Japanese American Cultural Identity: The Role of WWII, Internment, and the 3/11 Disaster in Japan

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JAPANESE AMERICAN CULTURAL IDENTITY: THE ROLE OF WWII, INTERNMENT, AND THE 3/11 DISASTER IN JAPAN

A Thesis

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Advisor: Dr. Margaret Thompson
ABSTRACT

This research explores the nature of Japanese American cultural identity through an examination of the historical contexts of WWII, internment, and the 3/11 disasters in Japan. Interview data was analyzed using both interpretive and critical paradigms. I then utilized the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), the corresponding concept of identity gaps, and critical-cultural hybridity. It was found that Japanese Americans construct, enact, and relate to their identities in markedly different ways despite belonging to the same cultural group. In turn, I am proposing further revision to CTI’s communal frame to exemplify the shared and contested elements of a collective. This research also suggests that the structural context of internment has impacted Japanese Americans even though they may not perceive much of an impact on their own identity conceptions. Moreover, this study argues that internment has profoundly shaped the lives of Japanese Americans, which future research can continue to explore.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

During World War II (WWII), over 120,000 Japanese Americans were unjustly imprisoned by the United States government in internment camps for three and a half years. Regrettably, no distinction was made between U.S. citizens and non-citizens (or immigrants), and no legal proceedings were employed to determine probable cause for criminality before their imprisonment (Hayashi, 2004; Kashima, 2003; Nakagawa, 1990b; Robinson, 2001). Pearl Harbor has been regarded, for many, as a key historical event that provoked the U.S. government to intern Japanese Americans. As it will be discussed, racial discrimination against Japanese Americans has been traced back to their emigration to the U.S. in the late 19th century whereby alien land laws, labor restrictions, and quotas on immigration were imposed on them (Ichioka, 1988; Miksch & Ghere, 2004; Robinson, 2001).

Many scholars have denounced the U.S. government for unjustly incarcerating Japanese Americans largely because of racial prejudice, political and economic interests, and wartime hysteria (Hayashi, 2004; Luther, 2003; Muller, 2001; Nakagawa, 1990b; Robinson, 2001). Accordingly, scholars have also produced an exhaustive amount of literature in order to understand and critique the immediate impact and long term implications of the camps across generations of Japanese Americans. In that literature, several scholars have addressed the role of collective memory, focusing on how people
talk about internment camps and WWII in shaping views toward both the Japanese and American aspects of the dual identity of the Japanese American citizen. In this study, I consider both how Japanese American identities have been constructed as informed by the historical contexts of internment and WWII, and how Japanese Americans related to the events of March 11, 2011 (also called the 3/11 disasters) when a massive earthquake, tsunami, and a nuclear accident occurred in Japan. I believe that exploring both current and older reference points are important in order to understand how Japanese Americans connect to their ethnic identities today. Persons of Japanese descent or ethnic Japanese living outside of Japan, also called Nikkei, have settled throughout North and South America since the late 19th century (Asakawa, 2004; Nakagawa, 1990a; Shimabukuro, 2011; Takenaka, 2009). This study, however, focuses on Nikkei who have settled in North America, and in particular, the U.S. Thus, I use the term “Japanese American” to refer to Nikkei in the U.S., and in this study, I focus on how Japanese Americans incorporate both recent events along with the formative experience of internment into their sense of identity.

I have investigated the nature of Japanese American identities by the following criteria: (1) How has internment and the personal experiences of Japanese Americans shaped their identities; and (2) How has historical racism and discrimination shaped Japanese Americans’ identities; and (3) How did Japanese Americans relate to the 3/11 disasters in Japan and to others who were affected by it. Consequently, I employed a dualistic paradigmatic approach that combined an interactional level of analysis with a broader consideration of the sociopolitical and historical contexts. I utilized the
interpretive approach as a means to understand how Japanese Americans have constructed their identities, which allowed narratives on culture and identity to emerge. I then used the critical perspective—in particular, the concepts of power, ideology, and hegemony—in order to examine and critique how their identities have been shaped and informed by the broader contexts of internment, WWII, racism, and discrimination. After identifying some common themes in participants’ narratives—e.g., many claimed that their parents (more or less) did not talk about internment with them, many experienced dissonance or were reluctant to accept themselves as Japanese Americans, the majority does not speak Japanese, etc.—it became clear to me that the interpretive approach alone was ineffective in explaining why this might have been the case. Not only that, but there was something problematic about my analysis that seemed to overlook power struggles and the role of the historical context that Japanese Americans have been profoundly shaped by. Therefore, my theoretical framework incorporated both the interpretive and critical approaches.

Rationale for this Study

Although Japanese Americans of similar generations and/or ages may share a common historical memory (e.g., racism, discrimination, internment), Japanese American identities are complex, multidimensional, contested, and constantly evolving. Therefore, this study considered how Japanese Americans’ identities have been shaped by the historical context of WWII and internment as well as by the more recent events of March 11.
Japanese Americans are unique in that they have long been viewed as “the Other” with an appearance that is not “white,” they have been the target of racism since the first arrivals in the U.S., and they have a historical experience of internment. Internment has been conceptualized as a paramount experience for Japanese Americans that has generated compounding, cross-generational effects upon members of this ethnic and cultural group, albeit, with varying degrees among individual members (Asakawa, 2004; Fugita & Fernandez, 2004; Nakano, 1990; Takezawa, 1991). Needless to say, Japanese Americans connect to their ethnic and cultural identities in various ways. For some Japanese Americans, the historical experience of internment continues to inform their sense of self whereas being Japanese American for others pertains more to richness of their cultural traditions and interacting with other Japanese Americans, as I will discuss.

As ethnic Japanese (albeit, generations removed), this study also explored how participants have conceptualized the 3/11 disasters in Japan in order to understand another dimension of Japanese American identity. It goes without saying that because we live in an era that is saturated by media, news media coverage informs how local and global audiences have come to learn about disasters in addition to other events that are taking place in the world. Hence, global interest in the 3/11 disasters was fueled by extensive mass media and social media coverage. Given the rise of global instantaneous media during the present times, the media may have played a larger role in informing the public—and therefore, Japanese Americans—about the 3/11 disasters compared with WWII. However, that is not to imply that the U.S. government did not utilize the media (e.g., propaganda cartoons, radio, public service announcements, etc.) in order to
rationalize the “need” for internment and war with Japan among the U.S. public. Rather, the present times are marked by a greater degree of media in that media corporations play an important role in the public’s understanding of the crises through the way in which reporting is conducted, and that in turn can influence how people integrate their understandings of the crises into their identities.

While natural disasters are rather frequent in Japan due to the country’s prime location between four major tectonic plates along the Pacific Ring of Fire—the North American Plate, Pacific Plate, Philippine Plate, and the Eurasian Plate—the 3/11 disasters were unprecedented because they were both natural and human-made disasters (Matanle, 2011; Rajendran, Andrade, Thulasiraman, & Rajendran, 2011). That is, the first two parts of the disaster were characterized as natural disasters (i.e., the earthquake and the tsunami were caused by nature) whereas the third part was human-made (i.e., the nuclear accident involved the errors of human agents). Although 3/11 as an event is salient for numerous reasons (e.g., natural and human-made disaster, the construction of nuclear power plants on the coast of a seismically active country, the danger of nuclear power and radioactivity, the use of mass/social media in a global context), this study focused on how Japanese Americans connected to Japan’s 3/11 disasters by situating these disasters within the larger context of their identities.

**March 11, 2011**

At 2:46pm on March 11, 2011, an earthquake with a magnitude of 9.0 devastated the northeastern Tohoku region of Japan with its epicenter located near the city of Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture (Hommerich, 2012; Luke & Karashima, 2012; Matanle, 2011; Sharma
& Arora, 2011). Shortly thereafter, the earthquake then triggered a massive tsunami with wave heights up to 15-17 m destroying virtually everything in its path along the shore and inland (Hommerich, 2012; Luke & Karashima, 2012; Matanle, 2011; Sharma & Arora, 2011). Consequently, the tsunami also triggered a human-made disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, namely, an accident that released radioactive materials into the environment that has endangered the health of thousands of people, if not more (see Appendix 1). This unprecedented triple disaster (also called 3/11, the Tohoku disasters, or the Great East Japan Earthquake) has resulted in over 20,000 people dead or missing, nearly five to eight thousand more injured, and an estimated 150,000-330,000 people displaced from their homes—either homeless or temporarily housed at evacuation centers (Hasegawa, 2012; Herod, 2011; Hommerich, 2012; Ishii, 2012; Matanle, 2011; Sharma & Arora, 2011).

The aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami severely damaged or destroyed infrastructure, including power for communications services and devices, public transportation, roads, land, buildings, businesses, houses, belongings, etc. As a result of this, immediate communication from the Japanese government to its citizens about evacuation procedures and precautionary measures were delayed as well as for those attempting to contact friends, family, and coworkers for a confirmation of their survival and well-being (Herod, 2011; Kanayama, 2012; Sugimoto, 2011; The Quakebook Community, 2011).¹

¹ Intact community radio stations, however, provided specific, up-to-date, local information for disaster victims who needed more relevant guidelines as applied to their city, community, or prefecture (Kanayama, 2012).
While recovering from these natural disasters is undoubtedly a long and complicated process of political, social, and economic considerations, what is perhaps more problematic is rebuilding society after the nuclear accident. Located on the coast of the Tohoku region in the Fukushima prefecture, the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant withstood the massive earthquake, but then failed to hold up with the strength of the tsunami as waves crashed over its relatively small 5.7 m protective wall (Hasegawa, 2012; “Japan nuclear: UN says tsunami risk was underestimated,” 2011; Matanle, 2011). At the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, damaged infrastructure systems, power outages, and failed backup generators meant that nuclear reactors lost their cooling functions,—essential for preventing nuclear accidents—which consequently led to damaged reactors and fuel rods, radioactive water flooding the complex, meltdowns, explosions, and the release of radioactive materials into the atmosphere (Funabashi, 2012; Hasegawa, 2012; Ikegami, 2012; Ishii, 2011; “Japan reactor leak ‘serious setback,’” 2011; Matanle, 2011; Sharma & Arora, 2011). Within the duration of four days, unit reactors 1, 2, and 3 of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant suffered meltdowns whereas hydrogen explosions occurred at unit reactors 1, 3, and 4 with uncontrollable radioactive leaks into the air from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant (Funabashi, 2012; Hasegawa, 2012; Ishii, 2011; Matanle, 2011).  

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2 Japanese officials and representatives of Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) sprayed water from helicopters onto the stricken reactors—a hopeful yet unsuccessful attempt to stabilize the accident (Funabashi, 2012; Sharma & Arora, 2011).
Four days after the initial earthquake and tsunami, the Japanese government ordered a mandatory evacuation zone with a 20 km radius to ensure safe distances from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant (i.e., failure to adhere resulted in fines) and those living within the 20-30 km radius were told to remain indoors (see Appendix 2; Ikegami, 2012; Ishii, 2011; Matanle, 2011; Sharma & Arora, 2011). However, many Japanese and critics outside of Japan contested this supposedly “safe zone” for not being safe enough, which sparked several demonstrations and protests as early as the first few weeks since 3/11 occurred (Ishii, 2011; “Japan nuclear: UN says tsunami risk was underestimated,” 2011; Sharma & Arora, 2011).³ Case in point, the severity of the Fukushima crisis was rated a number seven on the International Nuclear Event Scale (INES) to denote a major accident, which is the highest on the scale and is the same rating as that for the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear meltdown. By implication, this suggests that the Fukushima crisis should not have been underestimated (Hasegawa, 2012; Hommerich, 2012; Matanle, 2011; Sharma & Arora, 2011).

By May 5, 2012, all 54 nuclear reactors in Japan (see Appendix 3) were decommissioned to be thoroughly inspected, yet on July 1, 2012 two reactors at the Ohi nuclear power plant were restarted, fostering even more dissent (Asakawa, 2004; “Japan shuts down last nuclear reactor,” 2012; “Protests in Japan as nuclear reactor restarts,” 2012). Recent updates about the Fukushima crisis during August and September of 2013

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³ The United Nations, the United States, and other countries had recommended a wider evacuation zone of 80 km from the nuclear power plant.
have found that the plant continues to leak massive amounts of radioactive water ("Fukushima Plant Operator Reports New Leak," 2013).

Seismologists and critics of nuclear energy had warned against the dangers of nuclear power plants, their construction near the coastline of Japan, their inadequate protective walls given the historical records of tsunamis in Japan, previous nuclear accidents at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl, and most notably the deadly effects of radiation when the U.S. military dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Hirose, 2011; Scalise, 2012; “Seismologists warn Japan against nuclear restart,” 2012).

Consequently, many Japanese citizens criticized or felt that they could no longer trust the Japanese government for a variety of reasons. The Japanese government and TEPCO’s claims that the radiation posed “no immediate threats” to their health was doubted by many, especially those with young children (Hommerich, 2012; “‘Invisible enemy’ stalks Fukushima,” 2012; Matanle, 2011). Suspicions about radiation are further exacerbated with known radiation levels that have been detected in the soil, oceans, food, and other products used for consumption (e.g., spinach, milk, and fish) whereby many fear both immediate and potential long-term risks. Accordingly, several people have become self-taught experts about radiation, learned how to measure one’s radioactive exposure, engaged in anti-nuclear demonstrations, and have denounced the nuclear complex. Other reasons for citizens’ distrust pertain to the government’s slowness to

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4 The nuclear complex (also called the “nuclear village” and the “atomic circle”) is comprised of close relationships between electric power companies, nuclear industries, political parties, government officials, mass media, and academics. They use power, politics, bureaucracy, and money to push their agenda for nuclear energy (Funabashi, 2012; Hasegawa, 2012; Ikegami, 2012; “Japan shuts down last nuclear reactor,” 2012; Matanle, 2011).
respond to the disasters, placing short-term concerns over the long-term effects, downplaying the harm of and exposure to radiation, insisting upon a relatively small evacuation zone from the nuclear power plant despite the explosions and meltdowns that released more radioactive materials into the atmosphere, not taking adequate responsibility or holding TEPCO to more responsibility, and the continued promotion of nuclear power as an economic interest (i.e., cost-efficient electricity). Certainly, some Japanese claim to trust expert opinions about healthy exposure to radiation and may not have participated in such overt forms of dissent (Hommerich, 2012).

**Media coverage of 3/11.**

Many people across the world learned about the 3/11 disasters through media coverage, including Japanese Americans who would have learned, gathered (more) information, and formed interpretations about the disasters. In addition to traditional media sources, Slater, Keiko, and Kindstrand (2012) maintained that social media “directly mediated our experience of the quake more than any other disaster” because some of the content and sources (e.g., videos, pictures, commentaries that individual users generated) were used in initial reports of the disaster by traditional media (p. 94). In the same way, individuals also posted news media articles on their social networking sites (SNS) (e.g., Facebook, blogs), which indicated an interpenetration of social media and news media (Slater et al., 2012).

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5 **Traditional mass media** refers to a single, centralized source of information (such as print, radio, TV, etc.) produced by corporations that has the capacity to reach a mass audience whereas **social media** refers to a “many-to-many” production, consumption, and user generated source of information (mainly online networks such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Mixi, etc.) through social networks (Slater et al., 2012, p. 95).
To determine how social media were used by the Japanese during 3/11, Hjorth and Kim (2011) found that cell phones (which include normal cell phone features plus the internet) were an important device for making immediate contact with others, capturing footage of the earthquake and tsunami, gathering important information, and for some to avoid the bombarding messages about the disasters by playing games. However, cell phone usage was not accessible for everyone due to power outages and severely damaged technological infrastructure systems that were caused by the disasters.

