interested in this subject as the

visibility of Asians in Western television and film rose in the past couple of years. Additionally, the conversation of representation and identity still continues to be a common theme amongst my peers, especially as we establish ourselves in the current workforce and work to reclaim our heritage.

Literature Review

The Asian American Landscape in the 21st Century

The term "Asian American" is an overgeneralization of the complexities of the ethnic groups it encompasses. It is partly comprised of the descendants of those who immigrated to the United States in the mid-1800s to the early 1900s, as well as the more recent wave of immigrants who moved to the United States after the 1964 Immigration Act (Chan, 1991). In 2015, there was an estimated number of about 21 million Americans who identify as Asian, with a majority located in California (around 6.8 million) and New York (around 2 million). The largest ethnic group in America is made up of Chinese, followed by Indians, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Koreans, and then Japanese (López, Ruiz, & Patten, 2017).

Despite coming from a history of racial prejudice and low-skilled occupations, Asian Americans are now regarded as the "highest-income, best-educated, and fastest-growing racial group in the United States", according to Pew Research Center ("The Rise of Asian Americans", 2012). Between 2000 and 2015, the Asian population in America grew about 72 percent, surpassing the second most rapidly growing population, Hispanics at 60 percent (López et al., 2017). The National Geographic reported that they also make up the largest immigrant population in the United States.
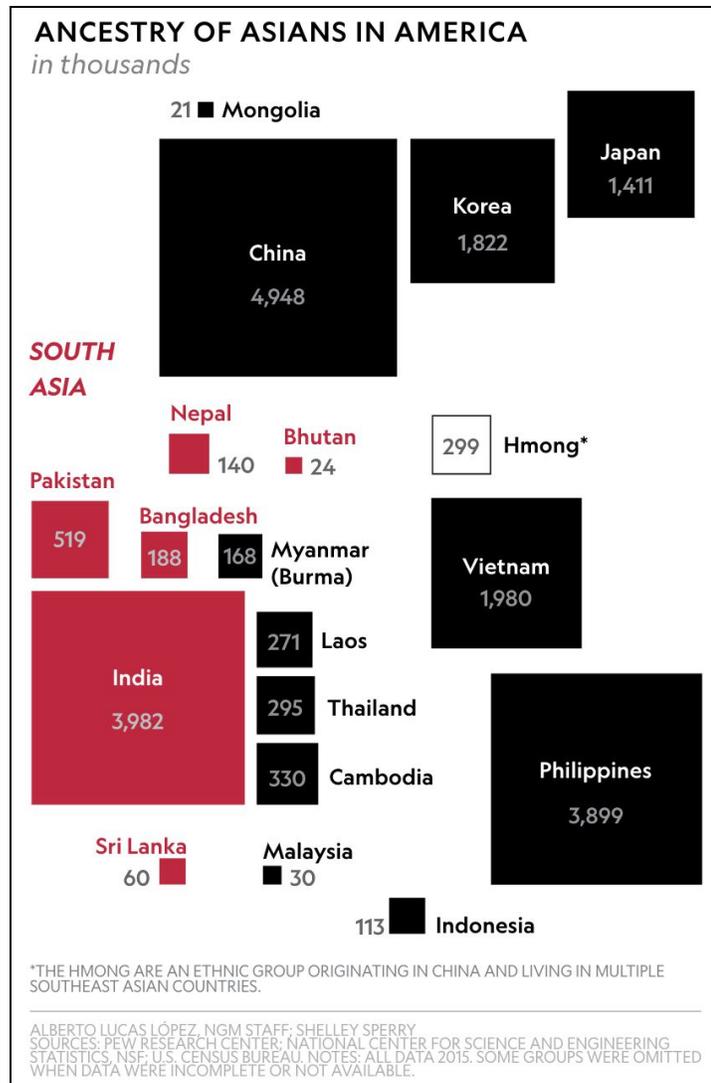
Figure 1. A visual breakdown of the Asian immigrant population in the United States from the years 2010 to 2015. By Alberto Lucas Lopez, 2018, The National Geographic Society.

Economic prospects for Asian Americans have grown immensely in the 21st century. Recently, the median annual income for Asians was reported at $73,060 compared to the country's overall at $53,600 (López et al., 2017). It is important to note that while the average income in Asian Americans has increased significantly throughout the years, so has the income

inequality between the ethnic communities. In a study observing 19 Asian groups, eight of the groups had higher poverty rates than the country's average. Hmong (28 percent), Bhutanese (33 percent), and Burmese (35 percent) groups had the highest poverty rates; conversely, Filipinos (8 percent), Indians (8 percent), and Japanese (8 percent) were among the lowest (López et al., 2017).

