# "My dad is samurai": Positioning of race and ethnicity surrounding a transnational Colombian Japanese high school student 

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#### Abstract

From sociocultural, interactional and critical perspectives, this study investigates the practices and ideologies of racial and ethnic identities and relationships surrounding Jun, a Colombian Japanese high school student, within a transnational Japanese student community at Pearl High School (pseudonym) in California. In particular, the analysis focuses on how Jun's racial and ethnic positioning is interpreted and represented by others and himself through examining their labeling and categorization practices. I utilized the analysis of two-year ethnography, in-depth discourse analysis of narratives and conversations and mental map analysis. The study shows how Jun and other participants interactionally negotiated their racial and ethnic identities and relationships by strategically positioning each other in an attempt to survive in the environment where they were marginalized. The study illuminates the dynamics and politics of inter-/intraracial and ethnic relations and identities as well as the circulation of a persisting Whiteness ideology in a global context.


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## 1. Introduction

The globalization of our world economy has meant increasing transnational mobility for individuals and families, and for American schools, this has created new and growing populations of immigrant and transnational students. Although much of the existing literature focuses on linguistic, academic and social issues surrounding immigrant students from Latin American countries (e.g. Bettie, 2002; Flores-Gonzalez, 1999), the issues facing growing numbers of students from Asian countries tend to be overlooked (e.g. Kanno, 2003; McKay \& Wong, 1996). Particularly when it comes to a mixed heritage population among Asian students, their experiences are rarely addressed, and there is almost no ethnographic research that explores the complex racial and ethnic identities among transnational Japanese high school students in the U.S. (e.g. Kobayashi, 2008; Sato \& Kobayashi, 2006).

The Asian population in the United States has nearly tripled over the past two decades: approximately 6.9 million in 1990, 11.9 million in 2000, and 17.3 million in 2010 (U.S. Census, 2010). The Japanese are one of the oldest and largest immigrant groups from Asia; however, unlike other Asian groups in the United States, the number of new immigrants from Japan has remained rather small relative to the Chinese, Asian Indians, South Koreans and Filipinos. In fact, the total Japanese population decreased by six percent between 1990 and 2000 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1993; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). While the number of new Japanese immigrants is small, there are a large number of long-term visitors, sojourners. According to Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in 2008, 384,411 Japanese nationals resided in the United States, and Los

[^0]Angeles, New York and San Francisco were the top three cities where Japanese sojourners lived (Consular and Migration Policy of Japan, 2012). Among Japanese nationals in the U.S., over 63 percent are long-term visitors, most of whom are international students or workers, who come with their families, to fill positions in the Japanese government or private transnational corporations such as Toyota, Japan Air Lines and Panasonic. Because of the constraints by the company or government structures, the way in which these corporate and government affiliated Japanese families are engaged in the global capitalism tends to be different from many Asian immigrants such as Chinese entrepreneurs who enjoy the "flexible citizenship" (Ong, 1999) in a transnational context. Many of these transnational workers are placed in foreign countries by the government and private firms, and many get relocated back to Japan and to other countries.

The concept of transnationalism has been controversial among migrant research scholars: some argue that transnationalism has been observed throughout the history of immigration studies (Waldinger, 2004; Waldinger \& Fitzgerald, 2004), while others suggest that acknowledging the significance of transnationalism is a recent trend that has emerged from the frequent and sustained transnational social connections that has become increasingly possible in the last few decades (Nonini \& Ong, 1997; Portes, 2001; Portes, Guarnizo, \& Landolf, 1999; Waters, 2003). Moreover, the concept of transnationalism addresses what was often overlooked in traditional migration studies (Portes, 2001; Smith, 2003), namely the continuous and simultaneous process of individuals' social, economic and political involvement in multiple nations. Indeed, with advancements in communication technologies and easy access to transnational transportation, many migrants are not just settling in a host country to assimilate, nor are sojourners working in foreign countries only to return to their home countries when their work is finished abroad. Instead, transnational students and workers are continuously renegotiating their social locations and cultural identities across national boundaries (Schiller, Basch, \& Blanc, 1995). For this reason, in my investigation, I describe the Japanese families as transnational because their lives have been lived across national boundaries and the cultural frameworks they employ to position their own identities come from the norms of multiple nations. In contrast, the category of sojourner only describes the participants' status from a host country's perspective.

When Japanese transnational families settle in the U.S., generally their children are enrolled in local public schools, where most of these students start in an English Language Development (ELD) program. These Japanese students often struggle in American schools because of their racialized positions, limited English proficiency, and cultural differences in schooling practices. These struggling high school students are given incentives to return to Japan for university, since many higher educational institutions in Japan offer preferential treatment to foreign schooled students over high school students educated in Japan (Kanno, 2003; Sato \& Kataoka, 2008). These institutional policies function as great motivators for transnational Japanese high school students in the United States to return to Japan (Kanno, 2003).