Nevertheless, journalists captured extensive media coverage—mostly during the first few months—of 3/11 that documented the political and economic power of Japan (Tkach-Kawasaki, 2012). Tkach-Kawasaki (2012) contended that global media have focused on comparing Fukushima to the Chernobyl and Three Mile Island nuclear accidents whereas local Japanese media have focused on the immediate situation at hand (i.e., loss of life, scarce resources, temporary housing, nuclear power plant updates, etc.). Nearly three years later, local and global media still report on 3/11 as new developments happen and updates occur, mostly pertaining to the nuclear power plant(s), radioactivity, and the economic sector. Certainly, coverage of anti-nuclear demonstrations and criticism of the Japanese government appears more frequently and in more overt ways in global media; however, local media have given some attention to these issues (“Anti-nuclear protestors put heat on Noda,” 2012; Ito, 2012; Mie, 2012). Turning now to how trauma may have factored into people’s experiences of 3/11, internment, WWII, and the atomic bombs, the following section addresses this concept.
Trauma.

Japanese survivors of 3/11 who witnessed the horrendous black wave (i.e., the tsunami) that swallowed up thousands or those whose family members, friends, etc. were lost because of it may be grappling with trauma and the “fairness” of who survived, otherwise known as “survivor’s guilt” (Grammaticas, 2012; Luke & Karashima, 2012; The Quakebook Community, 2011). According to LaCapra (2001), trauma is a “disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in [the] existence; it has belated effects that are controlled only with difficulty and perhaps never fully mastered” (p. 41). To complicate the process of working through the trauma, the mind can become metaphorically possessed by the past in which it unconsciously and/or consciously reenacts the trauma—in the form of flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety attacks, intrusive thoughts, etc.—through precise images and actual scenes of the trauma, which is known as retraumatization (Caruth, 1995; LaCapra, 2001).

An essential frame of reference for how the Japanese have experienced trauma and how some people have conceptualized 3/11, specifically the Fukushima Daïichi nuclear accident, pertains to the historical context of WWII. Grey (2002) contended that the Japanese were devastatingly humiliated when the U.S. military dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which psychologically eliminated Japan’s will to fight and killed, wounded, and severely traumatized millions. Historic memory and the long-term impact of the atomic bombs are noteworthy for many Japanese and serves as evidence for several protesters that nuclear power is not safe (Barker, 1985; Igarashi, 2000; “Protests in Japan as nuclear reactor restarts,” 2012). Likewise, some Japanese
Americans may have experienced trauma from being interned. However, the amount of trauma suffered from the internment camps varies depending on each person, their experiences, age, generation, cultural values, citizenship status, marital status, interpersonal networks, socio-economic status, and other factors (Fugita & Fernandez; 2004).

In summary, this introduction has served to familiarize the reader with some of the key developments of the 3/11 disasters and media coverage of 3/11, which is an essential contextualization in framing the situation in order to examine how Japanese Americans interpreted the 3/11 disasters. This study utilized 3/11 as a means to identify how Japanese Americans have expressed their identities by analyzing how they have responded to the disasters in relation to, or in contrast to, the stories they told about internment, WWII, and their own personal experiences as Japanese Americans. In other words, 3/11 is the initial point of conversation to explore personal experiences of how Japanese Americans have viewed and discussed their identities.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is two-fold: First, it makes a case for how scholars have written about the ways that Japanese Americans have constructed their identities. In doing so, it considers the historical background of Japanese Americans in order to understand what experiences have shaped the identities of some Japanese Americans. Secondly, it explores the impact of natural disasters in general, the role of media coverage, and how members of different cultural groups have responded in different ways to natural disasters. This broader contextualization of the impact and sense-making structures of how other cultures have handled various natural disasters is a necessary, preliminary step for analyzing how Japanese Americans in this study have interpreted the 3/11 disasters.

Japanese American Identities and Internment

As the overall objective examines how Japanese Americans have conceptualized their identities and how they related to the 3/11 disasters, it is first necessary to consider the history of Japanese Americans in the U.S.

While the Japanese began emigrating to the U.S. by the thousands starting in the 19th century, they encountered suspicion, bans on immigration, alien land laws that allowed the seizure of Japanese agricultural land, labor restrictions, discrimination, and racism by the dominant European American (white) population from the start (Ichioka,
This long-standing racism before internment simultaneously “cut deep into…psyche[s]” of Japanese Americans and served the interests of the U.S. government in forming the “perfect enemy” to hate in a time of war, especially as the war in the Pacific worsened (Nakano, 1990, p. xv). Following Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor, Japanese Americans were deemed to be enemies of the U.S., which culminated in the massive forced internment of Japanese Americans. However, this masked U.S. political and economic interests in Japanese Americans’ agricultural land and served as a “justification” for the U.S. entry into WWII—specifically, war with Japan (Nakano, 1990). Likewise, the “justification” to end the war with Japan by using nuclear weapons, the atomic bombs (of which the U.S. and Japan still remain divided over), devastated large segments of Japanese society, especially for those who lived in or near Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

These experiences have drastically changed the lives of some Japanese Americans across generations due to the ways that they were treated and perceived by the U.S. American public, but it is necessary to make a distinction between collective guilt and collective shame in order to understand how Japanese Americans might be positioned within these histories. Collective guilt pertains to the guilt, remorse, and/or regret that members of an in-group may feel on behalf of their in-group’s misdeeds, harm, and/or immoral actions done to others even though individual members may not have been personally responsible or involved in committing such acts (Brown, Gonzalez, Zagefka, Manzi, & Cehajic, 2008; Brown & Cehajic, 2008; Imhoff, Wohl, & Erb, 2013; Piff, Martinez, & Keltner, 2012; Reid, Gunter, & Smith, 2005; Sullivan, Landau, Branscombe,
Rothschild, & Cronin, 2013). In turn, members of an in-group may feel some sense of obligation (arising from their guilt) to make amends, restitution, and/or offer reparations to those who were wronged (Brown et al., 2008; Reid et al., 2005; Sullivan et al., 2013). For example, some Japanese Americans may feel a sense of collective guilt for the acts committed by the Japanese imperial military during WWII (e.g., for the bombing of Pearl Harbor, invading other Asian countries, etc.) even though they were not directly involved or personally connected with that subgroup.

On the other hand, *collective shame* refers to the perception of a negative or tarnished group image due to some wrongdoing committed by their in-group and/or some flawed attribute(s) of their group (Brown et al., 2008; Brown & Cehajic, 2008; Piff et al., 2012). These negative perceptions supposedly “implicate something about the very nature of who they are” (Lickel et al. cited in Brown et al., 2008, p. 671). Examples of collective shame are illustrated by the following statements: “If only I wasn’t” and “My group is bad” (Imhoff et al., 2013; Piff et al., 2012). Although it is contested among scholars whether collective shame may lead individual members to seek restitution with groups who were wronged by their in-group, it is more commonly held that collective shame involves avoidance or distancing behaviors in response to the negative and/or threatening perceptions associated with their group (Brown et al., 2008; Brown & Cehjic, 2008; Piff et al., 2012). In light of negative rhetoric and public perceptions of Japanese Americans (e.g., “foreign savages”), some Japanese Americans may have felt collective shame for belonging to this “inferior” and “threatening” group. While some Japanese Americans even dissociate themselves from their cultural group entirely, others have
gone to great lengths to prove their U.S. American loyalty by enlisting in (or were drafted into) the U.S. military in an attempt to dispel such myths (Asakawa, 2004; Fugita & Fernandez, 2004; Kuramitsu, 1995; Murray, 2000; Takezawa, 1991). Hence, collective shame—along with social and political pressures for being imprisoned in camp—may offer insight into why some Japanese Americans might have severed their ties with the cultural values of their ethnic heritage—such as learning and speaking Japanese, sharing family histories with their children, talking about internment, practicing Buddhism and/or Shintoism, and so on. Throughout this study, I invoke the concept of collective shame—rather than collective guilt—as more of a factor into how and why many Japanese Americans might have constructed their identities in the ways they do.

Nevertheless, there are a number of differences among each generation, which will be the focus of the following section.

**Nikkei in the U.S.**

The name, Japanese American, is at best a symbolic representation of cultural hybridity that both unites and divides. There is a need for the constant negotiation and re-negotiation of the multiple cultural identities of Japanese Americans due to their “dual personality…an inner mental conflict—a conflict of loyalties” that came to a head in WWII and in particular, the U.S. war with Japan (Hayashi, 2004, p. 21). However, this conflict of loyalties is best explained as a conflict of cultural loyalties—the mixing, blending, and conflicting of cultures—rather than a conflict of national loyalties (being loyal to the U.S. or Japan) that tends to serve the interests of the U.S. government in constructing Japanese Americans as the “enemy race.” Furthermore, the term “Japanese
American” invokes an implied juxtaposition: Japanese and American—two ethnic identities that Japanese Americans were not able to separately embrace (i.e., being solely Japanese or American) partly because of the appearance of their “foreign” bodies, yet many were not granted the rights to embrace both/and parts of their identities (Luther, 2003; Nakagawa, 1997; Ono, 1997; Uchida, 1982). Furthermore, Ono (1997) noted that many bicultural and multicultural individuals typically exist in non-spaces and non-locations whereby they “squeeze between spaces, yet never fully inhabit [their] own space” (p. 118). It is possible that some Japanese Americans may not feel that they have a proper place within U.S. American society (despite a U.S. citizenship status) because of racism before, during, and after internment. However, they may not feel a sense of belonging to Japanese society either as many are generations removed, may not speak Japanese, and have not necessarily lived in Japan, nor in some cases even visited the country. Certainly, some Japanese Americans fit in quite well with U.S. American culture and may regard themselves as more American than Japanese. As such, while “Japanese American” appeals to and unites a common ethnic identity, the term is also divisive in that it implies homogeneity by masking individual differences (Nakagawa, 1990a).

Nevertheless, this research cautions against privileging “authenticity,” which implicitly suggests an ideal identity for Japanese Americans, thereby de-valuing those who might have differing connections to their Japanese and American identities (Hao, 2012). The complexities of Japanese immigration and identity issues across generations are illustrated by the terms that had implications with internment during WWII: Issei (first generation immigrants before 1924), Nisei (second generation American-born
Japanese), *Kibei* (second generation, yet were educated in Japan), *Sansei* (third
generation), and *Shin Issei* (new first generation immigrants after 1965).

*Isseis* are the first-generation Japanese who emigrated from Japan during the late
19th to early 20th centuries, and may be the generation “most connected” to Japanese
customs and cultural traditions due in part because they grew up in Japan, and were thus
more likely to internalize Japanese values (Fugita & Fernandez, 2004; Hayashi, 2004;
Nakano, 1990; Uchida, 1982). Isseis were more likely to value transmitting Japanese
culture to their children in that they often encouraged learning Japanese, eating Japanese
food, and partaking in Japanese cultural traditions. Isseis mainly emigrated—mostly
young men at first and in larger numbers with women and children settling later—to the
U.S., Canada, and South American countries for economic reasons; namely, for work in
the agrarian and business sectors (Asakawa, 2004; Fugita & Fernandez, 2004; Nakano,
1990; Smith, 2008). According to Smith (2008), many Isseis intended to stay in the U.S.
only temporarily and planned to return to Japan once they had earned enough money,
received an education, and/or started a business.

However, Isseis also had the least access to rights in the U.S. due to their “enemy
alien” status in which they were prohibited, at the time of internment, from becoming
naturalized U.S. citizens and owning land in some states (e.g., California) (Kurashige,
2000; Saito, 2005; Smith, 2008; Wilson, 2011). Isseis were finally granted the right to
become naturalized U.S. citizens with the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952
(Asakawa, 2004). Younger Isseis tended to be more active in the community as well as in
Japanese American organizations. Additionally, some even held leadership positions in
organizations, like the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL)—a civil rights organization formed during the 1930s (Fugita & Fernandez, 2004; Uchida, 1982).

*Niseis* are the second-generation Japanese who were born in the U.S. and were therefore citizens at the time of internment (Uchida, 1982). Many Niseis have encountered tensions between their Japanese or American identities, learned minimal or no Japanese, and mostly had not travelled or lived in Japan (Harada, 1998; Kuramitsu, 1995; Ono, 1997; Uchida, 1982). Although many Niseis tried to reject their “Japaneseness” and the Japanese ways of their parents that made them stand out from mainstream white U.S. American culture, others were more conscious of the discrimination they faced and verbalized their dissent (Asakawa, 2004; Harada, 1998; Nakagawa, 1990b; Takezawa, 1991; Uchida, 1982). The desire to be accepted as an American is exemplified in the following account:

I thought of my prizewinning essay that I had written for my English class titled, “Why I Am Proud to Be an American.” As tears streamed down from my face, an awful realization slowly dawned on me—I am an American with the face of the enemy. The added trauma of being uprooted from my friends and home left me confused and with a deep sense of loss. (2-I quoted in Nakagawa, 1990b, p. 398)

The pain and trauma of being in internment camps prevented many older Isseis and Niseis from talking to their children about it because talking implied that wounds could be re-opened for them while their children may have felt vulnerable at the expense of a good childhood (Nagata & Chen, 2003). Accordingly, some older Niseis were more likely to experience internment with greater shock and trauma whereas some younger Niseis adapted somewhat more easily and could possibly still obtain a college education (Fugita & Fernandez, 2004). Some older Nisei women felt more obligated to care for
their aging Issei parents and siblings, and younger Nisei women tended to be more negatively impacted by internment due to scare financial resources (Fugita & Fernandez, 2004). Furthermore, some Niseis also feared revealing their true feelings as the U.S. government heavily documented and monitored camp activities, a feeling that continued for some throughout their lives (Kuramitsu, 1995; Shimabukuro, 2011; Takezawa, 1991; Uchida, 1982).

However, some younger Niseis and Sanseis fought against internment, and for reparations (Takezawa, 1991). A few Niseis—namely, Fred Korematsu, Gordon Hirabayashi, and Minoru Yasui—defiantly stood up for their rights by refusing to go to the internment camps and by breaking curfews in which their cases were then taken to the U.S. Supreme Court (Asakawa, 2004). For nearly forty years, their unjust convictions were upheld, yet were eventually overturned during the mid- to late-1980s (Asakawa, 2004; Saito, 2005; Smith, 2008).

Kibeis were American-born Japanese (technically Niseis) who went to Japan for a “minimum of three years in Japan between the ages 13 and 20” to become educated and acculturated as Japanese (Hayashi, 2004, p. 34). According to Asakawa (2004), Kibeis were encouraged by their Issei parents to “soak up their traditional culture” by going to Japan for a few years (p. 10). The U.S. military, however, viewed Kibeis with particular suspicion and questioned their U.S. loyalty (Hayashi, 2004). However, it was eventually proven that these fears did not have any legitimacy, except for serving U.S. interests in “justifying” that ethnically Japanese were a part of the “enemy race” (Hayashi, 2004).
Sanseis comprise the third-generation Japanese who were primarily born in the U.S. at the time of internment when they were very young or shortly after internment. While it certainly was not the norm, some Niseis did tell their Sansei children about internment. However, many Sanseis typically learned about internment from books, articles, films, college courses, from others, and some not even at all (Takezawa, 1991). Many Sanseis were not taught or were (only) minimally taught about internment in schools. Since most Sanseis did not grow up in camps, did not experience trauma, or who were too young to remember the experience, they were able to critique internment (that is, after internment was over) in completely different ways that most internees could not, such as the freedom to express one’s feelings without being monitored by guards, a further removed ethnic status (as third-generation) that allowed for more overt critiques, a U.S. citizenship status that was recognized by authorities, and minimal or no recollection of trauma. In fact, some Sanseis even contended that they had never experienced racial discrimination (Takezawa, 1991).