In terms of education, Asians were reported to have higher overall education levels than the rest of the United States. In the same study comparing those ages 25 and older, about 51 percent of Asians attained a bachelor's degree or higher compared to the 30 percent of all Americans. It is projected that the Asian American population will continue to grow, but it will soon be less dominated by immigrants than it currently is, leaving the newer generations to redefine the Asian American identity.

Despite the growth in educational attainment, a larger study of the United States population between 1989 and 2015 indicated that second-generation Asian Americans had lower levels of mobility compared to the first-generation (Fosco, 2018). While it is impossible to pinpoint the causes, one possible factor could be that the more acculturated second-generation group may be exploring more diverse occupations than their parents, entering industries other than science, technology, engineering, or mathematics. Growing up with American values and attitudes, it seems that second-generation Americans are caught between two worlds.

The Role of Family

Studies show that Asian parents play a significant role in the lives of their children when it comes to aspects such as academic achievement, mental health, and career decisions,

prioritizing social obligations and interdependence over the individual (Qin, 2010). Previous findings also suggest that this factor may be key to understanding self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Shen, Liao, Abraham, & Weng, 2014).

Immigrant Asian parents tend to follow a more authoritarian style of parenting, as opposed to the authoritative style that Westerners tend to adhere by (Kolluri & Lee, 2016). Authoritarian parenting styles impose strict rules and guidelines that children are expected to follow without question. Obedience to parents and adherence to cultural values is highly valued. Immigrant parents hold consistently higher expectations than native-born parents and tend to reflect more optimistic outlooks in their children's educational and professional careers (Fan & Chen, 2001). Findings suggest that other factors that may affect this are the level of acculturation and generation status. It was concluded that lower levels of acculturation and a lower generation status typically had a stronger belief in traditional Asian cultural values (Shen et al., 2014). Moreover, family hierarchies are well-respected, and academic and professional achievements indirectly represent the social status of the family. Some immigrant parents may also view other families' children as competition, leveraging their own children's accomplishments as benchmarks of parental success.

The "Immigrant Bargain" theory illustrates how children of immigrants feel obligated to achieve great success in order to justify the adversity experienced by their parents (Cherng & Liu, 2017). This is not uncommon amongst many minority groups, as research has shown that Asian Americans and Latin Americans have a stronger sense of duty and respect towards their parents than those of European descent in America (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999). According to Pew Research Center ("The Rise of Asian Americans", 2012), Asian Americans were shown to

have a strong sense of familial respect, with about 66 percent of participants believing their

parents should have some influence in choosing one's career. Therefore, immense pressure to

succeed and find security is often placed on Asian Americans. Because of this internalized

pressure, Asian American students often feel that they must "choose majors based on survival

considerations rather than vocational interest" (Qin, 2010, pg. 76). In a research study involving

249 participants, Qin found that majors that were traditionally perceived to be successful (e.g.

science, business, technical) had lower interest congruence than those in a nontraditional major.

The interest congruence in atypical majors was higher (e.g. entertainment, art). This suggests

that Asian American students pursue careers with greater perceived opportunities despite the idea

that they do not necessarily align with their interests.

The Role of Friends

Another factor that affects career outcomes is social influence. Social influence is a

critical connection in models of educational and occupational attainment (Davies & Kendel,

1981). Friendships, specifically, are seen as a form of social capital. They have been linked to

increased motivation, bringing better-perceived opportunities and cultivating a stronger sense of

belonging (Kiefer, Alley, & Ellerbrock, 2015). Positive friendships also reaffirm an individual's

sense of self (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005). This is especially important as second-generation Asian

Americans attempt to integrate their Asian and American identities.

Rosenberg (1973) theorized that peer pressure affects adolescent girls more so than

adolescent boys. This idea was further confirmed in another study, where friendships were

shown to have played a more influential role in the aspirations of young girls than for young

boys (Davies & Kendel, 1981); however, this was explained by greater parental pressure

instilled in boys than for girls. This could be due to the belief of traditional sex typing in many

Asian cultures in which conventional gender roles are highly valued, especially for males

(Huang, 2017). This study also indicated that peer influences were the highest for girls in the

ninth grade and decreased towards the end of high school, while it remained fairly negligible

throughout all grades (Davies & Kendel, 1981, pg. 383).

The Role of Identity

Perceived levels of self-identity are critical in determining career outcomes. Those who

experience higher levels of self-identity tend to exhibit higher levels of self-esteem, greater

perceived opportunities and are secure in their abilities to succeed. It affects how one responds to

perceived barriers, such as ethnic or gender discrimination. These perceived barriers may

motivate or demotivate career-related behavior; however, research has shown that those who

have a strong sense of ethnic identity tend to see barriers as challenges to overcome (Mejia,

2011). Self-identity also plays a greater role in interest-choice congruence when it comes to

education and professional opportunities.