In addition to the lack of research on Japanese transnational students, experiences of mixed heritage children among this Japanese student population are further overlooked. According to the U.S. Census, between 2000 and 2010, the mixed heritage population grew from $6,826,228$ to $7,329,381$, and Japanese Americans have the highest mixed heritage rate (nearly one-third of its population) among Asians (U.S. Census, 2000). Despite an increasing number of studies on mixed heritage identities, the ones that focus on mixed heritage Asian Americans are limited (Khanna, 2004). Moreover, studies that focus on mixed heritage Asian children tend to target descendants of Asian and White parents residing in one country, not children of minority races in a transnational context. In fact, the majority of the transnational families from Japan are solely of Japanese heritage and the population of mixed heritage children is still limited even though the birth rate of mixed heritage children, who are commonly called haafu (half) among people in or from Japan (Williams, 1992), are increasing in Japan under globalization (Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2010; Lee, 1998). Most of these children are racialized and foreignized in the Japanese context due to their physical appearance, and they are expected to speak English even if they were born and raised in Japan or their parents are not from English-speaking nations (Kamada, 2005, 2010; Williams, 1992). When these mixed heritage children are brought to America, they are often racialized by other transnational Japanese students. This phenomenon reveals how mixed heritage transnational children, a generally overlooked population, represent the complex politics of inter and intraracial and ethnic relations and identities in a global school context.

From sociocultural, interactional and critical perspectives, this study investigates the practices and ideologies of racial and ethnic identities and relationships surrounding Jun, a Colombian Japanese high school student, within a transnational Japanese student community at Pearl High School (pseudonym) in California. In particular, the analysis focuses on how Jun's mixed heritage identity is represented and interpreted by himself and others by examining their use of labeling and categorization. I utilize the analysis of a two-year ethnography, including an in-depth discourse analysis of narratives and conversations and a mental map analysis. I illustrate (1) participants' grouping practices and ideologies by focusing on their use of labels and territories; (2) Jun's self-positionings in relation to his Japanese and Colombian heritage as he journeyed from Colombia to Japan to America; (3) Jun's racial positioning by other transnational Japanese students; and (4) Jun's discursive negotiation of his Japanese membership by performing his haafu-ness.

Just as the U.S. Census $(2000,2010)$ identifies the growth of mixed heritage populations in America, globalization and transnational migrations mean the population of mixed heritage children in transnational families is also likely to grow, and individuals such as Jun are likely to challenge how we understand the racial, ethnic, and national identities of students and how best to address their specific cultural and educational needs. Understanding the practices and ideologies of racial and ethnic relations surrounding mixed heritage children in school can help us understand how identity is negotiated across multiple cultural contexts and how the hegemonic ideologies of whiteness infiltrate identity politics for Japanese transnational students.

## 2. Theoretical framework

To understand the complex politics of racial and ethnic relationships and identities among Japanese transnational high school students, this study draws on theories of social identity, Othering, authenticity and passing. Social identity is not fixed; instead it is a fluid and alterable social construct negotiated across time and place (Hall, 1997; Waters, 1990) through linguistic interactions (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, \& Shuart-Faris, 2005; Castanheira, Green, Dixon, \& Yeager, 2008; Eckert, 2003; Eckert \& McConnell-Ginet, 1995; Erickson, 2004; Gumperz \& Cook-Gumperz, 1982). In particular, social categories and labels often indicate how social identities and ideologies get constructed (e.g. Bucholtz \& Hall, 2004, 2005). Moreover, examining the role of physical appearance and racial hierarchy is crucial in order to understand racial and ethnic identity negotiation involving mixed heritage individuals (Lai \& Arguelles, 2003; Spickard, 2000), whose in-between status marks them as the racial other (Greer, 2001; Greer, Kamada, Ascough, \& Shi, 2005).

Racial and ethnic identification practices to either resist or confirm one's group membership requires that group boundaries are continuously reimagined, since the concept of "dominant" and "subordinate" shift from one cultural context to the next (Bauman, 2004; Hall, 1997). The ideology of dominant and subordinate group relationships also influences differentiation between and among minority groups by producing conflicts and feelings of rivalry (Tajfel, 1982). One of the concepts used to understand differentiation across and within racial and ethnic groups is "Othering," a process of internalizing the dominant ideology and differentiating a particular group as the "others" in order to maintain one's own positive social position in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and language background. Othering of coethnics, "intraethnic othering" (Pyke \& Dang, 2003), is a practice of "accepting the legitimacy of a devalued identity imposed by the dominant group, but then saying, in effect, 'There are indeed Others to whom this applies, but it does not apply to me"' (Osajima, 1993, p. 425). By distancing oneself from a particular coethnic person or group in order to protect his or her own social position, Othering of coethnics reproduces the dominant ideology. Among immigrant children of the same ethnic group, often more acculturated members tend to feel superior to their less acculturated peers and thereby distance themselves from less acculturated peers, while less acculturated youth may view the behavior of their more acculturated peers as an ethnic betrayal (Suarez-Orozco, 2004). When Othering involves mixed heritage children, the assumed characteristics of authentic racial or ethnic group membership, specifically physical appearance and racial purity, are also revealed.
"Authenticity" as an explicit or implicit criteria for group membership speaks to a commonly held belief that there is an authentic and inauthentic member and language of a social group (Bucholtz, 2003). Individuals identify themselves and others as a member or non-member of "a group," which is organized according to types of commonalities (Barth, 1967[1998]; Bauman, 2004; Bucholtz \& Hall, 2004; Cornell \& Hartmann, 1998; Hall, 1997). This membership categorization of "self" and "other" indicates how certain characteristics get selected to define authentic membership in a social group (Cornell \& Hartmann, 1998). Consequently, the image of authenticity (Bucholtz \& Hall, 2004, 2005) must be continuously re-imagined as homogeneous, essential and singular (Hall, 1997). Not only does this image of racial or ethnic authenticity influence linguistic and social performance by a mixed heritage person, it also affects people's perception of whether a mixed heritage person can "pass" for a particular racial or ethnic group member.