Shin-Isseis are the newest, first generation emigrants from Japan since 1965 (Asakawa, 2004; Smith, 2008). Shin-Isseis typically speak Japanese and may have varying levels of English as many have spent several years of their childhood and/or adulthood in Japan (Smith, 2008).

Likewise, Yonsei (fourth generation), Gosei (fifth generation), Rokusei (sixth generation), Han or Hapa (half or of a mixed Asian race; e.g., Hapa Nisei), also capture interesting complexities of generational Japanese, yet will not be elaborated for this research.
Expanding beyond generational differences among Japanese Americans, Fugita and Fernandez’s (2004) survey of the Seattle Japanese American community (i.e., as it has one of the highest concentrations of Japanese Americans on the West Coast) provides some insight into how different age groups of Japanese Americans have interpreted internment. For instance, the study showed that the elderly were more likely to have more negative and traumatic, rather than positive experiences. Many women, depending on their stage in life, viewed the social and occupational activities more positively and the living conditions more negatively. Men who were college-aged at the time typically interpreted internment more negatively due to disturbances in their educational and/or occupational plans. Those who were children or adolescents were more likely to think that internment was fun as they were able to continue being children (Fugita & Fernandez, 2004). Notwithstanding, it was often younger Isseis, Niseis, and Sanseis who were highly critical of the U.S. government field and some even supported Supreme Court cases (e.g., *Hirabayashi v. United States, Korematsu v. United States*) that fought for Japanese Americans’ civil rights as “guaranteed” by the U.S. Constitution (Kuramitsu, 1995; Shimabukuro, 2011; Takezawa, 1991; Uchida, 1982). Hence, Japanese Americans may have conflicting interpretations of internment depending on their life experiences, generation, age, socioeconomic status, and so on. In sum, the above section considered a few key differences among generations of Japanese Americans. The next section considers how organizations and community involvement also takes part in forming one’s identity.
Organizational involvement.

Japanese American organizations—civic, cultural, religious, athletic leagues, language-based, etc.—were and still remain an essential mechanism for forming and shaping Japanese American identities. Through such organizations, Japanese Americans were/are able to collectively embrace aspects of their identities and maintain the social fabric of their culture.

Within several Japanese American communities along the West Coast were ethnic enclaves called Little Toykos and Nihonmachi, or Japantowns, that were areas of several blocks full of businesses, retail shops, restaurants, grocery stores, churches, services, recreational facilities, barbershops, bathhouses, etc. (Fugita & Fernandez, 2004). Fugita and Fernandez (2004) suggested that Japantowns were the “heart of Japanese American life in the Pacific Northwest” where many communal and social activities took place (p. 19). One festival, Nisei Week—held at Little Tokyo during the 1930s and early 1940s—served as a means to rekindle the small businesses, revive Japanese culture among Niseis, and to celebrate their bicultural identities with folk dances, music, parades, beauty pageants, cultural, and martial arts (Kurashige, 2000).

While more densely populated Japanese American communities along the West Coast have more vibrant “Little Tokyos” or “Japantowns,” Denver’s ethnic enclave is somewhat of a “Tiny Tokyo” called Sakura Square (Asakawa, 2004). Located in downtown Denver, it is centered in one square block with a high rise apartment for seniors, a grocery store, a restaurant, a Buddhist temple, a resource center, and a few businesses (Asakawa, 2004). Other organizations, festivals, and fundraisers in the Denver
metro area include two (Japanese) Christian churches, the JACL, the Japan America Society of Colorado, the General Consulate of Japan, the Cherry Blossom Festival, the Colorado for Japan Relief Fund, and a few others.

The JACL has been instrumental in fighting for the rights of Japanese Americans (Fugita & Fernandez, 2004). It was mainly comprised of young Issei leaders, primarily men who were more educated and/or professionals, and who sought to combat discrimination against Japanese Americans (Hayashi, 2004). In particular, the JACL Seattle chapter took social and political leadership on numerous controversial issues; namely, redress for internment (Fugita & Fernandez, 2004; Takezawa, 1995).

However, some JACL chapters have been criticized for supposedly siding with the U.S. government (e.g., expressions of their patriotism to the U.S., some administered an oath of allegiance to the U.S. upon entrance into JACL chapters after Pearl Harbor) or not denouncing internment as strongly as some suggested, taking hostile positions against the Kibei, and challenging Japan’s relations and invasion into China in 1937 (Asakawa, 2004; Fugita & Fernandez, 2004; Hayashi, 2004). According to some scholars, Japanese American organizations and their prominent Issei leaders were viewed with particular suspicion by authorities (Fugita & Fernandez, 2004; Muller, 2001; Robinson, 2001). Consequently, the government targeted and arrested more Isseis who were active in civil affairs immediately after Pearl Harbor, including: “business leaders, farmers, travel agents, Shinto and Buddhist priests, judo instructors, editors of the vernacular press, and the like” (Muller, 2001, p. 18). Hence, young Niseis were soon thrown into the leadership positions of JACL chapters following internment (Fugita & Fernandez, 2004).
Additionally, religious organizations—namely, Buddhist temples and Christian churches—were also prominent in Japanese Americans communities, which were often located in Japantowns or Little Toyko locations (Fugita & Fernandez, 2004; Izumi, 2010; Smith, 2008). Buddhism, as one of the main ethnic religions of the Japanese, served to keep some Japanese Americans connected to their cultural heritage (Izumi, 2010). For instance, Buddhist temples were typically established in conjunction with Japanese language schools, which allowed Japanese Americans to express their ethnic, cultural, religious, spiritual, and linguistic values (Izumi, 2010). Buddhist temples (or churches) were not only spaces for individuals to express their religious identities, but they also allowed Japanese Americans to socially interact with others and participate in festivals such as the *Obon*—including *bon odori* dances, *ikebana* flower arrangements, *taiko* traditional Japanese drumming, etc. (Izumi, 2010). Whereas many considered Buddhism to be the socially acceptable faith of the Japanese and Japanese Americans, there were also several followers of Christianity, but they were often accused of becoming “Americanized” (Smith, 2008). After internment, several Buddhist temples, Christian-based organizations, and churches—e.g., Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), Federal Council of Churches, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians—helped to resettle Japanese Americans (Bangarth, 2004; Izumi, 2010; Smith, 2008).

Another way to express the cultural and/or ethnic identities of Japanese Americans was through learning one’s “native tongue” in Japanese language schools. It should be noted that the term, “Buddhist church” has been used interchangeably for “Buddhist temple” so as to appear less foreign and more American (Izumi, 2010).
(Doerr & Lee, 2009; Fugita & Fernandez, 2004). For instance, some Japanese Americans attended Japanese Language Schools in the U.S., called *Nihon gakko* (literal meaning, "Japan school") in addition to their public education because some parents (particularly, Isseis) wanted their children to learn cultural and moral values implicit within the Japanese language (Fugita & Fernandez, 2004). Moreover, the desire to learn Japanese varies among each individual and family, their interest level, the type of Japanese taught at Japanese Language Schools (standard Japanese as taught in Japan or a Japanese curriculum tailored to non-native speakers who plan on living in the U.S.), the difficulty level in actually learning the language, time available compared to the time commitment, and many more reasons (Doerr & Lee, 2009).

In this elaboration about generational and age differences in addition to organizational and community involvement, I have sought to explore a few facets of how Japanese Americans have constructed their cultural and ethnic identities. Although I have referred to the experience of internment in earlier sections of this thesis, below I present a more detailed description of internment and its consequences in order to then consider how Japanese Americans’ sense of identity may have been informed by this historical experience.

**The Internment of Japanese Americans.**

Over 70 years ago, Japanese Americans encountered one of the most devastating experiences that impacted not only Japanese Americans at the time, but also generations born thereafter. On February 19, 1942, United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066—nearly two months after the Japanese attack on Pearl
Harbor—which legally gave the U.S. government and military permission to exclude (i.e., imprison) any and/or all persons for any reason as a means to “protect” against espionage and sabotage under the conditions of war (Fugita & Fernandez, 2004; Inada, 2000; Nakano, 1990). Although Executive Order 9066 did not explicitly pertain to the “Japanese,”—which can be arguably more dangerous as the U.S. government gave itself full permission to exclude any racial, ethnic, or other kinds of groups as its “enemy”—many scholars have suggested that this order served to legally authorize the imprisonment of Japanese Americans (Hayashi, 2004; Kashima, 2003; Muller, 2001; Nakagawa, 1990b; Nakano, 1990; Robinson, 2001; Uchida, 1982).

In a context of WWII warfare, discrimination, and racism, Japanese Americans were unjustly imprisoned in 10 internment or concentration camps away from the West Coast (see Appendix 4) in designated, desert-like, swamp-like, or in high plains areas for nearly three and a half years from 1942-1945 (or 1946 for those imprisoned at the Tule Lake camp). Japanese Americans predominately lived along the West Coast of the U.S. (then regarded as a “sensitive” military zone) due to its proximity and similar climate to the Pacific, yet this was—in addition to economic interests in their agricultural land—precisely why the U.S. government “relocated” Japanese Americans away from the West Coast (Asakawa, 2004; Nakano, 1990). Niseis made up about two-thirds or 70,000 of Japanese Americans interned and were technically U.S. citizens. Isseis were the remaining one-third of Japanese Americans interned.

In the two-month period before President Roosevelt issued the order to intern Japanese Americans, General John L. DeWitt—the commanding general of the Western
Defense Command—announced a curfew that required Japanese Americans to remain in their homes from eight o’clock at night until six o’clock in the morning, in addition to a mandatory military approval for traveling more than five miles from their homes (Miksch & Ghere, 2004; Muller, 2001). DeWitt also requested that Japanese Americans “voluntarily” move away from the West Coast, but numerous bank accounts of Japanese Americans were frozen, which further complicated the ability to relocate (see Appendix 5). In rearticulating military orders, DeWitt rhetorically shifted the evacuation request “from voluntary to mandatory [as] the military was to empty the West Coast of all ethnically Japanese people, aliens and citizens alike” (Muller, 2001, p. 23). However, evacuation was portrayed positively by U.S. officials to Japanese Americans in that evacuation was for their own “protection” (Uchida, 1982).

Kashima’s (2003) critique of various terminologies used to frame internment underscores the need to distinguish between various terminologies to capture the reality of the situation:

At the time, the U.S. government used its own euphemisms to identify its wartime camps and actions. Terms such as “assembly centers,” “relocation camps,” and “evacuation” mask the unpleasantness of people removed involuntarily from their homes and forced to live in flea-infested stables, dusty fairgrounds, and hastily and shoddily built barracks in desolate places. **Internment** designates the imprisonment of civilian enemy nationals... **Incarceration**, as a concept, applies to those imprisoned by the W.R.A. [War Relocation Authority] and to the assembly camps created by the War Department. **Imprisonment** encompasses the overall process that includes both internment and incarceration. (Kashima, 2003, p. 8-9, emphasis in original)

Moreover, several Japanese Americans believe that the most accurate term was “concentration camp,” which signified the “barbed-wire enclosure where people are
interned or incarcerated under armed guard,” but others were conflicted as the term typically refers to the Nazi concentration camps during the Holocaust (Kashima, 2003, p. 8).

In order to allocate time for “proper” set-up and arrangements of permanent relocation centers (meaning, internment or concentration camps), the U.S. Army’s Wartime Civil Control Administration (WCCA) detained Japanese Americans in 15 to 16 assembly centers (Kashima, 2003; Mizuno, 2003). Mizuno (2003) indicated that the average length of stay within assembly centers was around 100 days, which served as the “prologue to mass encampment” (p. 99). Although the typical family was given several weeks to abandon their homes, others were given only a few days to resettle in temporary camps or assembly centers. Personal possessions, livestock, and property were unfortunately lost, sold quickly for extremely low prices, or illegally seized as Japanese Americans could bring “only what they could carry” to assembly centers (Muller, 2001, p. 27). They were forced to leave their belongings, livelihoods, occupations, and dignity to embark upon a new “journey” called internment. However, there were some good-willed (white) Americans and churches that were hospitable to Japanese Americans, opposed the evacuation order, and offered storage for some of their possessions (Bangarth, 2004; Uchida, 1982). That is not to suggest that all churches held the same opinions about Japanese Americans and internment as many succumbed to hypocrisy and racism.

Accordingly, there was even one governor who politically opposed internment and who allowed Japanese Americans to settle in the state of Colorado so as to evade internment, as the next section will elaborate.
Governor Ralph Carr.

Most of the Japanese Americans who lived in Colorado before internment consisted of males who primarily engaged in agrarian occupations (C. Takeshita, personal communication, July 6, 2012). Ralph Carr, then Governor of Colorado, was immensely significant for some Japanese Americans because he encouraged the reunification of families, women, and children to come to the state of Colorado. In effect, a couple thousand Japanese Americans came to Colorado during the voluntary evacuation away from the West Coast (Harvey, 2004; Schrager, 2008). However, Carr’s “invitation” of Japanese Americans into Colorado sparked intense resentment and outrage from (white) Colorado residents as well as from others (Harvey, 2004; Schrager, 2008). Indeed, Carr was the only governor to publically oppose interning U.S. citizens, yet he supposedly supported the construction of the internment camp in southeastern Colorado (called the Granada relocation center or Amache). However, other governors “adamantly refused to allow large numbers of [Japanese] Americans to relocate within their borders unless they were confined within concentration camps” (Harvey, 2004, p. 36). Carr shielded those Japanese Americans who voluntarily moved away from the West Coast to Colorado from being interned before the mandatory evacuation order was put into effect. Moreover, Carr stood with Japanese Americans in fighting for their civil rights and opposed the internment of American citizens, thus becoming a hero in the eyes of many Japanese Americans within Colorado, which was indeed a rare move on behalf of political leadership at the time and came at the cost of his political career.
Those who did not or could not evacuate away from the West Coast, however, were interned. While the term “camp” carries a positive connotation, the following portion explores how daily life panned out for some internees.

*Daily Life in Camp.*

Internees’ lives were heavily monitored and confined to the camp; as such, they were surrounded by barbed wire and were watched by armed guards in towers, further preventing escape from the camps (Luther, 2003; Nakagawa, 1990b; Uchida, 1982). However, some individuals or families were re-assigned to different camps after their initial arrangements, which caused disruption and a lack of consistency in the lives of some in the camps (Uchida, 1982).

All camps and all but one assembly center had their own newspapers that were written and published by some internees, yet the War Relocation Authority (WRA) exercised oversight (including strict censorship in some cases) over the newspapers (Luther, 2003; Mizuno, 2003; Uchida, 1982). Although many newspapers had small Japanese language sections and some were prohibited from writing in Japanese (albeit, a point of contention among scholars), scholars have suggested that controversial subject matter was often censored whereby some articles were deleted while others had blotches covering the content making it illegible (Luther, 2003; Mizuno, 2003). Depending on the stages of internment and how comfortable internees were in expressing their identities, internees sometimes depicted camp in the newspapers as enjoyable, strongly affirming their American identity and dissociating from Japanese identity, indirectly commenting on camp conditions using others’ quotes, cartoons, and self-censorship, minimizing the
impact and their true feelings, to bold assertions of being Japanese and American as well as their critiques of internment (Luther, 2003).