Identity is also affected by differing levels of acculturation and how strongly one adheres

to Asian values as opposed to American values. Acculturation is defined by the Webster

Dictionary as the "cultural modification of an individual, group, or people by adapting to or

borrowing traits from another culture". Therefore, acculturation impacts one's self-identity

changes that take place as a result of continuous and direct contact between individuals having

different cultural origins

The Model Minority stereotype is a theory that explains how Asian Americans achieve success through positive cultural characteristics (Louie, 2004). It is not uncommon for Asian Americans to internalize these stereotypes, and while some may view these stereotypes as positive traits, many feel a heavy burden by these messages (Cherng & Liu, 2017). As mentioned by Xuhua Qin (2010, p. 14), "many Asian American children grow up in an inhibiting environment, in which they only perceive limited occupation opportunities" due to social, economic, and psychological barriers. Asian Americans tend to experience or perceive limited mobility in areas where success does not mostly rely on education, such as sports and entertainment. As a result, they tend to seek careers that rely more heavily on education, as these are seen as providing greater opportunities for success (e.g. science, technology, engineering, and medicine).

The role of gender has also been proven to influence self-identity. Findings suggest that Asian American males are more likely to consider more traditional occupations, Asian American females are more likely to explore nontraditional occupations (Leung, Ivey, & Suzuki, 1994). Due to the pressure of adhering to traditional gender roles, males may internalize the concept more so than their female counterparts. This was later reaffirmed in another study in which there was a significant correlation between occupation-interest congruence with intergenerational conflict and family obligation for males, but not for females (Qin, 2010). Additionally, the study found that the higher the intergenerational conflict resulted in lower occupation-interest congruence for male participants. This brings in the role of the family, suggesting that the internalization of cultural values supersedes personal interests in males than for females.

The Digital Age

Although 2018 introduced critically acclaimed films with Asian leads (e.g. Crazy Rich Asians and To All The Boys I've Loved Before), Asian Americans have yet to achieve commercial success across all levels of mediums in Western media. This could be due to racial stereotypes and the idea that Asians may not be as "marketable" as others, although mainstream success has followed those who appeared to be more racially ambiguous (e.g. Jhene Aiko, Hayley Kiyoko, and Bruno Mars).

However, the past couple of years brought greater recognition to many Asian artists. BTS, one of Korea's most successful "boy bands", became the first Korean album to be recognized by the Recording Academy in 2019 (Herman, 2019); meanwhile, 88rising's very own Rich Brian became the first Asian to reach the top of the iTunes hip-hop chart with his album *Amen*, with his colleague Joji's album *Ballads 1* reaching the top of Billboard's R&B/hip-hop chart (Cheng & Han, 2017). In 2017, the Korean hip-hop artist Jay Park became the first Asian American to sign with Jay-Z's record label Roc Nation, well-known for its roster of artists like Rihanna and J. Cole (Herman, 2017).

In the 2012 documentary *Uploaded: The Asian American Movement*, producer Julie Zhan praised the power of new media for Asian American voices. "It is a space that allows for 100 percent creative control. New media has showcased Asian American talent and given opportunities rarely seen in traditional media." Innovations in social media and other platforms in the past decade have transformed the production, distribution, and consumption of music (Jung, 2014). With lower barriers to entry, Asian American musicians have been able to utilize platforms like YouTube, Soundcloud, and other social media to build their brands. Artists like

Dumbfoundead and David Choi symbolize a "fundamental shift in the popular music profession" (Jung, 2014, pg. 76).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand how parental expectations, peer pressure, and self-identity affect the career outcomes of Asian Americans in their pursuit of "nontraditional" careers, specifically in music. The study attempts to gain a personal and more in-depth perspective of the increasingly diverse views surrounding Asian cultural expectations and values, as well as a better understanding of the music landscape in today's digital environment. The research questions this study seeks to clarify are:

1. How do parental expectations, peer pressure, and self-identity affect Asian Americans in pursuing careers that they are interested in?

2. With the greater representation of Asian Americans in the music industry and increasingly accessible DIY platforms like YouTube and Soundcloud, what further outcomes can we predict from the next generation of Asian American creatives?

3. How can we encourage the next generations of Asian Americans to choose careers that they are interested in?

I predict that higher-perceived levels of parental expectations affect individuals negatively in their music career outcomes, while higher-perceived levels of peer pressure and self-identity attribute to positive outcomes in music careers.

Methodology

There is a lack of literature that explores these themes thoroughly and personally; therefore, using a qualitative approach is the most appropriate in understanding this topic. A qualitative approach is used to explore the depths and complexity of this topic and is meant to highlight the unique experiences of what it means to be an Asian American in modern day society.

Participant Recruitment

For this study, I aimed to recruit at least five participants with diverse professional experiences to interview. The participants needed to identify as Asian American, be at least eighteen years old, and currently work in music or have previously attempted to pursue a music career. Additionally, participants needed to have been born in the United States or immigrated to the United States before or during their teen years.

