

Beyond MODEL MODEL MODEL MINORITY MINORITY MINORITY Faith

A Study Guide on Race and Faith



SESSION 3: A FISH IN WATER

Navigating Our World: Asian American Identity

Welcome back to our gathering! As we shared last week, we are dialoguing and journeying together to learn more about Asian American identity and how it intersects with faith in Jesus Christ.

As we begin, let's make sure we're all on the same page of respect, space, and listening well. We want to make sure we're all in agreement on the following:

- This is a journey for all of us, so let's respect one another's stories.
- Let's give each other space to think and reflect. Maybe we take a moment before jumping into conversation, or pull back if we notice that our voices are dominating the discussion. All thoughts and questions are welcome, and we want this to be a safe space for everyone.
- Let's actively try to listen well. Some of the subject matter we'll be covering could be really sensitive for some of us. Let's not get defensive or argumentative, but rather treat this as a journey of discovery we'll be going on together.

With that said, let's move forward! We're continuing to unpack what it means to be Asian American, and then connecting that identity with a faith in Jesus Christ.

Last week was our second session, talking about Our Migration Stories.

Today we'll be continuing on with the third and final session: A Fish in Water: Navigating Our World.

Let's get started!

Icebreaker: Never Have I Ever...

- Pretended to not know a certain language in order to avoid speaking to people of my ethnicity
- Refused to date a person of a certain Asian ethnicity for whatever reason I had
- Only dated Asians because I refuse to date any other ethnicity or race

- Refused to eat any food from my culture or ethnicity
- Only eaten food from my culture or ethnicity because everything else is disgusting
- Wanted to be another race or ethnicity other than Asian (i.e. white, black, Latino)
- Changed my aesthetics to try and look more like another race or ethnicity (i.e. dyed hair, lightened or darkened skin, dressed a certain way, spoke a certain way)
- Truly believed I was another race or ethnicity other than Asian (i.e. white, black, Latino)
- Gone to a school that taught the specific language from my ethnicity
- Had to google cultural traditions or practices of my ethnic heritage because I don't have much knowledge about it
- Visited the country where my parents, relatives, or I emigrated from
- Met any relatives outside of my immediate family
- Listened to music in another language or from another culture
- Watched movies or tv shows in another language or from another culture

Discussion Questions: The Waters We Navigate

"If you write about the Asian culture, be accurate between what is the difference between Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Malaysian, Thai, Taiwanese, Indonesian, and many individual Asian countries' cultures. While there are many similarities, the differences in cultures will set your novel apart from what is an authentic portrayal to what is a westernized version."

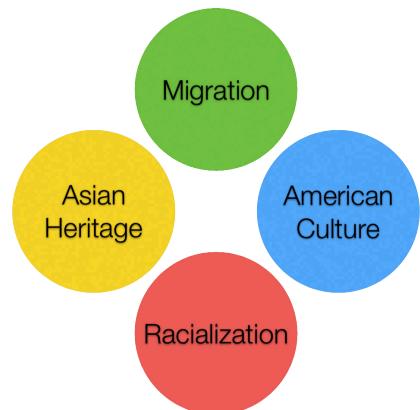
—Kailin Gow, Taiwanese American author

The Asian American Quadrilateral is a tool that outlines the 4 areas that collectively make up Asian American Identity.

Not every Asian American has a strong experience of all of these areas: your connection to one of these aspects may be extremely subtle, or even deeply buried.

But still, this tool can be helpful, teaching us to think about our identity and experiences through the four lenses of:

- Asian Heritage
- Migration



- American Culture
- Racialization

Let's look at each of the lenses more closely.

Asian Heritage

Asian heritage, simply put, is our “Asianness”. There are distinct cultures, ideologies, mannerisms, and habits rooted in Asian sources that still influence us, our families, and our communities.

Some of our Asian heritage may be religious, drawing from Buddhism, Shintoism, Islam, Hinduism, animism, shamanism, or other sources. Another source of Asian heritage are moral philosophies like Confucianism or Taoism. Finally, there are historical events that still impact us, like the various wars and invasions that have taken place in Asia from the distant past to the last 40 years.

- Take a few moments to reflect on your Asian heritage. How much do you know? Is your heritage something discussed readily in your family? Are you aware of your family and communal heritage? Discuss your thoughts with a partner.