The living conditions in the camps included: extreme heat or cold, dust of desert climates, long hours of waiting in lines, insufficient and unhealthy food rations, open showers and toilets without dividers, small living areas depending on the size of one’s family (i.e., larger families did not necessarily have to share one room together or with those who were unrelated to them), limited privacy, unsanitary living conditions, limited extracurricular activities, and insufficient educational activities etc., all of which were terribly shameful and humiliating for Japanese Americans—even resulting in minor ailments, major illnesses, and the deaths of some (Muller, 2001; Saito, 2005; Uchida, 1982). As if the harsh living conditions in camp were not rough enough, the U.S. government interrogated Japanese Americans’ loyalty as they distributed questionnaires to internees.

**Loyalty Oath Questionnaires.**

While thousands of Japanese and Japanese Americans languished in the internment camps, in 1943 the U.S. distributed loyalty oath questionnaires to Japanese Americans primarily to recruit “loyal” Nisei into the U.S. military (Hayashi, 2004; Nakagawa, 1990b). Japanese Americans aged 17 and older as well as those who were U.S. citizens were expected to answer either a “Yes” or “No” to two specific questions, among several other questions that asked if they would serve in the U.S. military, and if they would swear their allegiance to the U.S. while forswearing allegiance to the Japanese Emperor, foreign governments, or organizations (Inouye, 2011; Nakagawa, 1990b).
1990a, b; Saito, 2005). The questionnaire was unjustly framed as a dichotomy (i.e., loyal Americans or disloyal Japanese), which implicitly assumed loyalty to Japan, hence the invocation of “foreswearing” their allegiance (Nakagawa, 1990b; Saito, 2005). According to Inouye (2011), the loyalty oath questionnaires were “supposed to reveal which Japanese Americans could be trusted to be released for military service, employment, or educational opportunities outside of the camps” (p. 35). Nakagawa (1990b) contended that Japanese Americans did not have a real choice in answering such questions (not even a space to write their own answers) as each answer had a set of implications in addition to feeling betrayed by their own country. Those who answered “No” to both questions (i.e., the “No-No Boys”) or those who failed to register for the military were deemed to be “disloyal” Japanese and pro-Japan supporters, and therefore “troublemakers” who were sent to the Tule Lake camp for stricter supervision along with 18,000+ others (Asakawa, 2004; Hayashi, 2003; Kurashige, 2002; Nakano, 1990; Saito, 2005). On the other hand, those who were initially imprisoned at Tule Lake who answered “Yes, Yes” on the questionnaire were transferred to different camps (Uchida, 1982). Many Japanese Americans feared answering “No, No” on the loyalty questionnaire or in such a way that could lead to separation from their family, or make their own or their family’s imprisonment worse—in addition to possibly being ostracized from the Japanese American community, while others took pride in demonstrating their loyalty to the U.S. by registering for the military (Asakawa, 2004; Saito, 2005).

By 1943, several thousand Japanese Americans either volunteered to join or were drafted into the U.S. military (Inouye, 2011). Japanese Americans served mainly in
segregated units, which included the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, the 100th Infantry Battalion, Military Intelligence Service (trained linguists fluent in Japanese and English), and the Women’s Army Corps (Asakawa, 2004; Fugita & Fernandez, 2004; Inouye, 2011; Kuramitsu, 1995; Murray, 2000). Moreover, the questionnaire infuriated many and divided the Japanese American community so drastically that the rifts continue even today.

**Internment Ends.**

Internment ended in the mid-1940s, but sources and scholars have contested a clear end date to internment. C. Takeshita (personal communication, July 6, 2012) drew attention to the notion that the War Department declared a revocation of their exclusion order against Japanese Americans on December 17, 1944, which was a strategic move to avoid the likely negative ruling by the Supreme Court the very next day. The War Department claimed that they would close camps beginning in January of 1945 with the revocation of the exclusion order (C. Takeshita, personal communication, July 6, 2012). According to Ina (1999), the first internment camp (Jerome) to officially close occurred on June 30, 1944 whereas the last camp (Tule Lake) closed on March 20, 1946. On the other hand, Hayashi (2004) noted that the Supreme Court overturned the justification of “military necessity” in December of 1944 while the closure of camps started in 1945 and ended in 1946. From this, it can be inferred that internment was tied up with political issues.

The War Department later “admitted that their search for…spies among Japanese Americans and other enemy aliens were misplaced,” which was evidence that espionage
accusations were entirely false and unfounded (Hayashi, 2004, p. 212). During the 1980s, Japanese Americans and the general public became more critical of the internment period in which it was revealed that racial prejudice, propaganda, greed by which whites were able to seize the rich agricultural land on the West Coast through the alien land laws, wartime hysteria, and failure of political leadership were the more accurate justifications for the imprisonment of Japanese Americans. It was not until 1988, with the passage of the Civil Liberties Act, that the U.S. government publicly apologized to Japanese Americans and provided $20,000 in reparations to surviving Japanese Americans (i.e., mostly Niseis and Sanseis). This offer further divided the Japanese American community because some harsher critics who refused to accept the money argued that it was an insult since it was hardly enough to compensate for the massive losses, damages incurred, trauma experienced, and no “real” life to return to from internment (Shimabukuro, 2011; Takezawa, 1991). Others chose to accept and were grateful for the reparations (Takezawa, 1991).

Internment also contributed to the breakdown of some Japanese American families as women were more likely to work and develop more hobbies as opposed to their primary role of holding their (own) family together (Asakawa, 2004). Working in the camps gave many internees something productive to do despite the low wages that they typically earned (Howard, 2008; Nakano, 1990; Uchida, 1982). In fact, there were thousands of Japanese Americans who were allowed to leave the camp with work and/or school permits provided that it was away from the West Coast (Asakawa, 2004). Nevertheless, some Japanese Americans made efforts to resist the breakdown of their
families as they tried to make the best of the situation, and even started new families (Asakawa, 2004; Fugita & Fernandez, 2004; Howard, 2008; Uchida, 1982). Likewise, living under such harsh collective conditions, children had few (or none in some cases) role models to learn parenting skills and what a healthy family consisted of (C. Takeshita, personal communication, July 6, 2012). Family cohesion disintegrated for many as camp activities were segregated by age and gender as opposed to families, there were limited choices for daily activities (school activities were offered, but not in the same way as before internment), children played card games, baseball, and idly sat around while others got into trouble with drugs, gambling, prostitution, and alcohol (Fugita & Fernandez, 2004; Muller, 2001). Consequently, while some people lost touch with their families, others began new families, restarted their careers, and lives (Fugita & Fernandez, 2004).

Pilgrimages to the memorial sites of the internment camps, which began in 1974 with the Tule Lake camp in central California, have provided many Japanese Americans the opportunity to (re)visit the camps, to process what exactly happened, what the conditions of camp were like, how they felt, and to feel (more) connected to the Japanese American community (Takezawa, 1991). However, even today many Japanese Americans remain divided on the overall issues of internment and may not agree with interpretations of the historical context, various criticisms, or outcomes.

Depending on various perspectives, ideologies, and socio-historical constructions of scholars and critics, some people may point to slightly different events leading up to internment. During the first half of the 20th century, Japan had several territorial interests
across Asia including: Manchuria, Korea, Sakhalin, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indochina, etc. (Iyenga, 1912; Pollard, 1934; Jing Sun, 2007; Sussman & Yafew, 2000). Although contested by some critics, Japanese imperialism, colonialism, and militarism were viewed as threats to the U.S. and other countries (Hayashi, 2004; Iyenaga, 1912; Pollard, 1934; Robinson, 2001; Jing Sun, 2007; Sussman & Yafeh, 2000). The U.S., then, strategically built off of the idea that Japan was a “threat,” which later served the purpose to intern “enemy aliens.” The possibility of war with Japan triggered U.S. concerns over security resulting in more defensive planning and the establishment of racist policies (Kashima, 2003). Additionally, Nardo (2003) indicated that U.S. officials ignored warning signs of a possible Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and instead used the attack as a declaration for war on Japan. Thus, when the attack on Pearl Harbor came on December 7, 1941, “it was relatively easy for the [U.S.] army command… [to carry out its orders] since it had already planned for the removal and the internment of thousands of enemy nationals” (Kashima, 2003, p. 7). Therefore, the U.S. now had their reason to justify the internment of Japanese Americans: it was a “military necessity” that the U.S. should be protected against the “enemy race.” This rationale was a masking of long-standing racial prejudices against Japanese Americans. That is, military necessity was used as a means to gain popular support with a majority of (mainly white) U.S. civilians who already discriminated against Japanese Americans (as well as other ethnic groups)—a strategic appropriation advanced in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor by the U.S. as a nation against the race of Japanese Americans as opposed to Japan itself.
Although the internment of Japanese Americans occurred over 70 years ago, internment (may) continue to inform Japanese Americans’ sense of identity. Even though Japanese Americans did not all experience internment, their self-perceptions and identity formations may still in fact be influenced by a cultural residue of those who lived through internment, yet it is also possible that there may be no resonance of the experience among other Japanese Americans. Nevertheless, Bhabha (1994) argued for a constant relation of the past upon the present. That is, the past does not necessarily become erased from one’s memory, but rather gets filtered through the present in numerous ways. Therefore, a constant reflection upon the positive, negative, and traumatic aspects of internment is necessary because it has the potential to frame how Japanese Americans might interpret present circumstances.

Once again, the purpose of this study explores the nature of Japanese American identities by examining how participants reveal their identities in relation to their personal experiences, internment, WWII, and to the 3/11 disasters.

An Overview of Natural Disasters

Before exploring how some cultures have responded to and interpreted natural disasters, it is important to examine the impact of natural disasters in general. Although humans can engage in preparedness and preventative strategies for a decreased impact, *natural disasters* are characterized as events that humans have no control over whereby nature causes it—including floods, fires, earthquakes, tsunamis, typhoons, hurricanes, tornadoes, etc. (Freitag, Grimm, & Schmidt, 2011). The uncontrollable, unpreventable, and sometimes unpredictable occurrence of natural disasters—resulting in several
hundreds, thousands, or even millions killed, injured, and/or missing—is a devastation capable of dramatically altering people’s lives and surrounding circumstances. While Condry (2011) framed natural disasters to be social disasters, Mutter (2008) provided a more exhaustive understanding in that landlocked, poor countries with extreme poverty and infectious diseases, certain geographic locations (coasts, hillsides, etc.), slums around large cities and places with the least developed infrastructure systems, as well as groups such as the poor, elderly, women, and the very young who often experience natural disasters with the most intensity and vulnerability. In reality, it may take several years, decades, and if not longer for countries to recover from disasters.

Grief, amazement, shock, awe, indignation, trauma, anxiety, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, hope, and countless other feelings and/or symptoms have been experienced by survivors of natural disasters (Carlin & Park-Fuller, 2011; Freitag et al., 2011; Joye, 2010; Perera, 2010). Treatment may take a variety of approaches ranging from seeking counseling from a variety of professionals, medication, aesthetic healing, and the continued engagement within one’s community. While a majority of Western medical and psychological experts have identified a need for victims to share their personal narratives using storytelling to make sense of the event and to gain greater health benefits, other psychological experts have contested this due to the disregard of social and cultural differences in framing and thereby handling natural disasters (Carlin & Park-Fuller, 2011; Freitag et al., 2011; Watters, 2010).
The Role of Media in Covering Natural Disasters.

For those who have not personally experienced a natural disaster, the public can still learn about such “heart-wrenching stories of survival and loss” through media coverage, social networks, and other avenues (Mutter, 2005, p. 507). Global mainstream corporate media reveals a distressing depiction of global divides for disasters that occur in the non-Western world: How and what is reported through the news media depends on who was affected, geographic location, political importance, economic, and cultural relevance—that is to say, how it affects the Western world (Joye, 2010; Mutter 2008; Perera, 2010). In what is sometimes referred to as the “coup and earthquake syndrome,” media coverage in the developing world tends to gravitate toward widespread death and destruction: that is, wars and natural disasters (Mutter, 2008). In the case of Japan as a more developed country, the 3/11 disasters were extensively covered by the media (most notably, during the first couple of months) perhaps in part because Japan is (now) a strong ally of the U.S. and due to the potential spread of radiation internationally (Igarashi, 2000; Tkach-Kawasaki, 2012). As scholars have indicated, natural disasters are newsworthy events because of the threat posed to human life, health, and subsistence, which can result in hundreds of thousands of deaths and immense damage to the surrounding environment—a shocking event indeed (Joye, 2010; Mutter 2008). However, media coverage of disasters does not necessarily imply that an honest interest is directed towards the most afflicted, but rather global media coverage—most notably U.S. mainstream corporate media—ethnocentrically reports on how it affects one’s own country, tourists that were present when the disaster struck, as well as the political,
economic, and social interests of selected governments (Grandien, Stromback, Ottestig, 
& Nord, 2006; Joye, 2010).

In turn, media coverage can trigger varying levels of trauma in viewers, including 
secondary or *vicarious trauma*—an emotional, empathetic over-arousal of the traumatic 
event; *empty empathy*—an arousal that dissipates upon viewing a succession of traumatic 
images resulting in fleeting empathy that does not move the viewer to action; and 
*witnessing*—an arousal, which may include vicarious trauma, that leads to positive and 
pro-social action (Kaplan, 2008). Therefore, the media can contribute to varying 
outcomes as the interpretation of events through media are filtered by individuals in 
relation to their own personal experiences and their cultural, political, and economic 
contexts.

Hollings (2005) examined ethical dilemmas of journalists in determining their 
role and how to report about natural disasters, focusing in particular on New Zealand 
journalists who had travelled to Asia, specifically pertaining to the 2004 Boxing Day 
Tsunami that hit Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. For instance, should 
journalists become participants, help the afflicted, or remain as outside observers to fulfill 
their journalistic role? Additionally, do the New Zealand code of ethics for media 
reporting (i.e., national and corporations’ broadcasting codes) and/or one’s own ethical 
principles guide their decisions? Such questions underscore the crucial consideration of 
how *people* are affected by the journalists’ choices and the media’s influence on them in 
writing news stories. Although some dilemmas do not always present clear-cut answers 
for what constitutes crossing the line, scholars have suggested some helpful insights, such
as “norms of decency and good taste, while not distorting the news by omission” and to “remember you are still human, with normal human responses…that may surprise the journalist within” (Hollings, 2005, p. 154; McMahon, 2010, p. 43 respectively). Some reporting can in fact produce a greater impact and/or consequences (e.g., producing or prolonging trauma) in the devastated community, the global audience viewing or reading the coverage, and for the journalist him/herself.

In summary, natural disasters can have profound effects on a country and the media have been shown to influence people’s conceptualizations of natural disasters. Regardless of the notion that disasters occur everywhere, the ways in which different cultures have responded to natural disasters are related to the cultural norms already set in place prior to the disaster. For that reason, differing cultural values should be recognized in conjunction with a culture’s response and the handling of a given disaster. The following section addresses how a few cultures have interpreted natural disasters throughout the course of history, but only a few disasters are considered in this review (thus, it is not comprehensive). The disasters are presented in chronological order along with a general explanation of what happened, its impact, and how members of such cultures have interpreted the disasters.