Recruitment was performed using convenience sampling and snowball sampling techniques. In order to be contacted, interested participants entered personal contact information through a Google Form survey. The survey link was shared with online industry group pages on Facebook and through Instagram and Twitter.

I was able to acquire 35 responses from the survey with almost an equal amount of males and females. Most of the participants identified as East Asian at 69 percent with Southeast Asian following behind at 43 percent. About 54 percent of participants identified with being a second-generation Asian American while 40 percent identified as first-generation. About 48 percent of the participants stated that they were currently working part-time in music, while only

17 percent stated they were working full-time. When asked to describe their current professional situation, it ranged from full-time producing and songwriting to being a full-time business analyst. Most of the respondents reported they were not pursuing a music career stated that they were currently working in traditional fields, especially in the medical and engineering fields.

I strategically chose my sample by first viewing the diverse range of experiences. Additionally, I took into consideration which immigrant generation they belonged to, the age ranges, and if they were pursuing music full-time or part-time to obtain greater variation in the study.

Out of the nine individuals I reached out to, four of them responded. Additionally, I was connected with another participant who did not respond to the initial survey. Two of the participants identified as males and the other three identified as females. Most of the participants identified as East Asian (primarily Chinese) with the exception of two. Both the male participants were in the 25 to 34 age range. Two of the three female participants belonged to the 18 to 24 age range while one of them identified in the 50+ age range.

Study Design

Once selected, participants were sent a consent form and a list of IRB-approved questions prior to the interview through email. The questions provided the basic structure for the interview. The guiding questions were separated into four categories: introduction, parental expectations, friendships, self-identity, and other (which surrounded topics like Asian American representation and personal advice).

Participant Summaries

Jackie.

Jackie is a singer-songwriter and performer under the stage name *jly* (pronounced July). She is currently based in the Los Angeles area. She is half Thai (from her father's side) and three-eighths Chinese and one-eighth Filipino (from her mother's side); however, she identifies the most with her Filipino background since many of her Filipino family members are also based in California. Influenced by her family's career paths, she graduated from UCLA in 2017 with a degree in Electrical Engineering and is now currently performing and songwriting full-time all over the Los Angeles area. She is a strong proponent of minority representation, a devoted feminist, and an advocate for the LGBT community.

Claire.

Claire is a music technologist and electronic artist under the name *dolltr!cks* currently based in New York. Born of Chinese descent and raised in Singapore, she explored her passion for the arts at a very young age, taking up dancing at only 3 years old and eventually adding piano and flute lessons to her expertise. She completed a year of school at the National University of Singapore but finished the remainder of her college education in Boston at Berklee College of Music. In just three years, she received degrees in Electronic Production and Design and Professional Music, as well as a minor in Music Production and Engineering.

 In addition to producing electronic music for her own artist project, she works as a music technologist by producing and assisting clients in live shows. She was a part of Music Action Lab in San Francisco, a residency that brings together musicians from around the world and

focuses on social issues. She is currently involved in Colors of Us, a musical project supported by the Queens Council on the Arts. It is a collaboration of female-identifying youths of Asian descent living in or who are from Queens, New York. She is also a DJ for the Grammy-nominated group Alphabet Rockers, which aims to bring social justice and empowerment through hip-hop music.

Jonathan.

Jonathan is a Vietnamese and Chinese American electronic artist known as *Sun Bear* and a full-time hardware engineer from the San Jose and Milpitas regions. He developed his musical talent at a young age, playing the saxophone in his school band and teaching himself to play the guitar. Music became a personal outlet for him as he eventually explored writing and producing music. He majored in Electrical Engineering in college, sharing that this was the best way to utilize his artistic talents and incorporate his love for music into a more "traditional" career path. Jonathan is working on developing his skills as a producer and hopes to serve as inspiration for other Asian American artists to come.

Jason.

Jason is a second-generation Chinese American working as a full-time software engineer at NBC. He has spent his entire life in Los Angeles and the San Gabriel Valley, which has a significant Asian population. Growing up, Jason explored his artistry by drawing and painting. In his adolescent years, he dreamed of becoming a journalist or a cartoonist but currently finds that he is still able to incorporate creativity within his full-time job through a different medium--code.

Now, he organizes events around the Los Angeles area and hopes to expand them over the next

few years. This year, he is focused on developing his talents as a producer and hopes to release

an EP by the end of 2019. He has previously worked on projects like radio ads, but he hopes to

work full-time as an audio engineer or delve into scoring films and video games.

Cindy.