Traditionally, the concept of passing has been used to describe mixed heritage individuals' identity practices to appropriate their body from a stigmatized race; however, some recent literature finds acts of passing can be self-affirming for individuals who pass selectively and to their advantage (Bucholtz, 1995; Fordham, 1993; Zach, 1993). "Passing is the active construction of how the self is perceived when one's ethnicity is ambiguous to others" (Bucholtz, 1995, p. 352). Bucholtz explains that passing is interactional, which means it does not simply rely on other's judgment; instead, mixed heritage individuals can monitor their own ethnic borders by controlling self-presentation and language use (Bucholtz, 1995). Construction of identity involves not merely assigned categories such as nationalities but also the interactional negotiations of group membership through linguistic and social performance of a racial or ethnic self.

Negotiation of racial and ethnic identity and relationships surrounding mixed heritage transnational children encompasses everyday interactional practices with others through the use of language, physical appearance as well as a normalized racial ideology in a cross-national context. By utilizing the concepts of social identity, Othering, authenticity and passing as discussed above, this study illustrates ways in which racial and ethnic positioning of a mixed heritage student, Jun, is complexly and continuously interpreted and represented by others and himself beyond existing racial or ethnic categories.

## 3. Setting, participants and methodology

This study's site, Pearl High School, is located in an area in California where large numbers of transnational Japanese students reside. This school is predominantly white with sizable numbers of Asian and small numbers of African American and Latino students. During my ethnographic fieldwork at Pearl High School in 2005-2007, I met 25 key participants, who vary in ages, genders, language backgrounds, social classes and academic histories, through the daily observation in an ELD program. Majority of the participants previously lived in a country other than Japan (e.g. Philippines, Thailand, Germany) before coming to the United States, and most of them went to all-day Japanese schools in those countries where Japanese students learn from Japanese teachers in Japanese language using Japanese curriculum. Jun, a focal student in this study, was a senior male student and was one of the few mixed heritage students among transnational Japanese students at Pearl High School. He was born of Colombian mother and Japanese father in Colombia, and had a Japanese last name. I
spent time with Jun and the other participants individually and in groups inside and outside of the ELD classrooms, after school, on weekends, in cyberspace, and also in Japan. I interviewed and informally conversed with the participants via face-to-face and online interactions. In addition to the ethnographic observation, which constructs my subjective understanding of participants' use of physical space, I incorporated an analysis of participants' "mental maps" (e.g. Olsen, 1997; Tuan, 1975) in order to understand their cognitive image of their social space and distance. In interviews, each participant was asked to draw maps of his or her hometown, social hangouts and school community, and to explain the contents. From the two-year ethnographic research, I have over 200 pages of field notes, approximately 50 h of audio- and videorecordings of in-person interactions, and 200 pages of text message and online chat records. In the process of data analysis, the audio-recordings were carefully transcribed using different transcript conventions including content-based and conversation analysis in order to understand ways in which each participant used various labels to represent, position and negotiate their racial and ethnic identities and relationships from multiple angles. For the examples in this study, I employed excerpts of discourse using content-based convention transcripts with some details of the utterances, which allowed representing the linguistic data descriptively and contextually. After transcribing, the Japanese transcripts were attentively translated into English.

In this research, it was especially significant to take my presence as a researcher into consideration in order to understand the context of my study because the participants were extremely aware of their and others' "Japanese-ness," and they usually saw me as "Japanese" regardless of how I identify myself in different situations. Thus, it was likely that who I was affected the data collection by possibly making the participants present themselves and others more or less differently if I were not perceived as Japanese. For example, some participants might have felt comfortable to vocalize their feelings, especially those against non-Japanese students, but not against Japanese in general. Therefore, it was important to critically reflect how I was involved in the making of the local contexts throughout the research process.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Group territories and ideology among Japanese transnational students

Japanese transnational students at Pearl High commonly recognized at least five social groups, as known as cliques: Bad Boy, Bilinguals, Entertainment, Cafeteria Girls and Eyeglasses. Bilingual, Entertainment and Eyeglasses were the exact "folk terms" (Spradley, 1980) that they used to refer to themselves, and Bad Boys and Cafeteria Girls were created by the author to capture the essence of participants' description of those groups. As noted previously, many of these Japanese transnational students in all five cliques had lived in different countries other than Japan such as Singapore, Philippines, Thailand, Germany and Brazil before coming to the United States. Yet, most participants attended all-day Japanese schools and lived in Japanese communities in those countries, thus their primary language was Japanese and they were accustomed to Japanese pop culture. Even with the commonalities, the cliques were clearly divided by not only gender, but also a style of speech and fashion as symbolized in the labels (Eckert \& Rickford, 2001). The members of Bad Boys, which Jun belonged to, considered themselves and were considered by others as "bad" usually in a cool way. They were seniors and sported either punk rock (e.g. piercing, leather and silver accessories, tight pants and shirts) or hip-hop style (e.g. piercing, silver accessories, loose pants and shirts). The members conversed in Japanese, but often inserted informal English expressions such as "fuck" and "man" in order to express their masculinity and coolness. On the other hand, the Bilingual clique members, senior girls, preferred conservative "girlie" fashion. They consciously performed bilingual-ness by speaking English or mixing English phrases in Japanese conversation in front of the other students. Moreover, most of the Entertainment clique members were junior and senior boys interested in football and comedy, and their fashion was usually casual (e.g. T-shirts, jeans and sneakers). The members rarely used English, and they usually pronounced English vocabularies with a Japanese accent. The Cafeteria Girls clique included several subgroups, and various fashions were observed among them; some students dressed up in a Japanese popular fashion and others were in a Californian style (e.g. t-shirts and short denim skirts). Their English proficiency varied, but they usually talked in Japanese only. Lastly, the Eyeglasses group members consisted by freshman boys labeled themselves and were labeled by others as "the Eyeglasses group" because majority of the members wore eyeglasses disregarding the fact that some students wore contact lens or did not wear anything for eyesight correction. The members cultivated a high level of expertise in the fields associated with "nerds" including anime, comic books and computers. Eyeglasses clique members spoke only in Japanese, and their speech usually contained difficult and old Japanese expressions, polite/honorific/humble forms and correct grammar.