**Cultural Responses to a few Natural Disasters throughout History.**

The Lisbon earthquake and tsunami of 1755 in the Kingdom of Portugal killed nearly a quarter of a million people. Survivors characteristically detailed what happened during the disaster by commenting on its abrupt, violent, dreadful force that devastated the city and instilled fear within millions of people (“Portugal-Lisbon earthquake 1755
Nonetheless, the Enlightenment provided a possible rationale for such immense and incomprehensible suffering. For instance, people started to ask “fundamental questions of good and evil, the nature of the universe and the existence of god; of belief in providence and the possibility of progress” (Perera, 2010, p. 36). Enlightenment discourses, however, were divided between those who believed that natural disasters were “acts of god,” thereby punishment for a country’s or community’s sins, and people who believed that natural disasters were unpreventable and not easily described as the result of people’s actions. Importantly, with the Enlightenment, people contemplated the possible meaning of disasters and suffering.

The 1978 Batticaloa cyclone in Sri Lanka killed thousands and affected more than one million people (“Country Report 2003: Sri Lanka,” n.d.). The Batticaloa cyclone demonstrates that massive natural disasters also have the potential to fuel (more) conflicts and war amongst civilians, including different cultural, ethnic, and political groups. For instance, Sri Lanka had been a war-torn country for 25 years between the territory of the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sinhala majoritarian state (Perera, 2010). Divisions among the Tamil and Muslim communities were further exacerbated with the destruction of the cyclone. Although non-governmental organizations (NGOs) intended to administer non-political aid to disaster victims, they were prevented from doing so because of Sri Lanka’s political and military agendas (Perera, 2010). Sri Lankan survivors have felt the need to discuss both the terrors of war and details of the disasters, which can arguably be a first step towards social transformation. Moreover, the cyclone in Sri Lanka suggests that natural disasters do not
always invoke a “search for meaning,” but can in fact intensify and complicate existing problems (Perera, 2010).

The 1994 Northridge Earthquake in Los Angeles resulted in 57 deaths, over 9,000 injuries, more than 20,000 displaced from their homes, and millions of dollars in structural damages (U.S. Geological Survey, 1996). Amy Murakami, a child at the time, was literally trapped by the earthquake: “My bedroom ceiling had fallen down around my bed…Everything was dark and quiet…It was hard to breathe. I couldn’t move” (Our “Girl’s World” Story, n.d.).

On a smaller scale than survivors who were trapped in buildings, scholars Iwasaki and Horie (1998) conducted cross-cultural, anthropological research on the conversational patterns of Japanese and Thai international students in the context of this disaster. Researchers found that both cultures talked about the Northridge earthquake in ways that were reflective of their cultural norms, such that Japanese participants were sensitive to maintaining mutual dependency or interdependence whereas Thais exhibited self-assertiveness and independence (Iwasaki & Horie, 1998). For example, Japanese participants displayed mutual dependency in their attempts to build empathy and engage in cooperative conversational patterns by refraining from interrupting the other (i.e., letting the person talk, refraining from topic changers, or asking clarifying questions), showed continued attention with short backchannels (i.e., reactive expressions that confirm one’s attention, such as “yeah,” “mmm,” etc.), and used overlapping utterances of similar thought processes. In contrast, Thais demonstrated self-assertiveness and their individuality by interrupting or adding to comments (i.e., asking clarifying or topic
changing questions), using fewer backchannels, yet also using overlapping utterances of agreement. While both cultures have similar group-oriented roots, Iwasaki and Horie (1998) noted that conversation styles can reflect broader cultural values, thus suggesting that cultural values have an important relationship with how various cultures talk about disasters.

In the case of 3/11, scholars, media, and the general public have directed much attention towards the Japanese (understandably so) given that the disasters occurred in Japan and primarily affected the Japanese people. However, significantly less attention has been given to Japanese Americans, who may not have physically experienced the 3/11 disasters, yet may in fact be invested in the events due to their various identity associations (e.g., ethnic, cultural, personal, relational). This study, then, considers how Japanese Americans have discussed the 3/11 disasters by placing the events within the larger context of their identities.

In 1995, the Great Hanshin earthquake (also called the Awaji-Hanshin earthquake) struck Kobe, Japan resulting in nearly 6,000 deaths, over 41,000 injuries, and massive structural damages (Elliott, 1997). Yoshiko Negita, a survivor interviewed by Otake, mentioned that the earthquake affected her worldview more than anything else in her life (Otake, 2011). Upon the realization that Negita herself had survived when she could have been burned to death, she concluded that “I don’t believe in fatalism, but I can’t help but think about fate” (Negita quoted in Otake, 2011). Naoko Miyatake, another survivor, related her story by inviting people to imagine how they would respond if he or she were 80 years old and lost everything due to the earthquake (including loved ones,
physical belongings/assets), yet had to start again despite his or her decreased mobility, physical health, and monetary means (Miyatake, n.d.).

Despite several offers of humanitarian aid from various countries following the Great Hanshin earthquake, the Japanese government declined most initial offers and only accepted portions of aid offered from selected countries (Elliott, 1997). While there was widespread criticism of these decisions outside Japan, Elliott (1997) called for greater cultural understanding before criticizing Japan for its selectivity because: (1) damage assessments must first come from the Japanese local governments who then make requests for assistance to the national government; and (2) not all of the aid received was culturally appropriate—e.g., used items and clothing, higher dosages of medicine than what is typically prescribed; and (3) the Japanese Constitution of 1947 places constraints upon an instant mobilization of its military forces in administering internal and external disaster relief. Therefore, knowledge about Japanese governmental functions and a consideration of its cultural norms is pivotal to understanding how some Japanese might react and expect others to respond to their disasters. In spite of this, there was an awakening of the non-profit sector and volunteerism in Japan in 1995, which was later declared the “Year of the Volunteer” (Haddad, 2007).

In 2004, the Boxing Day Tsunami (also called the 2004 Asian Tsunami, 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, South Asian Tsunami) hit the coastlines of Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia, killing nearly 300,000 people, and leaving several hundreds of thousands missing, and millions vulnerable to diseases (Hollings, 2005; Motter, 2010). Several people noted that their family members did not survive the
tsunami, but were grateful that NGOs aided them in rebuilding their houses and taught them how to respond to a tsunami drill—something of which the Indonesian government failed to do (Beaumont, Doherty, Ramesh, & Chung, 2009; Carter, 2009; Lichtblau, 2005; Ramesh, 2009). Consequently, survivors of natural disasters often discuss the disaster in terms of the damage incurred to their homes and belongings, loved one’s lost, devastation to the local community and cities as well as what steps to take in order to prevent or lessen the impact of future disasters. One man from Indonesia, who was seriously injured from the tsunami, noted that “I don’t have the power to do anything…I just pray to Allah. There is nothing else to do” (man quoted in Lichtblau, 2005). As it can be concluded, one’s religious identity may manifest in interpretations about a given disaster, which can be suggestive of how a given person within a cultural context handles adversity.

In a subversion of ethics according to Motter (2010), the U.S. in its “moral superiority” reportedly pledged a $950 million donation in response to the Boxing Day Tsunami—which drastically exceeded other countries’ donations—along with food, clothing, and other such supplies (Motter, 2010). In what was guised as an honest, compassionate act in the “best interests of foreign victims,” U.S. humanitarian aid was ultimately accompanied by military troops—a suspicious act in the eyes of the Indonesian government who demanded, two weeks after the tsunami, for their withdrawal within three months, to which the U.S. refused (Motter, 2010, p. 514). While Indonesia saw a distinction between aid workers and military personnel, the U.S. continued with its deployment of non-essential humanitarian personnel on Indonesian soil. Hence, the
Indonesian government was attuned to how countries—specifically, the U.S.—in their strategies of global dominance, offered humanitarian aid. Thus, accepting disaster aid might at times be caught up in political and militaristic agendas.

In an examination of public trust in the Swedish government, Grandien et al. (2006) concluded that citizens want their own governments to make a sound assessment of the crisis, provide quick and consistent information, and actively rather than silently express their sympathy to victims—especially during crises. Accordingly, many Swedes became extremely frustrated at their own government’s lack of response when the Boxing Day Tsunami struck because, of the 20,000 to 30,000 Swedish tourists, 543 were killed or missing in the affected countries (Grandien et al., 2006). Although the tsunami hit over Christmas holiday celebrations, it took over 24 hours for Swedish officials to arrange a press conference and rescue teams were sent nearly two days after the fact, which subsequently led many Swedish people to distrust their own government’s lack of attention, care, and slowness to respond (Grandien et al., 2006). While it was mentioned earlier that global media coverage tends to ethnocentrically focus on its own country’s victims, a lack of media coverage about certain affected persons or about the disaster in general may lead to a decreased level of the public’s trust in one’s government. Hence, one’s national and/or political identities can be partially influenced by how governments approach and handle a given crisis.

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans leaving approximately 5,000 people dead, and several thousand homeless (Mutter, 2008). Phyllis Montana Leblanc, a
resident of New Orleans, was rightfully outraged when 911 refused to take any more calls from people who needed their help (Spike Lee, 2006).

Kaplan (2008) maintained that several news media images about Katrina exposed the reality of pervasive racism whereby public viewers could see members of mass groups abandoned and left to die. Specific populations—namely, blacks, the poor, and the elderly—were rendered invisible and disposable by the inaction of the U.S. government, which evoked shame and outrage in the American public. While New Orleans’ residents were told to evacuate the area the day before Katrina hit, many did not have monetary or physical means or in a few cases did not want to leave their homes on such short notice. As such, thousands of people drowned, were left stranded on rooftops and expressways, waited for buses that never came, and packed into an unprepared Superdome in the aftermath of Katrina (Giroux, 2006; Kaplan, 2008). Spike Lee’s When the Levees Broke documentary critically analyzed the Katrina damage, the obviously failed engineering techniques of the levees, and the blatant disregard of U.S. government officials and “rescue” organizations such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Consequently, many New Orleans’ residents felt utterly helpless, abandoned, were treated like animals, and were called “thugs” and “looters” by government officials and the mainstream media in their search for available food and water in convenient stores as opposed to an act of survival (Spike Lee, 2006).

In witnessing the abysmal failure of governmental assistance to Hurricane Katrina victims, several hundred U.S. citizens volunteered to help and expressed harsh criticisms of the federal government (e.g., New Orleans region resembled a “Third World country”
with its people neglected in a life or death situation). In assessing the numerous problems, Andrulls, Siddiqui, and Gantner (2007) suggested that emergency disaster preparedness strategies should be culturally sensitive, communicated in multiple languages, and made accessible through a wide variety of sources in order to prevent further marginalization of racial, ethnic, and minority groups. Katrina was an *American tragedy* because of the widespread neglect of its citizens in a supposedly democratic country that professes equal rights for all (Spike Lee, 2006). Consequently, much of the American public became more critical of the overt forms of racism that was manifested in Katrina’s aftermath, yet also the covert forms of racism—the unconscious, systematic, and deep-rooted racism.

In summary, the second half of this literature review has explored some selected cultural responses to natural disasters. The devastation of natural disasters have led many people to consider the nature of good vs. evil in determining the value of suffering, political and ethnic strife, cultural norms, governmental procedures, volunteerism, ethics, morality, neglect, and racism. In general, while several scholars (Elliot, 1997; Giroux, 2006; Grandien et al., 2006; Kaplan, 2008; Spike Lee, 2006; Motter, 2010; Perera, 2010) analyzed the broader economic, political, and social context of disasters (i.e., religion, war, conflicts, politics, etc.), Iwasaki and Horie (1998) considered the interpersonal and intercultural levels of the disaster (i.e., conversational patterns, cultural norms of people), all of which capture a few dimensions of identity, albeit implicitly. As it is discussed in more detail in the theoretical framework of this thesis proposal, I define *identity* in terms of an individual’s self-conception that is made up of several complex, dynamic, fragmented, overlapping, and conflicting facets of oneself (including one’s race, ethnicity,
culture, nationality, social class, gender, etc.). Moreover, the above cultural responses to natural disasters still fall short of one objective intended for this research study, namely, that it is not clear how natural disasters have impacted the identities of cultural groups who are generations removed.
CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study of Japanese American identity uses a dualistic paradigmatic approach that integrates both interpretive and critical paradigms as a theoretical framework. The interpretive paradigm studies culture as it emerges on an individual and interpersonal level whereas the critical paradigm critiques what is revealed by examining the larger power structures within its given sociopolitical and historical contexts. In particular, I used the concepts of power, ideology, and hegemony within the critical paradigm.

The interpretative paradigm maintains the following assumptions: that the “(1) human experience is subjective, (2) human behavior is creative rather than determined or easily predicted, and (3) culture is created and maintained through communication” (Martin & Nakayama, 2010, p. 59). Essentially, the interpretative paradigm seeks to describe how individual behavior is socially constructed or shaped by a given culture’s beliefs, values, norms, traditions, and customs (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). The interpretive approach is valuable as it seeks to understand (not predict or overtly critique), in a general manner, how cultural values emerge on an individual level and through social interactions within a certain context. Given the background of Japanese Americans, one may have preconceived notions about the ways in which individual members of this collective identifies, cultural values and beliefs held, and customs practiced. However, an interpretive approach was employed for this research to allow for cultural values to
emerge and to avoid a further perpetuation of stereotypical knowledge about Japanese Americans.

While a significant portion of intercultural communication research is conducted from social scientific and interpretive approaches, these approaches have been criticized by some scholars for being grossly apolitical, ahistorical, and reductive in omitting the complex power structures that cultural groups are positioned by (Halualani, Mendoza, & Drzewiecka, 2009; Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Instead, Halualani et al. (2009) suggested that intercultural communication research should illuminate the “interplay between social structures and concrete interactions,” thereby juxtaposing a critical approach with an interpretive approach (p. 25).

Based on the assumption that culture and culture identity is a contested terrain, a critical perspective accounts for the role of power in identity formation and identity negotiation (Mendoza, Halualani, & Drzewiecka, 2002). Hence, the critical approach was applied in this study in order to critically examine how broader social, political, and historical contexts have influenced what it means to be a Japanese American for participants in this study. Although the critical approach has a rich body of literature, it is beyond the scope of this study to present an exhaustive review, but a brief overview is explored below.

The critical perspective (also referred to as critical theory or the critical approach) is an interdisciplinary perspective that was first developed in the 1930s as Nazism was on the rise and is commonly associated with the Frankfurth School, and scholars (including,
but not limited to) Gramsci, Horkheimer, Adorno, and Habermas (Foust, 2010; Madikiza & Bornman, 2007; Ono, 2011).

The critical approach takes on the assumptions that reality is subjective albeit material in which “large power structures guide everyday life,” human behavior is dynamic rather than deterministic and predictive, and culture is a site of power struggles (Martin & Nakayama, 2010, p. 52). In this research, power is defined as the “opportunity to force the behavior of others to one’s own will,” but it remains to be an ambiguous concept among some scholars (Weber cited in Siefkes, 2010, p. 227). Thus, critical analyses hone in on “issues of macro contexts (historical, social, and political levels), power, relevance, and the hidden and destabilizing aspects of culture” (Halualani et al., 2009, p. 18). The value in the critical approach, according to Splichal (2008), resides not merely in the revelation of power structures or power relations, but rather in its questioning of power relations and “common sense” cultural values as it “cannot live with what is or was empirically existing, prevalent, or ‘normal’” (p. 20).

In general, the critical approach critiques how the dominant group(s) is/are able to simultaneously maintain power over subordinate groups while gaining their active consent—albeit, not without some degree of contestation—thereby evoking the ways in which power, ideology, and hegemony function in society (Dutta & de Souza, 2008; Halualani et al., 2009; Madikiza & Bornman, 2007; Mumby, 1997). Ideology, in its basic configuration, refers to socially constructed sets of ideas, beliefs, and values that are embedded within institutional, political, social, and cultural aspects of society and are regarded as “the taken-for-granted assumptions about reality that influences…”
perceptions of situations and events” (Deetz & Kersten cited in Dutta & de Souza, 2008, p. 330). Ideology that is configured through a system of dominance, or becomes normalized to the extent that power relations and agendas are concealed, then becomes hegemonic.