Cindy is a professional classical violinist and pianist with a career spanning about 30

years. Born and raised in China until her late teen years, Cindy is based in the Sacramento area

and has played in multiple symphonies and operas around California. She also teaches piano and

violin to children. Cindy's experience is quite distinctive from the rest of the participants

involved. She is the oldest participant, spending most of her youth outside of the United States,

and is the only individual who was married. Additionally, she is the only participant involved in

classical music.

Results

Each other interviews lasted about an hour long and were manually transcribed by

myself. Following transcription, I analyzed common themes in their answers.

Family Matters

The post-war effect.

At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked to speak about their youth,

family dynamics, and their experience with familial pressure. Both Jason and Jonathan shared

their perspective on growing up with refugee parents during the Vietnam War. Jonathan pointed

out, "...coming from the Vietnam War, there's this concept of trauma passed on from one

generation to the next." Jason confirmed this notion in his interview:

> As refugees, they came to this country with no money and not speaking the language. They didn't have the luxury to pursue their goals and dreams so much as they had to focus on their own survival. That being said, due to that trauma, I can understand where they are coming from in wanting me to have a stable and comfortable job. Also, growing up in majority Asian communities, this was true for many of my peers. It was exceedingly rare for someone in my graduating class to look into music or art as a career. (J. Wu, personal communication, March 2019)

However, it seemed that the recurring idea of "stability" surpassed that of any prestigious

job title. Jason stated, "I don't know if parents specifically care about careers so much as they

would like to see their children stable and successful."

Jonathan also shared:

> I remember they discouraged me from going into electronics because engineers are kind of a dime a dozen and you could be replaced pretty easily. They actually recommended I go into pharmacy--going into school for pharmacy was difficult, but then you had a stable job. (J. Tran, personal communication, March 2019)

When asked about her thoughts on familial pressure, Jackie added:

> It's important to realize when our parents are pressuring us into taking those comfortable jobs and doing the boring 9-5s, it's because they grew up in countries where there were not as many opportunities for them and things like starvation and being homeless were real threats. Now that we're in America, they're afraid of us living an uncomfortable lifestyle and having to suffer as much as they did because they didn't have opportunities for themselves. (J. Yangyuen, personal communication, March 2019)

Even at Cindy's stage of her professional career, she experiences familial pressure.

> Until 5 or 6 years ago, my mom would ask when I was going to get a state job. I don't want to say it hurts my feelings, but I cannot change her. She cannot change me and that's the way it is. It's my life, my choice, my consequences. (C. Lee, personal communication, March 2019)

Friendships

When asked about the influence of their friendships, many of the participants did not conclude this to be a significant factor in their career outcomes. They did, however, play a more influential role in the development of their respective interests, especially during their formative years. In their school years, many of the participants joined took music lessons, joined musical groups, danced, and other activities.

Many of Jason's friends who were previously in the music scene tease that they are "living vicariously" through him. He shared:

> Even though they are not physically there to support me, I know that they have a large value in what I'm doing so it helps in keeping me motivated even when it feels like I'm alone, which is bound to happen in any artistic pursuit. Because I am so engrossed in the music scene now, the friends I do see more often now are those also working towards similar goals, and luckily, I have very supportive positive people. (J. Wu, personal communication, May 2019)

Realizing Self-Identity

Visibility and what it means to the community.

Visibility is a topic that many of the participants emphasized in their interviews. Jackie commented that the formation of 88rising and other similar groups gave her hope that the world is excited for Asians to be more present in music. The increasing popularity of South Korean music and culture, also known as Hallyu or the Korean Wave, is another sign. Additionally, she shared that she is currently writing a song that touches on experiencing racism as a child and wants to further bring these experiences to light.

When asked about her goals for the next ten years, Claire wants to advocate for women in electronic music, a genre whose mainstream artists consist of predominantly white males. She stated:

> I'm a strong proponent that visibility and representation is everything. If you don't see yourself, it puts you in a removed position like *I could never be like that person on TV* or *I could never be that person singing in that video*. The big thing about visibility itself is helping people recognize that they have a chance. (C. Lim, personal communication, March 2019)

She also hopes to return to Singapore in the future and continue to champion for the music industry there.

Additionally, Jonathan hopes that he is able to make an impact and represent his heritage as well as he can. His stage name *Sun Bear* pays homage to his Southeast Asian heritage, as the sun bear is relatively exclusive to the region of Asia. He also mentioned other prominent artists such as Toro y Moi, Chad Hugo, and Giraffage as his influences in music, all of whom are of Asian descent. He is proud to see these artists achieve success in Western music and hopes that more Asian artists are inspired to pursue their passions.

Technology

How technology affects certain careers.

Three participants who did not attend a traditional music conservatory stated that their "traditional" major of choice and/or current profession (which was heavily influenced by their family) positively impacted their musical pursuits. For example, both Jonathan and Jackie studied electrical engineering in college. This is a branch of engineering that focuses heavily on

technology and various types of equipment, which is helpful in understanding audio tools like instruments, MIDI controllers, mixers, and more.