Based on participants' mental maps, interview contents and data acquired from my research, I have reconstructed what Jun and the other participants shared in describing the five cliques in different lunchtime territories on campus during the academic year 2005-2006 in Fig. 1 and Table 1. Each participant had a different subjective view to understand their own group and others; however, all the participants shared how each clique occupied different physical spaces on campus during the lunchtime: Bad Boys clique off the school grounds, Bilinguals at the bench between buildings 1 and 2, Entertainment and Cafeteria Girls cliques in the cafeteria and Eyeglasses clique at the corner of the schoolyard (Fig. 1).

While students were restricted in where and with whom they studied in classrooms, they had more freedom in the way they spent their lunchtime. Yet, participants' behavior was organized with certain rules: They sat at a particular location with same friends everyday during lunchtime, which revealed their social identities, relationships and ideologies (Olsen, 1997; Thomas, 2005). Students socially structured physical space within the school by carving it into "territorial preserves"

Table 1
Characteristics of groups among transnational Japanese students.

|  | Labeling | Lunch Space | Grade level | ELD levels |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Bad Boys (Jun) |  | Outside | - - - 12 | Post-/Non-ELD |
| Bilingual Girls |  | Bench | ---12 | Post-/Non-ELD |
| Entertainment Boys | Japs \& FOBs | Cafeteria | - 10/11 - | ELD3 |
|  |  |  | ---12 | Post-/Non-ELD |
| Cafeteria Girls |  |  | 9/10 - - | ELD1, 2 |
|  |  |  | - 10/11 - | ELD3 |
|  |  |  | - 10/11 - | Post-/Non-ELD |
|  |  |  | - - 11/12 | Post-/Non-ELD |
| Eyeglasses Boys | Japs \& FOBs | Schoolyard | 9/10 - - | ELD1, 2 |

(Goffman, 1971) that were patrolled and defended insofar as students treated them as having implications for the identity construction and management and shaped their discourse and movements accordingly.

These Japanese student cliques did not directly interact with each other or go across each other's territory in their every day lives. Nonetheless, participants shared and circulated hegemonic concepts of whiteness as a racial category of Other, which had both positive and negative connotations. They reproduced a notion that English was the authoritative language and white people, whom they usually referred to as "Americans," were the norm of the school as well as the broader American society through the act of Othering the coethnics using labels such as "Japs" and "FOBs (Fresh-Off-the Boat)." Japs and FOBs indicated the characteristics of being "too ethnic" - speaking only Japanese and befriending only Japanese co-ethnics, which were equated with not speaking English and not having American friends. In contrast, "Americanized" was commonly used to describe one's level of assimilation. Based on an assumption that Japanese was an essential and central quality, the participants often applied this label to native-born Japanese Americans or 1.5 generation, those who immigrated to the U.S. at a young age.

Bad Boys and Bilingual Girls often indicated Entertainment Boys and Cafeteria Girls as Japs or FOBs, and those in the cafeteria usually labeled Eyeglasses Boys as Japs and FOBs. Interestingly, the Eyeglasses clique members labeled themselves as Japs or FOBs occasionally. Although the participants did not clearly indicate the association of their labeling practices with factors other than lunchtime territories, the practices closely connected with ELD levels as well. The ELD program at Pearl High School consisted of four classes with three English mastery levels; beginner English (ELD 1), intermediate English (ELD 2), and advanced English for freshman, sophomore and above (ELD 3). ELD 1 and 2 shared a room and held at the same time, but ELD 3 was taught separately. The five Japanese transnational student cliques were either current or post-/nonELD students, and groups were divided based on different ELD levels (Table 1). Assuming the relevancy between English


Fig. 1. Territories of groups of transnational Japanese students at Pearl High School.
mastery levels and social hierarchy, post-/non-ELD students labeled current ELD students as Japs and FOBs, and advanced ELD students labeled lower-leveled ELD students Japs and FOBs.

By differentiating their and other cliques through discursive and physical practices, the participants attempted to legitimize their social status within the Japanese student community in relation to the mainstream school community. As a result, they reproduced an ideology that white is the American and English is the superior language; consequently, they found less value in non-white or non-English language such as theirs, Japanese. Simultaneously, in order to protect their self-esteems and legitimize their marginalized position at school, these Japanese students regularly blamed and degraded American or Americanized students for being exclusionists, disregarding the fact that the participants would not usually initiate an interaction with them either. Especially, the participants often described their discouraging experiences with "Americanized Japanese (Japanese American)" students, who were engaged in the Othering of coethnics by blatantly calling the transnational Japanese students as Japs and FOBs. Even without these direct experiences of being discriminated (Pyke \& Dang, 2003), a notion of stigmatization among the participants arose from "a common sense of rejection, from a sense of being different, and needing to stand together in opposition to the notion of outsiders that what makes them different also makes them inferior" (Peshkin, 1991, p. 25). This notion of stigmatization made the Japanese students criticize Americanized and American students for being discriminatory, which helped them believe that they were morally superior to Americanized or American students because the participants were not the doers but receivers of discrimination. Ironically, however, the participants were also engaged in the Othering of the other transnational Japanese students by labeling them as Japs and FOBs in an attempt to destigmatize themselves, just like the Japanese American students who Othered transnational Japanese students for the same reason. Under this complex circumstance, Jun's haafu-ness was often treated politically in order to negotiate racial, ethnic and social status among the participants.