Hegemony can refer to a “process of domination where one set of ideas subverts, co-opts or dominates another” (Madikiza & Bornman, 2007, p. 29). However, definitions of this kind remain contested among several scholars as they maintain that hegemony is not necessarily synonymous with ideological domination, class-based oppression, coercion, or physical force, but extends into moral, intellectual, ideological, and the cultural realms of society that is a process of “manufacturing consent” among collectives (Crenshaw & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 1999; Dutta & de Souza, 2008; Foust, 2010; Hoerl, 2008; Madikiza & Bornman, 2007; Mumby, 1997; Zompetti, 1997). Similarly, Marxist interpretations of ideology and hegemony—i.e., ideology substituted for “false consciousness” and hegemony for “ideological domination”—are charged with being deterministic and reductionist as they assume the passivity of social agents, an uncritical mass acceptance of an ideology and/or hegemony, and the noteworthy absence of resistance from subordinate groups (Crenshaw & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 1999; Foust, 2010; Mumby, 1997).  

7 Stemming from prevalent functionalist and reductive conceptualizations of hegemony as ideological domination within critical theory, another field within communication studies was developed—cultural studies—to address the role of active audiences in interpreting hegemonic media texts and the multiple ways (i.e., polysemy) that texts can be read, which include consent, co-optation, and resistance (Mumby, 1997).
*Hegemony*, in this view, is defined as the “attainment of a ‘cultural-social’ unity through which a multiplicity of dispersed wills, with heterogeneous aims, are welded together with a single aim…on the basis of an equal and common conception of the world” (Gramsci cited in Foust, 2010, p. 36). Even before the attack on Pearl Harbor, for example, there was a prevalent racist attitude toward Japanese Americans and other Asian Americans (Luther, 2003). In particular, Asian Americans were viewed as “yellow perils” in that they were perceived to be “potential cultural and economic threat[s]…to the White population” (Balaji & Worawongs, 2010, p. 226). The host of negative images that came from the yellow peril stereotype suggested that Asian immigrants were uncivilized, threatening, foreign, deceitful, depraved, treacherous, and number of others negative stereotypes, which essentially bred xenophobia against Asian Americans—especially as the war in the Pacific worsened (Balaji & Worawongs, 2010; Paek & Shah, 2003; Shim, 1998; Yu, 2006; Zhang, 2010). When Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, it was not too much of a leap for much of the U.S. public to deepen their *fear* of the Japanese and to frame the Japanese as diametric “enemies” of the U.S. The attack on Pearl Harbor, then, functioned to culturally and socially unite the general U.S. public *against* Japan and anyone who was racially Japanese.⁸ With these hegemonic views, the U.S. rationalized that they should take necessary action against the Japanese primarily in two forms: war

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⁸ A paralleled and contemporary example of the internment of Japanese Americans after Pearl Harbor is the detention of certain Muslims, Arabs, Iraqis, Afghans, Yemenis, Southeast Asians, and others allegedly connected with Al-Qaida after the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Maira & Shihade, 2006; Verinakis, 2007). Since their detention in 2002, over a hundred detainees are still being held at Guantanamo Bay (over a decade later) in which many are severely tortured, interrogated, force-fed, and have not yet been tried or convicted of any crimes.
with Japan and the containment of “enemies within” in assembly centers and internment camps.

Furthermore, the dominant group(s) is/are able to “control not only the economy but also the political and cultural elements of a society… [yet] align[s] itself with other groups to establish a unified and subtle hegemony of cultural thought” (Zompetti, 1997, p. 72-73). In other words, hegemony is intricately interwoven throughout society—becoming somewhat indistinguishable—whereby dominant groups are able to maintain their power through a cohesive integration of their interests with the “common sense” norms that subordinate groups (or other collectives) have consented to and taken-for-granted.

Preceding Pearl Harbor, as far back to the first wave of Japanese immigrants to the U.S. in the late 19th century, was a context rife with racial discrimination against Japanese and Japanese Americans—which is to say nothing of the racism against Native Americans, blacks, Latinos, Chinese Americans, and other racial groups who were/are not white (Eguchi, 2013; Ichioka, 1988; Miksch & Ghere, 2004; Robinson, 2001). Thus, U.S. society has been historically permeated with its racist ideology whereby racial inferiority was regarded as an *indisputable* “scientific fact” by many (Hayashi, 2004; Inada, 2000; Robinson, 2001). Building upon the fear and outrage that much of the U.S. public felt in response to Pearl Harbor, the U.S. government and media were able to skillfully project—particularly through the use of propaganda—Japan and the Japanese as

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9 Needless to say, racial hierarchy still infiltrates U.S. American culture, but in somewhat more covert ways.
“enemies” (Inada, 2000). In an attempt to establish connections in the public mind between the supposed racial inferiority and savagery of the Japanese, Japanese (Americans) were commonly referred to as “Japs” (i.e., a derogatory racial slur) on the radio and press, and were demonized in propaganda cartoons and posters to be “monkeys…[who] were a crazy subhuman race running wild” (Shim, 1998, p. 392). Insofar as the use of propaganda aimed to frame the Japanese as “enemies,” it essentially served the interests of the U.S. in creating a rationale to declare war on Japan, and thus, and entry into WWII. Hence, “common sense” assumed that if someone resembled the enemy, then they must be the enemy—a misguided hegemonic ideology that still has its reigns on U.S. American culture.

Hegemonic ideologies, however, do not necessarily serve the interests of subordinate groups, but can in fact enable the dominant group to “manipulate the discourse in an attempt to maintain power” (Zompetti, 1997, p. 75). In this case, the U.S. government manipulated discourse after Pearl Harbor by appealing to a common sense, enemy dialectic. That is, the U.S. government was able to shape public opinion about the Japanese by framing the discourse around “America’s enemies” and further “threats” to national security, which concealed other motivations for the hegemonic pursuit, arrest, and imprisonment of Japanese Americans—namely, racial prejudice, wartime hysteria, envy and greed to seize their rich agricultural land, etc. (Verinakis, 2007).

In Gramscian thought, the potency of hegemony endures—but is not entirely impenetrable—in a “cultural formation” within a given historical period in which ideology, hegemony, dominant interests, and subordinate interests are deeply entangled
with one another (Foust, 2010; Hoerl, 2008; Zompetti, 1997). Profoundly situated in a worldwide context of rampant militarism, imperialism, expansionism, and racism from the late 18th century throughout the mid 19th century, “justifications” for the internment of Japanese Americans were intertwined with political, militaristic, economic, and ideological interests of the U.S.

The pervasiveness of hegemony is particularly problematic for subordinate groups who do not hold equal positions of power with those of dominant groups. Nevertheless, hegemony is not a unilateral system of domination resulting in indoctrination or oppression per se; but is rather an ongoing process and negotiation—or as Mumby termed it, “a process of struggle”—between the dominant and subordinate groups in defining, consenting to, challenging, and resisting the dominant social order that ebbs and flows throughout history (Crenshaw & Roskow-Ewoldsen, 1999; Foust, 2010; Mumby, 1997; Zompetti, 1997). While many Japanese Americans avoided and/or feared possible consequences for directly opposing or criticizing the U.S. government for their imprisonment, there were a number of people who resisted in the following ways: Defying military designated curfews in camp, refusing to sign up for the draft or to pledge one’s loyalty to the U.S., refusing to remain silent, exerting concerted legal action on Congress for an official apology, and other such strategies of resistance. Needless to say, conflict arose among Japanese American groups and individuals over these very different reactions. A critical approach is therefore a necessary contribution to existing literature on Japanese Americans as it aims to critique—not merely describe or remain
“objectively neutral”—how dominance, power, ideology, and hegemony functioned to create and sustain internment.

In summary, the interpretive approach is utilized in this study in order to understand the different ways in which Japanese American identities emerge whereas the critical approach examines how the nature of Japanese American identity has been shaped by sociopolitical and historical contexts, and in particular, internment. Likewise, the interpretive approach is also useful in demonstrating the diverse reactions to the 3/11 disasters. The following sections briefly review the concepts of culture, diaspora, and identity as they relate to and situate the discussion for the theoretical concepts used in the analysis (i.e., the Communication Theory of Identity, identity gaps, and critical-cultural hybridity).

Culture

According to Halualani et al. (2009), intercultural communication research in the 1970s conceptualized culture and cultural identity in relation to the complex intersections between race, class, gender, and nationality in specific communicative contexts. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, intercultural communication research was dominated by positivist (i.e., social scientific) conceptions of culture in which culture was treated as homogenous, static, ahistorical, and commonly thought of in terms of the nation-state (Halualani et al., 2009). In its traditional definition, culture has been conceptualized as a group of people who share (some degree of) a common nationality, race, ethnicity, history, language, value and belief systems, social norms, and so on (Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003; Martin & Nakayama, 2010). However, this definition
alone is problematic because it can “obscure the political, historical, and economic interests” of dominate groups within a culture (Halualani et al., 2009, p. 26).

Culture and cultural identity, then, is better conceptualized as a contested terrain, an ongoing ideological struggle, and a politicized system of signification that is a “process of negotiation around meaning that can never not be about politics” (Halualani et al., 2009, p. 22). Although several commonalities may exist within a given culture, culture is not necessarily uniform because differences exist among its members (Gudykunst, Lee, Nishida, & Ogawa, 2005). It is therefore problematic to assume that members of a given culture readily hold certain or presumed orientations.

For this research, culture refers to both the shared and contested elements of a collective. Likewise, culture is conceptualized as a complex phenomenon that is abstract, ubiquitous, all-pervasive, multidimensional, malleable, fluid, constantly changing, and emergent within communicative interactions (Hecht et al., 2003; Pensoneau-Conway, 2012; Samovar & Porter, 1997). Another example of the shifting and contested site of culture pertains to diasporic communities, which is detailed below.

**Diaspora**

Diaspora has been employed to describe the mass dispersion, expulsion, movement, or migration of a large community (e.g., ethnic, cultural, religious groups) to a different country (or countries) within a specific historical, social, political, and economic context (Bardhan, 2011; Halualani, 2008; Jianhua Sun, 2012). Diaspora includes those who willingly migrate (e.g., for economic, educational reasons) as well as those who are forced to leave their country (i.e., refugees) due to the dangerous, traumatic,
and/or life-threatening circumstances in one’s (home) country based on a well-founded fear of persecution, including but not limited to: war, political, ethnic, religious, and social conflict (Bardhan, 2011; Halualani, 2008; Kinefuchi, 2010; Jianhua Sun, 2012). “Home” or “homeland” has been theorized primarily in terms of the nation-state in which people of the same ethnicity live in a particular territory together (Karim, 2006).

Likewise, nationality, geographic territory, ethnicity, race, culture, and language have traditionally implied the existence of a common people who share such ties together, yet fails to address the shifting, conflicting, heterogeneous, globalization, multiculturalism, and transnationalism of the present times (Halualani, 2008; Karim, 2006).

As technology continues to improve, identity formation is no longer limited to a particular place (Karim, 2006; Halualani, 2008; Hao, 2012). Hence, identity formation also involves the spaces through which one can imagine communities and their cultural, ethnic, nationalistic, etc. identities through relational connections, media consumption (i.e., internet web sites, online chats, social media, news media, books, magazines, journals, music, movies, etc.), cultural artifacts, and so on (Bardhan, 2011; Halualani, 2008; Karim, 2006; Kinefuchi, 2010).

Diasporic communities and/or individuals—much like those with hybrid identities—often find themselves entangled in the multiple tensions of “being ‘here’ and ‘there’ simultaneously” in relation to their cultural identities, concept of home, and their sense of belonging (Bardhan, 2011, p. 43). Hall (1990) characterized diasporic consciousness as the “recognition of heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity” (p. 225,
emphasis in original). Moreover, diasporic communities often form fluid, dynamic, and multiple conceptions of “home” whereby old and new homes are sometimes combined into a third space, a different kind of home (Bardhan, 2011; Bhaba, 1994; Halualani, 2008; Hao, 2012; Karim, 2006; Kim, 2011; Kinefuchi, 2010).

As it has been previously elaborated, the Japanese diasporic community expands mostly to North and South America (i.e., the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Peru) who emigrated to these countries primarily for economic reasons during the late 19th to early 20th centuries (Tanenaka, 2009). While this study pertains to the Japanese diasporic community in the U.S.—in particular, the Japanese American community in Denver—generations of Japanese Americans have been living in the U.S. for decades now. Next, an overview of identity research is explored, which then lays out the theoretical concepts used in the analysis.

**Identity(ies)**

Identity research has been conducted since the 1960s among social psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists in which identity has been analyzed from emphases on the individual, role, social, and communal aspects (Chen, 2009; Hecht, 1993). From the social psychology field, Hogg, Terry, and White (1995) detailed two prominent theories of the time: identity theory and social identity theory. Identity theory focused on how individuals understood and negotiated identity salience in relation to their various role-related behaviors in a particular social context, which was based on the assumption that individuals are multifaceted with many distinct selves (Chen, 2009; Hogg et al., 1995).
contrast, social identity theory sought to understand individuals within group processes and intergroup relations—particularly, as members of various social groups such as one’s nationality, political affiliation, etc.—and the self-enhancement that individuals felt as a result of their membership in the group (Hogg et al., 1995). Since the 1980s, communication scholars have added the notion that identity is necessarily a communicative process (Hecht, 1993; Pensoneau-Conway, 2012).

For this research, identity is defined as “self-conception—one’s theory of oneself…[that] gives one a sense of one’s own ontological status and serves as an interpretive frame for experience…personal motivations and expectations for social behavior” that is constantly shifting and changing (Cupach & Imahori, 1993, p. 113). One’s identity is dynamically made up of abstract, complex, multiple, fragmented, fractured, overlapping, not unified, and sometimes conflicting identities (Cupach & Imahori, 1993; Hao, 2012; Hecht et al., 2003; Hogg et al., 1995; Moriizumi, 2011; Yep 2002). Identities, then, refer to the “names we give to the different ways we are [fluidly] positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” and present (Hall, 1990, p. 225). A few examples of this include one’s race, ethnicity, culture, nationality, social class, gender, sexuality, political and religious affiliations, and many more.

Likewise, the notion of intersectionality or thick intersectionalities suggests that a given aspect of one’s identity (e.g., race) is never understood alone, but is more fully understood when one examines how it intersects and is simultaneously intertwined with other dimensions of one’s identity—i.e., ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, political, religious, etc. (Bardan & Orbe, 2012; Yep, 2010). For Laclau, identity is
“always based on excluding something,” which is to say that identity is necessarily contextual whereby the nature of one’s role and situational context may result in temporarily excluding or lodging certain aspects of one’s identity into contingency (Laclau cited in Hall, 1996, p. 5). In other words, the dimensions of one’s identity that are not readily apparent in social interactions do not necessarily equate to a loss of identity as they may be hidden (Hall, 1996).

