Growing up Asian/American

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Introduction/Title Slide:

Hello everybody, my name is Trish Morita-Mullaney and I’m really happy to share a little bit about myself, growing up Asian American, for the Asian and American Asian Resource and Cultural Center here at Purdue. Again, my name is Trish Morita-Mullaney and I serve as an Assistant Professor in the College of Education. My research and my study is around English learning and bilingual teaching. Specific to the context of educational and language policy. And you'll see how my Asian identity and historicity point to the type of research agenda that I have around this distinct community of color. So today I will be sharing on the AAARCC’s Story.

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So, growing up, what does it mean or what does the term Asian American mean to you when you're growing up? So little bit about me. I was born in California. I was born actually in San Francisco. My father was in the military, so I grew up on military bases, San Francisco's being one of them. My father is a second generation or a Nisei, meaning his grandparents are from Japan and he was born in the US. And my mother is of European descent. She actually was born in Brazil but is regarded as a white naturalized citizen. And so I am a blend and you can see here my parents in the middle and you can see my siblings. I'm the oldest of four and this is us growing up in the California Bay area. And we all identify as Sansei which means 3rd Generation but we also identify as Hapas. Hapa haole is actually terminology that came out of the West Coast- specifically Hawaii. Where hapa distinctively states someone that is half and haole being white. We also identify as Japanese Americans.

When I was young I thought about things in very binary terms that I was half white, half Asian / half white, half Japanese and this always complicated my identity because it's never that simple but as a child that's sort of how I thought about things. And so I moved over time. I moved from fractions of half-and-half to more of a hybridity. So I was an indication of all the different experiences shared across my mom's family and my dad's family.
So when I think about growing up as an Asian-Japanese American in the Bay Area, I remember participating in different cultural events. Every Monday we will go see my Japanese cousins and our vacations were spent on the East and the West Coast with our Japanese extended family.

So I remember being connected through family, through cultural events, but not through language which is interesting because I've gone on to study language. My father does not speak Japanese. Largely because he was interned during World War II and because of that, he was largely discouraged from holding on to his Heritage language. And so that is the sense of loss that I have and always had even growing up as an Japanese American.

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As an undergraduate I attended a predominantly white university. I was regarded as a model minority, high-achieving, and I was situated as a poster child quite literally. And there's a picture of me here as the poster child on the front of a college magazine where I am stacked up against a motorcycle with two very glamorous looking people. And this just became the voice to the outside that we’re white but not totally.

And so what's problematic and challenging about this is that I was ascribed- this is the literature saying that I was an honorary white but I was also situated with a sort of permanent guest status-which meant I felt like my sense of inclusion was always partial.

So it was during my undergraduate years that I really began to identify these subtle and nuanced and sometimes direct racial microaggressions and I began to resist these descriptions. And I did so through the types of classes that I took and the types of study abroad experiences that I chose - which included travel to East Asia to examine my Heritage more directly.

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And now I would identify as an Asian-American more so than a Japanese-American as I am part of a larger community who are ascribed and minoritized as a collective. And some of our experiences obviously will be different but collectively there's a lot of shared experiences that we have. I also identify as a person of color in solidarity with other people of color that may be racialized and of races that are different than my own and who are also minoritized in subtle, indirect ways.

And I say minoritized because that's something that is institutionally done to people of color - it's not something that I chose and it's something that has been named upon me and so that's why I used minoritized as a verb versus as a noun.
I also identify as a family member with intersecting heritages, languages, and experience that are contextualized and complicated by consistent racializations. I show this picture of my family. I'm married. My spouse is a Caucasian male and my children are Quapas- where they are quarter Japanese and 3/4 white which again is very problematic.

But you can see that my kids here- they are twins- but you can see physically they look very different. My son looks a lot like his father and my daughter looks more so like me. And my children even though they are twins, have had very similar educational experiences in the same schools even with the same teachers- and they were ascribed very differently by their classmates and their teachers.

And so my daughter experienced very direct racializations where my son did not experience those really at all. And so I can say that my n of two within my own family has demonstrated the complication of ascription and the honorary gift status that my daughter and I often feel and the status that my son and my husband don't feel really at all. And so this has created a great venue for conversation and contextualization about what it means to have an Asian American identity. One that is seen and one that is not seen.

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How do I connect with my Heritage? I belong to a variety of affinity groups with different Asian American men and women, I participate in book studies… I'm currently looking at my Minor Feelings by Cathy Park Hong. Great Read! Work with my graduate students who are focused on AAPI content and also the research that I do on AAPI content and my connection to my immediate and extended Japanese American family.

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With my research specifically, I am interested and very compelled to explore the history of the migration of the Morita family to the US and have begun that sojourn with some of my extended family members in Hiroshima, Japan. And you can see me here with some of my family members back in 2014. That's my hope on my sabbatical that I can explore this further.

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In the current social climate it is very real and as I think about us moving away from shelter in place, I want to share an experience of being ascribed as the virus.

This is not something I expected but I was flying on a plane right before the shelter in place orders went in across the country. And I was sitting next to a couple who was literally wiping
everything down, had masks on, were spraying the air and we're literally creating this aerosol barrier between me and them.

And I was on the aisle seat and the flight attendant was observing this treatment of me. And what she did was she offered to all three of us to move because clearly this couple was afraid of being next to me and she saw the situation. Instead of making the offer to me or to the white couple to my left, she made the suggestion for movement to all three of us.

What I found distinct in this is her generalization to making an invitation to all - to sort of sanitize the severity of the situation. And I found it problematic that she made that invitation to the whole instead of addressing the larger issue of ascription and discrimination.

So as we move away from shelter in place, I remain concerned for myself and my daughter about how these ascriptions will persist in subtle and now more direct ways.

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So I thank you for letting me share my story on the AAARCC and here's my contact information and my Twitter feed and I look forward to seeing you on campus and having further discussions with you about what it means to be Asian American. Thanks everybody!

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