### 4.2. Crafting Japanese identity: Jun's journey from Colombia to Japan to America

When I was first introduced to Jun accompanied by other Japanese transnational students, he stood out because he had tall and tanned Hispanic phenotype, sported punk rock fashion, and had a witty personality. Jun's primary language was Japanese, but he used Spanish with his mother at home and had found little issue with either conversational or academic English. Example (1), one of the first conversations I had with Jun, illustrates Jun's self-identification through his explanation about his family.
Example (1) *R = Researcher

| *R: | Your friends said you are haafu. So your father is? = |
| :--- | :--- |
| Jun: | =My dad is samurai |
| R: | Samurai, eh? ((laugh)) And your mother is? |
| Jun: | ...a lady |
| R: | A lady? ((laugh)) |
| Jun: | Well, mom is...Colombian |
| "=": no discernible interval between turn; ".": pause; "((laugh))": description of action. |  |

Jun did not identify himself as haafu but other transnational Japanese students had always indicated him as such. In response to my question, Jun answered quickly that his father was "samurai," one of the popular cultural icons to represent Japanese males. On the other hand, Jun labeled his mother simply as "lady" after a few seconds of silence, and then proceeded to explain that she was Colombian. It appeared as though Jun had already prepared the answer, samurai, in his mind because it was an important factor to symbolize his own Japanese-ness, unlike his Colombian side of his heritage.

Jun's strong sense of Japanese identity was constructed over the years of interactions with others across transnational contexts. Growing up in Colombia, Jun attended a local kindergarten, where Jun and his neighborhood friend were the only Japanese. Jun was often bullied by the local children, who regularly positioned him as "Chino (Chinese)." Because of this experience, Jun's parents decided to send him to an all-day Japanese elementary school in Bogota, which was supported by Japanese government and ran based on Japanese curriculum implemented in Japanese for Japanese students by Japanese teachers. Jun remembered this school being "the best school I have ever attended." Unlike Los Angeles, where 2256 elementary school age Japanese children resided, Bogota had only 39 Japanese children of that age as of 2005 (Consular and Migration Policy of Japan, 2005). As a matter of course, Bogota Japanese school had been a very small school that usually had ten or fewer students in the entire elementary school system, which allowed the relationships between and among peers and teachers to be close. The contrast between Jun's experiences at the local kindergarten and those at Japanese elementary school in Colombia resulted in the construction of his keen sense of identity as Japanese.

During the ages of ten to twelve, Jun and his family lived in Osaka, Japan due to his father's job. Jun attended a public elementary school during that time, and he remembered his school days as "a hell" where his peers made fun of him for "acting cool" or "stinking like coffee beans." Currently, popular Japanese fashion magazines targeting adolescents and young adults frequently use mixed heritage models, who also make frequent appearances on various TV shows in Japan. Some literature indicates how mixed heritage people are still a target of foreign and English speaking stereotypes; yet, under this media environment, haafu-ness is remarkably celebrated among adolescent girls and young women in Japan
because of their foreignness as well as familiarity (e.g. Kamada, 2005, 2010). However, it is often the case that this idolization is applied only if one is part white due to a normalized racial hierarchy. Within the school context, Jun was not treated like white-Japanese haafu but as someone foreign and different. Despite Jun's clear identification as Japanese, his peers constantly bullied him by differentiating him as non-authentic Japanese; as a result, Jun refused to attend school after a few months. Rather than making him identify less as Japanese or more as Colombian, the experience at this elementary school made him characterize Japanese in Japan as unsophisticated, and differentiated the Japanese in Japan from himself.

After Jun and his family moved to California, he attended a small private all-day Japanese middle school, and then moved on to a local public high school, Pearl High. The social context of a normalized racial hierarchy at this school influenced Jun's as well as other participants' perceptions of racial relations. The social environment at Pearl High differed from Jun's previous schools, which were predominantly single ethnic or private; Pearl High was a racially diverse public high school where white, Latino, black and the other Asian ethnic students attended. Because Latino is generally not considered a racial group in Japan, most of the Japanese transnational students at Pearl High categorized Latino students as either White or Black based on the phenotype. Thus, the category of "Latino students" was virtually nonexistent in the eyes of most participants, while there were quite a few of them in fact. By contrast, Jun was very aware of the Latino student population. In Example (2), I asked Jun and Yu, a senior male student in Bad Boys that came to America five years earlier, whether they hung out with non Japanese students. The following excerpt illustrates Jun's positioning towards Colombian heritage.
Example (2)

| R: | Do you guys hang out with students who aren't Japanese also? |
| :--- | :--- |
| Jun: | Hmm... |
| Yu: | We used to |
| R: | Jun, do you talk to other Spanish-speaking students? Like other Colombian students? |
| Jun: | ((laugh)) Not really |
| Yu: | There aren't too many at school |
| R: | I believe Marcos is from Colombia |
| Jun: | ((laugh)) |
| Yu: | ((laugh)) |
| Jun: | MARCOS? ((laugh)) That name sounds hilarious |
| "CAPITAL": louder sound. |  |