Jackie felt that her Electrical Engineering major was a way for her to combine her creativity with a more pragmatic career choice. "I thought if I did electrical, I could do audio video design. I'd always been into music ever since I was younger [...] so it made sense for me to combine my love for technology with my love for art and music." Jonathan entered college as a Communications major, but due to parental pressure, switched into Electrical Engineering, which he decided was the best way to utilize his artistic talents and incorporate his love for music into a more "traditional" path. "At the time, I felt like I didn't have enough guidance but I reasoned with myself. It made a lot of sense because it felt like it was the direction that both industries were going in." Additionally, Jason believes his full-time position as a software engineer allows him to cultivate his creative ideas through code. His skillset is also useful in DJing and general audio production, a path he hopes to transition into later in his career.

The advancement of technology, however, is not necessarily beneficial in all aspects of the industry. Cindy, who primarily works in classical music, shared how the synthesizer negatively affected employment in her industry:

> Because we are so used to this digital sound, the vast majority of people don't know what a rich orchestra sounds like. [...] Orchestras used to have string quartets, but now they just double up with the synthesizer. Instead of using 4, 5, or 6 violins, they only use 1 violin and double it up with the synthesizer. (C. Lee, personal communication, March 2019)

Building online communities.

I asked participants to suggest how we may encourage the next generation of Asian Americans to choose careers that align with their interests. Jackie believes that online

communities like the Facebook groups *Asian Creative Network* and *Subtle Asian Traits* provide

opportunities for individuals to connect with others much more easily than before. She said:

> The formation of ACN is a really good sign. It started last December--it's really
> new. There are already 20,000 members from around the world with chapters in
> each major city. They've assembled that in a matter of months. In the first month
> of its existence, it had about 15,000 members and it's a closed group so it's just
> Asian creatives adding other Asian creatives that they know. (J. Yangyuen,
> personal communication, March 2019)

While Jason supports the group for creating safe spaces in which others can share their cultural

identities, he stated, "I do believe that to find success, you can't just be comfortable in your own

niche. You will continually have to push your boundaries and break the mold, which also means

stepping outside of these comfort zones."

Additionally, video streaming sites like Twitch and the recent development of Instagram

Lives are currently evolving the performance space, allowing artists to connect with their fans on

the internet in real-time. Jackie shared, "I have a friend who does a weekly live stream on

Twitch. He does a live concert every week and has hundreds of people watching." Some of these

video streams, as Jackie mentioned, have larger audiences than the artists' own live shows.

Perceived Barriers

Stereotypes & fetishization.

The participants shared their personal experiences with specific barriers they faced.

Claire shared an instance in which an audience member praised her DJ abilities by saying that

she DJ'd "like a man". He then advised her to dress differently in order to fulfill the "sexy Asian

DJ" image, making her a more likable artist. Jackie revealed a similar instance in which a man

introduced her as the "sexiest Asian in the room" at an industry event, making her uncomfortable

and ultimately feeding into the hypersexualization of Asian women. Jonathan, on the other hand, spoke about the feeling of "unwantedness" amongst Asian men, as Western media tends to reduce Asian men to being unattractive or inferior (Westerman, 2018).

Genre matters.

The type of music is a large factor, as each genre possesses its own niches. Jason mentioned that within the house and techno communities, there are very few Asian artists (although the events he hosts tend to be predominantly Asian attendees). He mentioned that more of his peers gravitated towards pop, hip-hop, and other subgenres of electronic. He also cited this as a barrier to connecting with others in his community, almost leading him to feel quite segregated from his own cultural identity.

In Cindy's personal experience, classical music is a seemingly less diverse genre. While the industry is predominantly white, she has observed that many of her minority colleagues and students playing the piano are largely Chinese. She did not feel that her race was a barrier, especially when working with orchestras based out of more liberal cities like San Francisco.

Looking Ahead
Finding the Asian American voice.

As a comparison to the Asian American voice, Claire spoke about the music culture in Singapore, which she described as being heavily influenced by external music. The questions she finds herself asking most frequently are: Does Singapore really have a sound? What makes Singaporean music Singaporean? Consequently, do Asian Americans have a sound?

Jonathan believes that it is difficult to do, as referring to the Asian American identity

oversimplifies a large group of people together.

> It's hard to do because of all these different experiences from different groups of
> people. It's like talking about one group that feels they've been displaced whereas
> another group might feel like they owe Americans." (J. Tran, personal
> communication, March 2019)

A positive outlook in the music industry.