Another distinction within identity research pertains to avowed and ascribed identities. Avowal refers to the characteristics that individual members of a collective gives to themselves, their group based identities, and how they portray themselves to others whereas ascription refers to the characteristics, representations, and sometimes stereotypes that other people assign to members of a collective (Chen & Collier, 2012; Hecht et al., 2003; Moss & Faux, 2006). Through an individual’s multiple positionalities of identity that they and others assign to them, individuals constantly negotiate their sense of self within social interactions, otherwise known as identity negotiation (Cupach & Imahori, 1993; Hao, 2012; Hecht et al., 2003; Hogg et al., 1995; Moriizumi, 2011; Yep 2002). Identity negotiation is an important daily and lifelong process that aids individuals in determining who oneself is, who others are, how one will interact and coordinate relationships with others, and how one makes sense of the world (Hecht et al., 2003).

Due to the fact that personal experiences, interpretations, situational contexts, and cultures are constantly changing, identity is also constantly transforming and adapting in a state of becoming (Luther, 2003). Hence, identity should be viewed as a fluid entity that is in a perpetual state of flux as individuals actively assess and construct their identities.
Thus, identities are in-transit identifications, productions, and acts of performativity in the state of becoming—i.e., always in the process of change and transformation, and is never completed—that are co-created with others, in interactions, and in situational contexts (Bhabha, 1990; du Gay, 1996; Hall, 1990, 1996; Hao, 2012; Hecht et al., 2003; Orbe, 2012; Pensoneau-Conway, 2012). As a means to expand on a few key components of identity, the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) is detailed next and is used for the analysis.

**Communication Theory of Identity.**

First developed by Hecht and his colleagues in 1993, CTI was created in order to create strategies for effective communication among interethnic cultural groups. In particular, Hecht, Collier, and Ribeau (1993) and Hecht et al. (2003) studied African American identity and communication as a means to gain insight into how members of this cultural group have defined themselves, perceived their group membership, and how they have communicated their sense of self to others. CTI involves four interrelated frames of identity—personal, enacted, relational, and communal frames. One can embody multiple frames at a time and/or juxtapose its dialectical tensions as “identity frames are not isolated from each other,” but are layered within any given interaction or context (Hecht, 1993, p. 80). First, the *personal frame* pertains to how one defines oneself in general as well as in particular contexts (i.e., one’s self-concept or self-definition). Second, the *enactment frame* notes how identities are represented, emergent, or are enacted within social interactions through communicative practices. Third, the *relationship frame* pertains to how people define themselves in terms of others and their
relationships (Hecht, 1993). And fourth, the *communal frame* characterizes a group, of which individuals are a part of, to have a particular identity. While Hecht and other scholars have maintained that the communal frame has a collective level of analysis given that the group ascribes meaning and takes precedence over the individual (Jung & Hecht, 2004; Kam & Hecht, 2009; Kim & Hecht, 2009; Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, 2008), I treated the communal frame as an individual’s membership within a larger group or collective in which members share some commonality together, yet meaning remains to be contested among its members.

I operationalized the identities of Japanese Americans in relation to statements of self-perception (the personal frame), statements of how they represented themselves or performed their identity to others (the enactment frame), how they discussed their sense of self in terms of others and their relationships (the relationship frame), and how they discussed their sense of self in terms of their membership within the Japanese American and/or Japanese communities (the communal frame).

**Identity Gaps.**

The theoretical concept of an identity gap—considered in relation to CTI’s identity frames as its theoretical counterpart—acknowledges that dissonance is present (and is perhaps unavoidable) in social interactions (Urban & Orbe, 2010). An *identity gap* is defined as a discrepancy felt among and/or between constituent parts of one’s identity (Urban & Orbe, 2010). Identity gaps provide a glimpse into the complex tensions and contradictions that are present within an individual, but they are not necessarily specific to any one type of experience. For this research, identity gaps provided a means of
interpretation of participants’ seemingly contradictory experiences and were operationalized in relation to the tensions they alluded to among two (or more) of their identity frames (i.e., personal, enacted, relational, and communal identities).

As an interpretive theory, CTI and the corresponding concept of identity gaps do not explicitly address the role of power in identity construction as they focus more on individual and interactional levels of analysis. To account for the ways that broader sociopolitical and historical contexts might shape some identity gaps on an individual level, a critical perspective offers an additional means of analysis to explore how the role of power factors into this process.

In sum, CTI and identity gaps were chosen for the theoretical framework and the coding of interview data because it accomplishes the task of presenting the multiple dimensions of a person’s identity as well as the discrepancies one encounters when interacting with others. While CTI addresses the question of communal relations, it does not deal directly with the specific issues emergent among those living in diasporic communities or those who embody several cultural backgrounds. For that, scholars have developed the concept of hybridity.

**Critical-Cultural Hybridity.**

The term “hybridity” was originally advanced as a form of racial purity and hierarchy during 19th century European colonization (Bardhan, 2012; Bhabha, 1994; Jianhua Sun, 2012). However, the term has since been reconfigured by postcolonial scholars and has abandoned the negative racist connotations it had of contamination and border anxiety (Bardhan, 2012). In general, hybridity is an ambiguous, dynamic, and
contested term that can pertain to cultural mixing, multiculturalism, the shifting, blurring, or contingency of boundaries that are constantly in flux, the blending and/or multiplicity of identities, and a state of in-betweenness (Bardhan, 2012; Bhaba, 1996; Kraidy, 2002, 2004; Moreman, 2005; Pieterse, 2001; Spencer, 2011; Shugart, 2007). Following an interpretive and critical research design, this research adopted “critical-cultural hybridity,” which incorporates elements of hybridity from both theoretical perspectives.10

Cultural hybridity is one version of hybridity that examines the intersections between one’s racial, ethnic, and cultural identities to emphasize the simultaneous presence of multiple, seemingly contradictory, or paradoxical cultural identifications that coexist within oneself (Kraidy, 2004; Sobre-Denton, 2012; Young, 2009). As such, hybrid identities fluidly exist within in-between spaces—i.e., interracial, interethnic, and international contexts—and are in transit where one can construct, reconstruct, collaborate, and contest one’s identity (Bhabha, 1994; Hao, 2012; Kinefuchi, 2010; Moreman, 2005). Particularly relevant to immigrant communities, cultural hybridity “allows them to make sense of their identity…whose culture is a mix of their native and host cultures” (Kraidy, 2004, p. 11). Moreman (2005) contended that cultural “hybridity is a both/and existence in which we operate within contrasts trying to hold these differences together” through the performativity of one’s identity in everyday cultural

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10 I use the term “critical-cultural hybridity” to refer to a dualistic, critical and interpretive application of the term, but “hybridity” (without signifiers) is more commonly used. In light of Pieterse’s (2001) proposal of “critical hybridity” that conceptualizes hybridity from a critical perspective, I use the term “cultural hybridity” to refer to an interpretive perspective on hybridity.
practices (p. 74). Thus, cultural hybridity “retain[s] a sense of difference and tension between two [or more] cultures without assuming hierarchy” (Young, 2009).

Additionally, cultural hybridity is sometimes referred to as a “third space” of identity that can pertain to individuals who are relatively comfortable straddling multiple cultures, those who readily identify as “both/and,” and who fuse their cultural identities together (Bhaba, 1990; Moreman, 2005; Sobre-Denton, 2012; Young, 2009). However, the idea of a “third space” can also refer to the tensions that individuals may feel among their cultural identities (e.g., a “neither/nor” type of identification) as they may not fit into clear-cut categorizations and can become marginalized into spaces of “non-belongingness” (Bardhan, 2012; Moreman, 2005).

Cultural hybridity, however, is not radically different than the assumptions and conceptualizations that identity theories follow; but it directs more attention to the complexity of cultures, and how individuals sometimes straddle multiple spaces. Consequently, scholars and critics of hybridity remain divided as to whether the increased emphasis on the mixing of cultures is necessary or rather commonsense (Bardhan, 2012). Nonetheless, cultural hybridity is a useful conceptual tool that draws attention to the various multiple cultural identifications that bicultural and multicultural individuals regularly have to negotiate in the face of racism and discrimination (Bardhan, 2012; Moreman, 2005; Orbe, 2012; Young, 2009).

As with identity gaps, cultural hybridity also examines the tensions between constituent aspects of one’s identity on an individual level, yet cultural hybridity is underscored more by issues of race, ethnicity, culture, and nationality—particularly for
immigrants, and those who have mixed ethnic and/or cultural backgrounds. While identity gaps can refer to similar types of tensions as in cultural hybridity (i.e., cultural, racial, ethnic, etc., but are instead categorized within CTI as communal identities), identity gaps seek to analyze the intersecting discrepancies among the various components within one’s identity (e.g., relational-communal identity gap), yet both theories suggest that individuals constantly negotiate the discrepancies or tensions they feel among their identities. Nevertheless, negotiating tensions, contradictions, and other discrepancies are not necessarily suggestive of their eradication. Rather, cultural hybridity addresses how individuals “continuously perform balancing acts between two [or more] cultures” (Young, 2009, p. 142).

However, many scholars remain critical of hasty applications of hybridity that essentially reinforce (perhaps unintentionally) its past connotations of racial purity and colonization—most notably, in cases where hybridity is applied to examine the acceleration of globalization, yet can (mistakenly) conceal hegemonic domination, cultural imperialism, or cultural homogenization (Bardhan, 2012; Bhabha, 1994; Kraidy, 2002, 2004; Moreman, 2005; Shugart, 2007; Jianhua Sun, 2012; Wang, 2006). Kraidy (2002) warned that mere descriptive applications of hybridity—in particular, global/local dissemination of cultural artifacts via transnational capitalism—absent from its sociopolitical, economic, and historical context undermines the power struggles, cultural domination, and class exploitation that are still present in today’s society. Other criticisms of hybridity include that it merely critiques essentialism in a hybrid manner rather than combating it, it mainly focuses on hybrid matters at the self-identification
level, it is wishful thinking of the new postcolonial privileged class rather than those less privileged at the borders, it supports neoliberal globalization that exploits differences, and it is under theorized (Bardhan, 2012). Hence, some scholars prefer to apply hybridity, or as Pieterse (2001) termed it, “critical hybridity,” through the lens of critical theory in which ideology, hegemony, power, and equality are carefully considered in their respective sociopolitical and historical contexts (Kraidy, 2002, 2004; Pieterse, 2001; Jianhua Sun, 2012).

Therefore, this research adopted critical-cultural hybridity (i.e., cultural hybridity and critical hybridity) in order to validate insights gained from both versions. That is to say, cultural hybridity is useful to articulate how some Japanese Americans identified as both Japanese and American without privileging either ethnic or cultural identity above the other, thus negotiating seemingly contrasting identities. In a similar vein, cultural hybridity also gave a means of interpretation to participants who encountered tensions among their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities and who struggled to fit in with some of their peers, yet nevertheless deeply identified as Japanese, American, and/or Japanese American. On the other hand, critical hybridity was particularly effective to examine how the sociopolitical and historical context of internment contributed to such racial, ethnic, cultural, and social tension felt by participants. Thus, critical hybridity supplements the narratives of tension, struggle, conflict, and the like in cultural hybridity by establishing connections between individual experiences with the broader social, political, and historical contexts. Critical-cultural hybridity was operationalized through conversational patterns whereby people speak with bifocality, rather than prioritizing one cultural
identity over the other or modulating between identification with one and then the other cultural community (as what one might expect in CTI’s communal frame). Critical-cultural hybridity is therefore distinct from the communal frame due to its emphasis on one’s simultaneously multiple identifications with two (or perhaps more) cultural communities.

**Summary**

The first part of the literature review was devoted to examining Japanese Americans’ identities and experiences that have been influenced by racism, discrimination, and internment as well as cultural, ethnic, civic, and religious organizations. The latter half of the literature review analyzed how other cultures have responded to natural disasters. The research goal is to understand how Japanese Americans have constructed their identities in light of the historical context of WWII and internment, and how they have interpreted to the 3/11 disasters within the larger context of their identities. In light of Halualani et al.’s (2009) recommendation, this research treats the interpretive and critical paradigms as complementary perspectives that join individual and interactional levels of analysis with the sociopolitical and the historical. The theoretical framework for this study is based on the theoretical concepts of CTI, identity gaps, and critical-cultural hybridity—all of which draw attention to the complexities of one’s identities.

CTI was particularly relevant for understanding how Japanese Americans defined her/his self, enacted their sense of self, how they interacted with other people and defined themselves in terms of others, and how they perceived their sense of self as a part of the
Japanese American and/or Japanese communities. Japanese Americans are somewhat distinct from other ethnic groups in that they are commonly thought of in relation to the historical experience of internment, yet not all Japanese Americans have directly experienced it and may, in turn, relate to their identities in different ways (Takezawa, 1991). Some of these differences were observed in how they have interpreted their personal experiences, the historical context of WWII and internment as well as how they have interpreted the 3/11 disasters in Japan. Hence, Japanese American identity conceptions are not the same for everyone, for which conversations during the research interviews helped to illuminate how participants have constructed their identities. On the other hand, identity gaps accounted for some the discrepancies that Japanese Americans have encountered among their identities (with respect to the identity frames in CTI). Given that Japanese Americans have been described as a hybrid mix between being Japanese and American, critical-cultural hybridity was employed as a means to explore how participants have perceived their multiple and paradoxical cultural identities (Luther, 2003; Nakagawa, 1997; Ono, 1997; Uchida, 1982).

In particular, these concepts acknowledge that a given individual is multifaceted in the ways he/she regularly enacts, interacts, and negotiates the tensions of one’s identity individually, relationally, communally, and communicatively within different roles and contexts. Hence, these theoretical concepts were appealing for research purposes in order to examine how Japanese Americans have constructed their identities in different ways. Therefore, this research study gathered the perspectives of a selected number of Japanese
Americans to understand the nature of their identity, and how they have, in particular, interpreted WWII, internment, and the 3/11 disasters.

Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1) *How has internment and the personal experiences of Japanese Americans shaped their identities?*

2) *How has historical racism and discrimination shaped Japanese Americans’ identities?*

3) *How did Japanese Americans relate to the 3/11 disasters in Japan and to others who were affected by it? How were their experiences of 3/11 shaped by memories of internment, racism, and discrimination?*

However, it should be noted that while I intended to explore how internment, racism, and discrimination might have shaped participant’s interpretations of 3/11 in the latter half of research question three—in particular, how participants may have been more critical of the Fukushima nuclear power plant accident in light of internment and the atomic bombs—the data did not reveal significant findings. Therefore, the research question was shortened to:

3) *How did Japanese Americans relate to the 3/11 disasters in Japan and to others who were affected by it?*
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODS

The purpose of this dualistic interpretive and critical study is to understand how members of the Japanese American community have conceptualized their identities as well as the 3/11 disasters. This methodological juncture allowed multiple ways to understand, interpret, and critique the experiences of Japanese Americans in this study.

A qualitative research study was conducted, involving 10 Japanese Americans, because the method lends itself to avoiding gross generalizations as it focused attention on the specific narratives of people. Semi-structured interviews were selected as the research method to explore in-depth cultural insights because narratives allowed individuals to offer their perspectives about their personal experiences, thereby allowing their identities to emerge (Lindof & Taylor, 2010). Interviews were recorded as audio and were conducted over the course of two months. Participants were interviewed once for an approximate total of one to three hours per participant.

Recorded interviews were stored in a secure location and were only used for research purposes by me as the primary investigator. Interviews were then transcribed and individual participants were given the option to schedule a meeting to discuss what was found (in a summarized version) to confirm the validity of the findings. Interviews occurred in places preferred by the participants so as to ensure they were comfortable expressing themselves, yet in places that would maintain their privacy. To ensure
confidentiality, pseudonyms were given to participants to conceal their identities. Western first names and Japanese last names were chosen as they signify the nature of participants’ real names.