This excerpt reveals how Jun distanced himself from Colombian heritage at the moment. First, he dismissed my question, whether he talked to other Spanish-speakers or not, by laughing at it. Moreover, Jun denied the possibility of knowing Marcos by mocking the sound of his name, even though both Yu and Jun had previously met Marcos, a student from Colombia in the ELD program. As much literature asserts, Latino students are often academically, linguistically and socially marginalized within the mainstream school community (e.g. Bettie, 2003; Mehan, Hubbard, \& Villanueva, 1994; Mendoza-Denton, 1999). Moreover, as Min and Kim (2002) claim in their study, "Asian immigrants feel far more in common with white Americans than with African Americans and Latinos and are highly prejudiced against African Americans" (p. 177). Japanese students at Pearl High were no exception: they felt virtually closer to and more interested in white students, who were the norm of the school community, in contrast to black or Latino students, who were often the targets of racial prejudice. Yet for most participants, Latino students did not register as a distinct racial category. For Jun, it was politically savvy to distance himself from his Latino heritage at school in order to maintain his social status as well as Japanese identity. In this way, Jun negotiated and constructed his ethnic identity within and across social and transnational spaces over the years. Yet, Jun's identity continued to be challenged by being involved in the identity politics among Japanese students at Pearl High.

## 4.3. "The Latino one": racialization of Jun

After Jun immigrated to America, school teachers and staff perceived him as part of the Japanese student body, partly because his last name is Japanese and he presents himself as Japanese. In other words, Jun passed as Japanese institutionally. Moreover, other transnational Japanese students also accepted him as a highly regarded member of the Japanese student community. Nonetheless, these Japanese students usually denied Jun authentic membership in the Japanese ethnic group. These seemingly contradictory positionings happened because of Jun's "foreign" appearance. As noted previously, haafuness, white-Japanese in particular, tends to be celebrated among a young Japanese generation in Japan and also by the transnational Japanese students at Pearl High. Even though Jun was not part white and clearly identified himself as Japanese, he was categorized, racialized and idolized as haafu among Japanese transnational students. Unfortunately, Jun's elevated status did not mean he could be authentically Japanese.

Example (3) includes excerpts of a conversation between Yu and Mizuki, a senior student in Cafeteria Girls. Mizuki lived in Laos for two years when she was in an elementary school, moved back to Japan, and came to the United States a year ago. Usually Cafeteria Girls and Bad Boys did not interact with each other, but Mizuki and Yu started to talk after they took the same class. Example (3) exemplifies how other Japanese students, both members and non-members of Jun's clique, racially and ethnically positioned Jun.

Example (3)

| Mizuki: | Jun is so cool, isn't he? |
| :--- | :--- |
| Yu: | Jun IS cool, indeed. |
| Mizuki: | Jun is the guy with different eye color |
| R: | Jun, right? |
| Mizuki: | The Latino one |
| .. |  |
| Mizuki: | Everyone loves Jun. |
| Yu: | Yeah, everyone HERE (in the cafeteria) loves Jun. |
| Mizuho: | they are like "OH my gosh, it's Jun!" |
| .. | It's like, his Japanese is better than normal Japanese people |
| Mizuho: | Yeah yeah |
| Yu: | "(cafeteria)": description of the preceding word. |

As Mizuki and Yu emphasized, Jun was very popular among Japanese students, especially among Cafeteria Girls. The participants did not just find him "cool," but they usually paid attention to the other side of his race, "Latino," regardless of Jun's own identification as Japanese or the fact he was Japanese as well as Latino. Furthermore, even though Japanese was his primary language, it was often marked as a special ability by other students as shown in Mizuho's comment, "His Japanese is better than normal Japanese people." In other words, Mizuho and Yu, who agreed with her, did not perceive Jun as "normal Japanese" either in the U.S. or in general.

Although Jun did not pass as an authentic Japanese, his racialized status was politically leveraged among Japanese students to raise their clique's social position within the hierarchy. In Example (4), Taichi, a senior student in Bad Boys who had been in America for two years, explains how he differentiates his group from FOBs by using Jun's membership to the clique. Example (4)

R:
Taichi:
R:
Taichi:

Can you describe "FOB"?
FOB is those who can't speak English, or those who are even not willing to learn English. They usually only hang out with their own ethnic groups.
I see. How is your group like?
Well. . . it's mainly Japanese. But we have Jun and used to have more native, Americanized ones, too.

Taichi emphasized the criteria of FOB involved lack of English proficiency and befriending solely coethnic group members. Based on my observation, it was clear that all of the Bad Boys clique members including Jun were self-identified Japanese and used only Japanese with some English slang words. However, along with other "native" and "Americanized" students who used to be in the clique, Jun was racialized as non-Japanese and treated as a symbol of group's non-FOB/Jap status. At the same time, Taichi explains that his group includes the membership of "more native, Americanized ones," namely Jun, whom Taichi identified as neither native nor Americanized, but not quite Japanese either. Because Jun did not pass as Japanese, he gained an elevated status in his clique as well as within the Japanese community based on their shared ideology that non-Japanese was superior to Japanese.

### 4.4. Performing Haafu-ness by Jun

Identity shifts across time, place and social contexts, and the meaning of social categories and labels can be interactionally negotiated and constructed within a local context depending on a goal of a speech act (Eckert \& McConnell-Ginet, 1995; Kang, 2004). It was not only other Japanese students who positioned Jun as inauthentically Japanese; he too occasionally designated himself as non-Japanese, despite his explicit and routine identification as Japanese. In fact, claiming inauthentic Japanese status allowed Jun to elevate his status within the community as a haafu, an esteemed category among other Japanese students.