As more Asian Americans enter the industry, Jason predicts they will begin to fill a

variety of jobs. Jason shared:

> While this makes it difficult for someone to find success due to saturation, I am
> expecting people to find that music as a performance is not the only possible path.
> You could move into sound engineering. As people start to flood in and doing
> creative pursuits becomes more commonplace and accepted, the cultural
> expectations around careers in the arts will become less strict and people like my
> parent's generation can come to see that this is as viable as perhaps any other sort
> of career. (J. Wu, personal communication, March 2019)

Still, it seems that there is a disconnect between native Asian artists and Asian American

artists, as mentioned by Jackie:

> With regard to Asian Americans, 88rising and labels like that give me hope that
> the world is ready and excited for Asians to be more present in music. The whole
> Hallyu wave in America--there's a lot to say there that people are excited to have
> music from Asia. But I want to challenge that by saying I think it's important to
> have distinctly Asian American voices. (J. Yangyuen, personal communication,
> March 2019)

Advice for creatives.

The participants were asked to share their own personal advice for those wanting to

pursue the careers of their choice.

Claire's most important piece of advice was staying true to yourself:

> There's a lot of power in sitting in your own self and realizing what you want to do and what you're truly passionate about. [...] There's always going to be pushback, but I strongly believe that being able to sit in yourself and understand where you want to take your own life is very important. What I would have told myself when I was younger is to be bold and to be unafraid. (C. Lim, personal communication, March 2019)

Jackie shared a similar piece of encouragement in her interview, "Stop asking for approval and just start doing what we really want to do. It's okay if your parents never fully understand why you do what you do, but it's your life to live at the end of the day. Do it now!"

When asked about advice she would give to other creatives, Cindy believes in being realistic about your goals and accomplishments.

> You should do whatever you want when you're young--whether you're successful or a failure, it's yours. [...] In the end, you find out what you want to do. At the same time, you shouldn't romanticize it either. There's truth in your parents' wisdom because they lived their lives and absolutely want you to be happy. (C. Lee, personal communication, March 2019)

Cindy also emphasized the importance of being flexible in one's work. In her profession, she is able to gain financial stability by taking on a variety of jobs such as providing lessons to her students and learning how to perform various genres like jazz and gospel music in addition to her classical training. She continues to perform at weddings, funerals, and parties.

Jason's advice touched upon the importance of valuing the journey to success.

> A lot of people give up because they have high expectations, want their 15 minutes of fame, or don't realize what pushing and grinding in this kind of endeavor really entails. What matters isn't "*Can you achieve a mixdown as good as your favorite producers?*", but "*Are you better at what you're doing today than you were yesterday, and if so, can you keep pushing?*" As long as you're doing this for the right reasons and have the discipline to follow through with it, you'll find success. (J. Wu, personal communication, March 2019)

Jonathan concluded his interview by sharing:

> Read as much as you can. When it comes to finding direction, who you are is basically what you've read in the past. What direction you go is based on what

information you've gained through whatever you've read. (J. Tran, personal
communication, March 2019)

Discussion

It is critical that we observe the expanding Asian American landscape in the context of
today's evolving music business. What current societal factors affect these career outcomes in
Asian Americans? Alongside the growing visibility of Asians in Western film and television and
phenomenons like the Korean Wave, how can we further encourage participation from those
interested in pursuing music and other artistic endeavors? What can we predict from the next
generation of Asian American creatives?

Regarding familial pressure, the participants accepted their cultural values and abided
their parents' wishes to an extent. Many still felt pressured to succeed due to the difficulties their
parents had endured, even as they reached adulthood. Therefore, individuals feel pressured to
choose occupations that offer high salaries, stability, and sometimes, prestige. These responses
reaffirmed the Immigrant Bargain theory as described by Cherng & Liu (2017).

Coming into adulthood, the participants fulfilled many of their parental and cultural
expectations. Now, it seems that self-identity and their social environments are the most critical
factor in determining career outcomes. I had originally predicted that peer pressure in adolescent
years and a better understanding of self-identity had positive relationships in one's decision to
pursue a more "nontraditional" career path in music. While their friends seemed to have played a
role in developing their interest in the arts, the participants' answers suggest that their friends did
not have the largest effect on their actual career outcomes but rather their families. Still, positive
friendships influenced many of them in their adulthood, allowing them to develop a stronger

sense of self and become more inspired in their pursuits (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005; Kiefer et al.,

2015).

Like many of the participants in their youth, their friends were hobbyists and were

described as seeking careers in their respective "traditional" careers later in life. Cindy found that

many of her peers experienced similar transitions, citing it to traditional Asian gender roles as

Huang did in her research (2017). "Eventually the pressure gets to you and you switch majors.

My friend did--he started violin with me, but after one year, he went to San Jose State to become

an engineer. It was too risky for him to do music." Overall, their friends were still very

supportive of their endeavors.