Migration

Last week, we examined our migration stories more closely. We hope you continued to reflect on your or your family's migration stories over the past week.

Migration impacts so many areas of our lives, including experiences like assimilation, adoption, intergenerational conflict, anti-immigrant prejudice, trauma, and the loss of identity and language. We only scratched the surface last week.

- If you're willing and didn't share last week, please share some of your reflections - or recap what we talked about last week for those who couldn't make it that time.

American Culture

Asian Americans are a part of American culture! This means that we also have to deal with all the things floating in our American cultural heritage. Some of these aspects include:

- Greek, Roman, and European heritage
- Imperialism, colonialism and colonized mentality
- Christendom (centering of Christianity) and Evangelicalism

- Portrayal of Asian Americans within American media
- Asian Americans contributions throughout history

Some of us are acutely aware of and connected to American culture, while others of us may not even be aware of how everything influences the way we think.

- Take some time to reflect on what American culture is and what you know of it. In what ways do you identify more with American culture than your Asian heritage? In what ways do you feel disconnected from it? After a few moments of reflection, discuss with a partner whom you haven't shared with yet.

Racialization

This is a hot topic for some of us, but it's an essential one. We can't begin to cover all these topics in a single session, but it's crucial for us to acknowledge the racial issues that affect us as Asian Americans. Topics that fall under this category are:

- Microaggressions
- Structural racism
- Internalized racism
- Model minority myth
- Black-White Binary Paradigm

These are all complex ideas that may be unfamiliar to you at this point - and we'll touch on them further in future studies. For now, what's important to understand about this aspect of Asian American Identity is that (A) it's predominantly related to your physical appearance, and (B) it links your experience with the experience of others with similar appearances, throughout American history.

Whether we like it or not, Asian Americans are treated a certain way because of how we look. Because race is a surface-level judgement, Asian Americans are even racialized differently from each other. For example, Asian Americans with darker skin tones may have very different experiences from Asian Americans with lighter skin color.

Race affects how we navigate the society around us: some of us may have grown up in school districts with a large Asian American population and be used to fitting in and "being normal". Others may have attended schools where you were the only Asian American, and received frequent reminders of being "different" based on race.

- Take some time to reflect on your experiences of race. How has the way you look affected how you have been treated? Did this negatively impacted you, or even sometimes help you receive preferential treatment?

- After a few minutes, share your reflection with someone you haven't shared with yet.

Discussion Questions: Knit Together And Known.

- ¹ You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.
- ² You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
- ³ You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
- ⁴ Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.
- ⁵ You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
- ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain...
- ¹³ For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
- ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well...
- ²³ Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
- ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

This passage is from Psalm 139. It's a song or poem where the artist is declaring how God already knows all of who we are even before we were created. Does this sound encouraging to you?

- If you are “wonderfully made” by a good God, how does that influence the way you view yourself and the world you live in?
- Do you believe that God knows and loves every part of your identity as an Asian American individual? What gives you this faith - or what causes you to question whether it is true or not?

For This Week

- Take some time to reflect and journal on how deeply and thoroughly God knows you. Think about the ways you've felt unseen, unknown, or misunderstood. Re-read Psalm 139 and meditate on the truth that you are seen, known, and understood by God, who created you to be loved and to love.
- What areas of your Asian American Identity can you learn more about? Are there areas of your Asian heritage that you might not have known, but are curious about? Take time to research your family's heritage and how it has impacted you.
- Reflect on the ways you've been treated because of how you look. How and when has your racialized appearance been advantageous, and how and when has it been challenging?
- Think about the American culture we live in – from the national anthem to who our sports heroes and celebrities are. In what way have you been predominantly immersed in American culture? What part of that do you value, and what part of that do you dislike? What messages have you received from American culture about being Asian American?

Additional Resources

Books:

Pioneer Girl by Bich Minh Nguyen
American Born Chinese (graphic novel) by Gene Luen Yang
The Making of Asian America: A History by Erika Lee

Podcasts:

Only in America - <http://onlyinamerica.libsyn.com/>
Centering Podcast, episode on What is "Asian American"? <https://sparks.fuller.edu/centered/2018/11/15/centering-1x03/>