In contrast to Jun's popularity among Japanese students in the cafeteria, he expressed disdain towards the Cafeteria Girls, who were similarly unpopular among members of Bad Boys and Bilingual Girls. Jun and the other participants usually shared the labeling criteria of "Japs/FOBs" and "Americanized"; however, Jun negotiated the meaning and characteristics of the dichotomous labels by performing his haafu-ness in Example (5), a conversation occurred between Jun and I while Yu and Mizuho were present. In the excerpt, Jun asked my opinion about Jap and FOB cliques and then explained some of the reasons why he abhorred them.
Example (5)

| 1. | Jun: | Now, let me ask you. How do you think of those Japanese? |
| :--- | :--- | :--- |
| 2. | R: | I guess they are okay. |
| 3. | Jun: | Really? I don't think so. |
| 4. | R: | You think they aren't okay? |
| 5. | Jun: | Not okay? Umm... usually not okay. |
| 6. | R: | How come? |
| 7. | Jun: | The reason is that they are mostly stupid complainers. "Japan was better, I really wanted to be in Japan, but my <br> parents forced me to come with them. America is truly the worst. I hate white people. They are selfish." |
| 8. | Mizuho: | ((points at Yu)) |


| 9. | Jun: | Yu? I guess you say that, too ((looking at Yu)). . But boys don't complain as much as girls. They (those Japanese) say things like "white people are stupid, ignorant, narrow-minded." They say such things even though they don't even know well. |
| :---: | :---: | :---: |
| 10. | Mizuho: | I've said that, too... |
| 11. | Jun: | ((ignoring Mizuho)) What the heck? They can complain all day long, but nothing productive can be born out of it. Sure I understand, no, I don't understand, but, they may really hate being in America. You hated America in the beginning, right? ((Looks at Yu)) Maybe you hate it even now. |
| 12. | Yu: | . . . Not so much now. . |
| 13. | Jun: | But Yu is having fun unlike them. Usually about girls, though. ((both Jun and Yu laugh)) Yet, these people (ones in cafeteria) really don't try to look beyond "We are Japanese and hate Americans" for no good reason. Even if they find something good about America, they soon reject it by saying "No, that is different. Americans are just arrogant." |
| 14. | R : | So the image of Americans is fixed among them? |
| 15. | Jun: | Yes it is. Arrogant, selfish, too self-confident. Well, I don't deny them, though. |
| 16. | Yu: | There are many Americans like that, no? |
| 17. | Jun: | Those people around here (cafeteria), the top of Japanese groups ((laugh)). The boss is the Americanized one with too much self-confidence. I guess it is fine that he hangs out only with Japanese but don't be so narrow-minded. They act as if they are much superior than the others. What I mean is that they shouldn't even say a thing if they don't know anything. |
| 18. | R : | I see |
| 19. | Jun: | ‘Cause, isn't it so silly? You came to America, and they only pay attention to those things. How much of a boring human being are you? Fine, then how do you feel if I complain about Japan a whole day long in Japan? Narrow, gross, stinky, too many old men. It's wrong, isn't it? It's wrong. |
| 20. | Mizuho \& Yu: | ((remain silent, looking down)) |

The Entertainment Boys and Cafeteria Girls were usually labeled as Japs and FOBs because of two adverse factors: speaking only Japanese and hanging out only with Japanese. However, Jun criticized students in the cafeteria for ignorantly assuming the supremacy of Japanese and the deficiency of Americans as "narrow-minded" (line 17), like "white people" (line 9). Jun labeled "the boss" of the Japanese students in the cafeteria as "Americanized" while accepting the fact that he hung out only with Japanese (line 17). Instead of using "Americanized" to indicate one's level of assimilation in terms of English proficiency, Jun used this label to indicate how too much assimilation led to negative attributes: arrogance, ignorance and unmeasured self-confidence (line 15). Not only did Jun negotiate what Japs, FOBs and Americanized meant, he also strategically used his haafu-ness to highlight his point. In line 19, he says, "How do you feel if I complain about Japan a whole day long in Japan?" showing how Jun positioned himself as an outsider in Japan, much like Japanese students in America. Jun's critique of over Americanization tactically positions his ethnic identity as both Japanese and not quite Japanese.

Jun's haafu-ness and its superiority were also emphasized by Yu and Mizuho's silenced participation in the speech context. Mizuho and Yu were much more vocal and active during a conversation when the topic was not on the unfavorable attributes of Japanese students; each complained about Americans and their lives in America. Given that Mizuho was a Cafeteria Girls, Jun simply ignored her throughout this speech event; however, when Yu, Jun's best friend from Bad Boys, spoke Jun tried to protect him by differentiating him from others based on gender (lines 9 and 13) and by briefly agreeing about the characteristics of Americans (line 15). Yu attempted to participate in the conversation in line 16, but Jun started to criticize Japanese students in the cafeteria again, and Yu remained silent until the end of that topic. The way Jun, Mizuho and Yu engaged in this conversation demonstrated how Jun's haafu-ness helped Jun gain authority to criticize some Japanese students, to control the conversation, and to patrol the boundaries between various cliques.

The meanings and boundaries of a label altered based on how labelers used it against different individuals and for varied purposes. As a haafu, Jun strategically shifted his identification between Japanese and non-Japanese to designate Japanese students in the cafeteria as less authentically Japanese by infusing critique into the label "Americanized." By inauthenticating those students' Japanese-ness, Jun attempted to negotiate his haafu, less authentic Japanese, status and legitimize his Japanese-ness as more authentic, at least imaginarily. Indeed, a label or a category was not single dimensional or definitive by itself (Eckert \& McConnell-Ginet, 1995). As the analysis showed, the meaning of a label was situationally and interactionally negotiated by individuals within and across different social contexts.