In general, the participants have an optimistic outlook on Asian Americans entering the

music industry. While the type of genre plays a factor, the development of technology, the

growth in social media, and increasing distribution channels have and will continue to impact

those interested in pursuing music. Asian Americans have more visibility and representation now

than ever, and the lower barriers to entry give artists the opportunity to pursue their crafts

without having to rely on traditional industry practices and professionals.

The evolution of technology and distribution platforms has played a role in increasing

visibility and representation for Asian artists throughout the past decade. While YouTube has

helped artists like Kina Grannis, David Choi, and Dumbfoundead garner attention exceeding the

internet, the accessibility of Soundcloud and music discovering tools from Spotify will continue

to serve as excellent tools for DIY users. Jason stated, "...it has become a very healthy niche.

There now exists platforms for people (of any race or background) to demonstrate their art and

find success outside of the traditional methods." As stated by Jung (2014), these new possibilities are opening doors that were formerly closed.

In the past couple of years, collaborations with other mainstream artists seem to have grown significantly, but many of the top tracks seem to feature Asian artists rather than Americans. For example, Korean pop star Park Win Joo was featured in a remix of A Boogie's hit "Look Back At It"; additionally, Japanese singer Hikaru Utada worked with electronic producer Skrillex in recording and releasing the song "Face My Fears", the opening for the video game Kingdom Hearts III. This does not mean that Asian Americans artists have not made significant strides in the past few years. Still, there is much progress to be done before we can truly understand and define the "Asian American voice". Time will tell if the impact of technology and the increased visibility can break through niche communities sustainably.

An interesting finding was a similar trend in "traditional" college majors choices and career decisions by Jackie, Jonathan, and Jason. Although Claire attended a more traditional music conservatory, she pursued a more technical route for her education. At face value, one would assume that most of these individuals pursued careers that aligned with their parents' expectations, but this career decision does not necessarily lessen the interest of the individual. Could it be that choosing "traditionally overrepresented career choices" may actually empower Asian Americans by allowing them to integrate a different perspective and more technical skill set into "nontraditional" career paths?

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was heavily based on qualitative data. Although I attempted to select participants in a way that I felt best maximized diversity, I would suggest future research to include a more ethnically and geographically diverse pool.

Given the time constraint, I was not able to interview as many participants as I would have liked. I recognize that five interviews are not entirely representative of the Asian American population. I would have also liked to have supported my qualitative data with a quantitative survey, allowing participants to more structurally identify how family expectations, peer pressure, and self-identity affected their career decisions.

There are many other factors that may contribute to career outcomes that should be explored in further qualitative and quantitative research, such as music genre, spirituality, and levels of acculturation. Further research in interest-choice congruency should also be conducted with those working in more technical industries, such as engineering.

Conclusion

It is critical that we observe the expanding Asian American landscape in the context of today's evolving music business and digital environment. After interviewing five participants discussing the implications of parental expectations, peer pressure, and self-identity on career outcomes, their trends in their answers indicated an overall positive outlook for Asian American not only in music but in other sectors of the entertainment industry as well. By discussing external factors (like stereotypes and fetishizations) and internalized influences (such as perceived barriers and opportunities) in contemporary digital media and popular culture, society

will be able to better understand the dynamic Asian American identity. There is much research

that needs to be done in order to better represent the voices of Asian Americans, but perhaps we

can start by encouraging conversation amongst the community and continue to push through

these perceived boundaries.

Appendix

Guiding Interview Questions

The questions will touch on themes surrounding parental expectations, peer pressure, and

self-identity. The questions below provide the basic interview structure. The interview will be

primarily led by you and your experience.

Introduction

- Tell me about yourself.

    ○ Where are you currently based?

    ○ What is your current job?

    ○ What is your creative project?

Parental Expectations

- Tell me a little about your family dynamic and the environment you grew up in.

- How have your parents influenced your career decision?

- What did your parents expect you to do as your career?

- Do your parents approve of your career choices now?

- Overall, do you feel that you are living up to your parents' expectations?

Peer Pressure

- How have your friends influenced your career decision?

- Do your friends share similar career paths as you?

- Did they take your passions seriously or view it more as a hobby?

- Overall, do you feel that you are living up to your friends' expectations?

Self-Identity

- Are you satisfied with your career choice?

- Were there any instances where you felt your identity affected your opportunities in music?

- What would you like to accomplish in the next 10 years?

    - Can you foresee any obstacles to those goals?

Other

- How do you feel that the current state of the industry has changed over the years for Asian Americans?

- The new media has had a positive influence on independent musicians pretty much all across the board. Is it unique to Asian American musicians? Then why didn't Asian American musicians get as much attention before the new media? Due to stereotypes from fans, or limited distribution channels?

- How has technology played a role in your career over the years?

- What are your predictions or hopes for future generations of Asian American creatives?

- What advice would you give to Asian Americans who want to pursue careers they are actually passionate about?

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