## 5. Discussion and implications

This article has explored the ways Jun and the other Japanese transnational students at Pearl High School discursively negotiated, reconstructed and reinforced their identities and relationships by positioning each other through the use of various labels beyond demographic categories. These students were institutionally and socially marginalized as foreigners and as English learners. Often teachers, staff and other students perceived these Japanese students as "naturally" gathering at a particular spot, speaking their own language with their own kinds of people (Tatum, 1997; Thomas, 2005). However, their discursive practices revealed how complexly and diversely transnational Japanese students were engaged in selfidentification and relationship construction beyond an ethnic category.

I illustrated how the participants engaged in Othering of coethnics by labeling transnational peers as Japs and FOBs. One important background of this Othering practice among the participants was their shared experience to be Othered as too ethnic by Japanese American students. As indicated in previous research (e.g. Pyke \& Dang, 2003; Suarez-Orozco, 2004), more acculturated peers often perceive less acculturated peers as inferior based on an assimilationist ideology. Japanese American students at Pearl High School also attempted to emphasize their assimilation to America by Othering transnational Japanese
students to destigmatize their racialized positions at school. In turn, transnational Japanese students internalized and reproduced similar Othering practice within the transnational Japanese community, who created social hierarchies associated with English proficiency and the ELD program. As previous literature argues, English language learning programs implicitly and explicitly value English and mainstream peers; yet these programs often separate English learners from mainstream students, depriving English language learning students opportunities to practice English or interact with English speaking peers (McKay \& Wong, 1996; Olivo, 2003). In fact, this study's participants explained how their counselors placed them in predominantly ELD or Asian student classrooms throughout the years at Pearl High School. These academically and socially segregated environments created rival cliques among transnational Japanese students, who regularly engaged in intraethnic Othering by labeling cliques in lower-leveled ELD classes as Japs and FOBs. In this way, the analysis revealed the Japanese American and transnational Japanese students' attempt to destigmatize their own positions by marginalizing their coethnics, particularly those in the ELD program. Indeed, these students' everyday practices reenacted the social stratification of dominance and subordination, redrawing the racial and ethnic hierarchies (Bauman, 2004; Hall, 1997) of a White hegemony they were fighting against.

Furthermore, this study helps illuminate the negotiations of a racial and ethnic identity surrounding a generally overlooked multiracial child of minority races, a Colombian Japanese student, across transnational contexts. Racial hierarchies differs from one country to the next, and mixed heritage children tend to be positioned differently in different countries depending on local and political contexts of racial relations. In the case of Jun, he was marginalized as Chino in Colombia, which drove him to identify himself as Japanese. Then he was discriminated against as a foreigner in Japan even while white Japanese haafu were celebrated there. When he moved to America, the marginalization of the Latinos in the local community caused Jun to distance himself from his Colombian heritage and emphasize his Japanese heritage. Contrary to the foreignization and discrimination Jun experienced in Japan, transnational Japanese students at Pearl High School eagerly emphasized their friendship with Jun, who was regarded as haafu, therefore non-Japanese and superior to Japanese in America. In many ways, the haafu stereotype in Japan (e.g. fashion icon, English ability, foreignness) accelerated participants' idolization of Jun, who was regarded as foreign, Latino, and not authentic Japanese, even though haafu typically means half-White for those in Japan. Despite Jun's strong identification as Japanese, the other students and Jun himself occasionally highlighted Jun's non-Japanese heritage to gain authority within the community. Indeed, when researching children's identity negotiation in a transnational context, examining how a racial hierarchy in different countries would have an impact on the identity negotiation process is necessary. Studies like this would give insight into ways in which locally specific as well as globally normalized racial and ethnic ideologies are reproduced, reemphasized and circulated. Therefore, more research focusing on transnational mixed heritage children in other racial and ethnic groups needs to be conducted to further understand the identity negotiations as well as the circulation of a Whiteness ideology that occur across different nations.

With rapid globalization, the population of transnational and mixed heritage children can be expected to grow in American society and these children are likely to impact new racial and ethnic paradigms among student communities. Our critical task, then, is to understanding their academic and social experiences and provide appropriate support. The participants of this study represent a minority even among the body of linguistically and culturally diverse students in the U.S. education system. However, this study sheds light on globalizing processes that have not received much attention: the effects of a normalized racial hierarchy and a Whiteness ideology under globalization. At Pearl High School, teachers, counselors and administrators perceived transnational Japanese students as Japanese sojourners, and treated them like temporary students who would soon leave America. I encourage teachers, school counselors and administrators, who play a significant role in structuring curriculum and school environments, to carefully rethink the deep impact an English language learning program can have on transnational students. English proficiency is not the only skill they learn in the program; instead, the structure of an English language program gets associated with racial, ethnic and linguistic ideologies that influence students' social identities and relationships even after these students graduate from high school and move to other countries. This study can help school personnel better understand who transnational and mixed heritage students are and what they experience in schools in various nations in order to create more inclusive learning environments that better integrate English speaking peers with English language learners across campus communities. Moreover, a traditionally marginalized student population like the participants of this study as well as mainstreamed students should be offered opportunities to critically reflect on their shared ideologies and normalized practices to avoid alienating tendencies within themselves and among each other. Educating transnational children effectively means understanding the American education system as well as educational systems abroad. Studying and working with these students who live between national cultures can help us address critical of inviting students to better participate in educational environment across nations.

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