Authorization to conduct this study and to use Japanese Americans as the subject population has been obtained through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Denver. Informed consent forms were used to obtain voluntary participation, to provide a detailed description of my role and theirs in this research, and any potential psychological or emotional risks (albeit, minimal) that could have occurred as the result of their participation. Participants were told beforehand about the possible negative effects or experiences that engaging in this research could have brought, their right to withdraw from the study at any time for whatever reason, and were given additional resources (that is, a handout was distributed to participants detailing a few counseling resources in the Denver area).

This study took place in the Denver, Colorado metropolitan area. Subject participation was solicited through personal connections made with Japanese Americans on the 2012 Camp Amache Pilgrimage in May 2012, through the personal connections of a professor at the University of Denver, and by attending services at the Buddhist Temple and the Simpson Methodist Church. Hence, I did not have any relationships with participants prior to this study.

The sample was comprised of 10 Japanese Americans using a purposive sampling method. Two criteria were required for participation in this study: (1) being Japanese American, thus excluding other ethnic and cultural groups, and (2) adults aged 18 and
older who were more likely to have a more complex understanding of WWII, internment, and 3/11 disasters. No direct connection to internment was required for participation in this study. Accordingly, participants were either former internees, descendants of survivors, and some had no direct relationship to internment.

All participants currently live in Denver, but have some lived in parts of Japan and California. Participants’ ages ranged from the late 20s to early 70s, but most were either middle-aged or elderly. Participants’ were mostly from lower- or middle-class backgrounds, but one had a middle- to upper-class background. Among the 10 participants interviewed in this study, four of them were born during WWII or prior to internment whereas the other six were born and raised in the post-internment generation. Of the four born during WWII or before internment, two participants were interned as young children.

**Coding of Interviews**

The data was coded using a thematic analysis approach. Using this approach, interview transcripts were analyzed by identifying logical relationships between responses given and the theoretical concepts used in this study (i.e., CTI, identity gaps, and critical-cultural hybridity), recurring and emerging themes, contradictions, general observations, and by making comparisons between other participants’ responses during each interview (Halualani, 2008; McCracken, 1988; Urban & Orbe, 2010). After interview data was thematically categorized according to CTI, identity gaps, and critical-cultural hybridity, the data was then placed into subcategories within these theories. A
brief review of these concepts is explored below as well as which questions I asked during the interviews in order to gather my data.

Identity is one’s comprehensive theory of self, consisting of multiple, complex, overlapping, and conflicting smaller identities or group memberships that define who one is. The subcategories of identity were taken from CTI’s four frames of identity—personal, enacted, relationship, and communal frames.

The personal frame denotes how one perceives the self. To determine the nature of one’s personal identity, I asked questions during the interview pertaining to the neighborhood they grew up in, personal connections with their family, positive and negative experiences of being a Japanese American, what one could recall about WWII, and how one’s perception of being a Japanese American has changed since WWII. Additionally, I also asked questions regarding one’s reaction to the 3/11 disasters, how the disasters have (or have not) changed one’s self-perceptions, and whether the disasters reignited memories from WWII. For a more in depth look at the interview questions that were asked in the interviews, see Appendix 6. For the analysis, I re-read each interview transcript numerous times and contemplated how participants were (or were not) defining themselves as well as what experiences have shaped their sense of self.

The enactment frame considers how identities emerge and are represented within social interactions. To pinpoint enacted identity, I asked questions that related to how one interacted with other Japanese Americans or Japanese, as well as after the 3/11 disasters and what that consisted of. I also considered how participants presented and performed their sense of self during the interview in relation to the major themes they communicated.
The relationship frame considers how one’s relationships have influenced one’s identity. In order to figure out one’s relational identity, I asked questions pertaining to the makeup of one’s family, if they knew someone affected by the 3/11 disasters, who they contacted in response to hearing about 3/11, and if they knew anyone who was in the internment camps. In addition, I considered how participants naturally discussed their family members, significant others, and friends in relation to the impact they have had on their lives.

The communal frame pertains to how one has defined oneself in terms of the groups or communities they belong to or are a member of. In determining the collective identity of Japanese Americans, I asked questions pertaining to what events (i.e., cultural festivals, parades, holidays, memorials, fundraisers, one-time events, etc.) one has participated in with other Japanese Americans and Japanese to understand how one related to both communities. Additionally, I also asked (when it was appropriate for the participant) if collective memories of WWII have informed their sense of identity as a Japanese American. In sum, I considered how participants discussed their membership in both the Japanese and Japanese American communities. In order to distinguish the communal frame from critical-cultural hybridity, I looked for the dominant collective identity conveyed for the communal frame and a simultaneously double (or multiple) identification for critical-cultural hybridity.

Identity gaps refer to the dissonance present within one’s identity and is considered in relation to CTI’s identity frames (e.g., personal-communal). In order to identify these gaps, I looked for contradictions and dissonance that participants
communicated during the course of their interview. No direct questions were asked in the interview to determine when an identity gap was present. Instead, identity gaps were identified through the process of re-reading interview transcripts and by analyzing the data.

Critical-cultural hybridity allows one to retain their seemingly conflicting and contradictory multiple identities as a both/and or a neither/nor existence. In order to identify notions of critical-cultural hybridity, I looked for the simultaneously complex and multiple ways that Japanese Americans discussed their ethnic identities without placing one ethnic identity over the other and the tension both identities posed to them at times. While all participants could be categorized as hybrids due to the nature of their cultural identities as Japanese and Americans, I specifically looked for how participants placed value into both of their cultural identities without choosing a dominant identification.

**Positionalities**

The process of conducting cultural research raises important issues of the relationship between the researcher and the cultural members in the study. How the researcher interacts with and represents cultural members in the study can be detrimental if not approached ethically or respectfully.

In addressing the criticism of people speaking about or for others in which they are not a member of, Alcoff (1991) asserted that one’s social location can reinforce positions of privilege at the expense of marginalizing the “Other” in a crisis of representation. Dow (1997) added that one’s social location can influence which voices
are heard and which are excluded—a political issue concerning power because social locations do not assume equal vantage. However, speaking with or to others may be a better approach in guarding against misrepresenting and further colonizing the “Other,” but not without a constant and critical reflection of self-reflexivity.

As the primary investigator for this research, it is necessary that I position myself in this research as a white, U.S. American graduate student. Although I am an outsider to both Japanese and Japanese American cultures, I am an interested outside observer of both cultures who can converse in Japanese at a beginner’s level and who has been to Japan for a brief visit. My interest in studying about Japanese Americans grew out my interest in Japanese culture and the relationships that I have with the Japanese. Initially, my topic for my thesis intended to center on the 3/11 disasters in Japan because I, having friends who live in Japan, became very concerned about their safety as I watched these tragic events unfold on the news media. After refining my topic with some of my thesis committee members, however, I decided that it would be interesting to research how Japanese Americans have conceptualized their identities and how they have interpreted these disasters as they are ethnically Japanese. Given the fact that Japanese Americans have a unique history in the U.S. because of the experience of internment and racial discrimination, I thought it would be fascinating to explore the nature of their identities against the backdrop of this historical context. My intent in conducting this research is to promote a greater sense of cultural understanding about Japanese Americans so as to deconstruct stereotypes, to create an awareness of the tensions and racism they face as well as the preconceived notions that often undergird racism and discrimination.
To negotiate the tension of being an outsider, self-reflexivity was a necessary component for interacting with, considering narratives and perspectives, and writing about Japanese Americans. Interviews were conducted as a means to try to understand the experiences of Japanese Americans, but with a relative amount of distance from them so as not to assume that my experiences and/or perceptions are the same as those of Japanese Americans. Furthermore, it was also important to verify the findings of this research with the participants involved in this study so as to get their reflections and to avoid stereotyping. As an outsider to the Japanese American community, I conducted this research with the following question in mind: Does this research study bring value to Japanese Americans or does it contribute to the “Othering” effect? Miike (2010) stressed that *how* one theorizes ought to be more heavily weighed against *what* one theorizes, although both considerations are needed for a productive analysis. Thus, a conscious consideration of how Japanese Americans were “represented” proved to be an essential element that informed what was theorized.
CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS

In order to examine the identities of the Japanese Americans interviewed for this study, data was thematically categorized according to CTI, identity gaps, and critical-cultural hybridity. While CTI is useful in identifying some key dimensions of identity, identity gaps are particularly effective in drawing attention to the discrepancies that participants felt when communicating and interacting with others. Likewise, critical-cultural hybridity was utilized in order to explicate how Japanese Americans negotiated their biracial and bicultural identities.

Although the narratives of participants often reflected a number of identity frames and identity gaps, only those which were the most salient for selected individuals were analyzed and presented here (see Appendix 7 for a guide to participants in this study). The results are therefore presented in the following order: CTI’s identity frames (i.e., personal, enacted, relational, communal), identity gaps (e.g., personal-communal, enacted-relational-communal, personal-enacted-communal, personal-relational-communal), critical-cultural hybridity, and lastly, the research questions (see Appendix 8 for a guide to the categories and subcategories used in the analysis).

Communication Theory of Identity (CTI)

As previously described, CTI explores identity with respect to four frames—namely, the personal frame, enacted frame, relational frame, and communal frame. Each
participant’s narratives were then put into subcategories of the four frames solely for analytical purposes. However, it is crucial to conceptualize identity frames as shaped through communication and as entities that are complexly interwoven with other identity frames. Similarly, Hecht (1993) maintained that identity frames are better understood as interpenetrated and juxtaposed entities whereby cohesion, contradiction, and ambiguity coexist within oneself. For that reason, I applied the concept of intersectionality—which capitalizes on the intersecting identities (e.g., personal and relational) that impinge upon one’s identity as a whole—to illuminate the intricacies and fluidity of one’s identity.

The personal frame.

The personal frame (or personal identity) encompasses an individual’s self-definitions, self-concepts, or self-perceptions and is comprised of numerous fragments that can intersect, conflict, and contradict constituent parts of one’s identity. Self-perceptions are constantly negotiated and influenced by one’s relationships, social context and interactions, past experiences, worldviews, and other related factors.

Michelle Fujimoto.

Michelle Fujimoto, a third generation Sansei in her early 70s, was born in the pre-internment era and was interned as a child at Manzanar (in California). Internment was deeply traumatizing to Michelle as it has impacted her tremendously, which has also led her to become politically active in the community.

As one of the two participants in this study who was interned, Michelle was born in Los Angeles, California and was interned with the rest of her family from when she was just seven months old until she turned four. After camp, Michelle and her family
resettled in Denver, Colorado, but her memory of internment continues to endure. In fact, Michelle’s grandfather (an Issei) was arrested on December 7th, 1941 and her father was put on the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) secondary list, but was not arrested. These details are particularly noteworthy as Michelle made numerous references to them, which serve to intimately personalize the experience for her. Internment, then, has had a significant impact on Michelle’s personal identity as it was the dominant topic that she communicated about herself during our interview, which has also shaped the nature of her relationships (relational frame) and inspired some of her community involvement (communal frame). Internment has arguably been the most defining part of her life during what she considered her formative years.

The amount of detail that Michelle is able to remember about internment—especially at such a young age and more than her older siblings—is astounding, which she attributed to the notion that “everything was fairly traumatic.” From fantasizing about her (material) “dreamland” in the Sears Roebuck catalogue, to the ever present dust particles in her barrack, to feeling “mortified” that she was bathed in public, and being quarantined for contracting chicken pox when she was less than a year old were just a few stories that Michelle narrated about her childhood.

Michelle’s family, however, do not have the same degree of interest in internment that she has had (with the exception of her daughter’s recent interest in the past decade). In effect, the nature of Michelle’s relationships have been affected since she is constantly engaged in and inquiring about internment whereas her siblings and parents (her mother in particular), in a general sense, have shied away from this issue—thus creating
somewhat of a distance between them. Even in the local Japanese American community, Michelle is viewed as an outcast for politicizing internment: “Whatever place I’ve made for myself in the Japanese American community here is really by sheer force of will because I wanted to get to the bottom of the truth of our internment and people did not like to hear about that.”

The following example depicts the dialogue between Michelle and her mother (now deceased) as Michelle remembered fragments of contracting chicken pox in camp:

I asked [my mother] specifically and said, “You know I remember lying in a bed and I’m crying really hard and I can’t move my arms. There’s somebody by the edge of the bed singing lullabies to me. Looking up I could see the dust particles and the sunlight coming in from the window overhead.” She said, “Well, you can’t remember that!” And I said, “Why not?” And she said, “That had to be when you were quarantined for three weeks right after we got to camp, you contracted chicken pox.” They wouldn’t let my mother come to see me because I cried so much that it bothered all the other patients in the barrack… I can only attribute that to the trauma of being taken away from my mother and so that’s why I remember being in that situation.

Michelle’s mother addressed some of the skepticism that one might have at the ability of an infant (as Michelle would have been less than a year old) to remember such a situation. Nonetheless, Michelle asserted that this was indeed a “true memory” as she first described the situation, and then her mother filled in the details as to what actually happened.
That said, Michelle keeps her memories of internment alive by re-invoking her personal experiences—filtered through and sharpened by her political sense of being—primarily through story-telling, everyday conversations, and through her activism with organizations in the Denver metro area (i.e., Japanese American Resource Center of Colorado, Japanese American Citizens League, Asian Round Table, etc.). Accordingly, one might argue that as Michelle sharpens her critique about internment, she may also be recalling (or filling in) memories about camp that she otherwise did not know or were triggered after reading literature about internment. Be that as it may, the experience of internment is inseparable from her sense of identity. What is more, the critical perspective suggests that broader, structural contexts contribute to shaping people’s identities and everyday lives even though people relate to their identities in varying ways. For Michelle, the broader sociopolitical and historical context of internment profoundly informs and shapes her personal identity, even to this day.

Particularly significant for her self-concept (i.e., personal identity), Michelle recalled talking about camp with her mother only on an “interim basis,” in part, because her mother could not properly deal with or accept internment. The larger issue, however, was a broken relationship between Michelle and her mother (relational identity): “I think her imperialism led her to too much unhappiness in her life…She felt it [internment] was way beneath her perceived [class] status.” Regardless of an apparent broken relationship, Michelle’s past discussions with her mother about internment have informed how she has come to know about internment, herself, as well as her social and political context.
Consequently, the manner in which Michelle relates to her personal identity is unique because she has incorporated internment into the very essence of her being. Michelle’s outlook on internment is pit against her family’s and the local community’s general perspective on internment, which mirrors the dominant narrative about internment: It was not *that* bad.

*Charles Nishimura.*

Charles Nishimura, a third generation Sansei in his mid-70s, was born in the pre-internment era and was interned as a child at both Tule Lake (in California) and Amache (in Colorado). Charles is the other participant who was interned, yet he was three years old when his imprisonment began. However, Charles did not perceive that internment had much of an impact on him as he maintained that he was “too young.”

Following camp, Charles and his family moved to Denver, Colorado. Unlike Michelle, Charles does not recall much about camp besides the poor quality of food, being with other Japanese Americans, and a few other details. Charles’ parents also did not talk about the experience much with him or his brother, despite the fact that his father lost his business when they were forced to “evacuate.” The following excerpt details Charles’ perspective on internment:

As a child, I guess you really don’t think about the discomforts at that time or how small of an area you have for a family…I think I was just too young to have that much of an opinion at that time. I think a lot of things go by hear-say or what you read, not actual facts. You don’t know if it’s an actual fact. You just have to
take it at face value. I’d say that my thoughts of it or values really haven’t evolved to be that much different.

Clearly distinct from Michelle’s interpretations, Charles insisted that he was too young to truly understand what it meant to be imprisoned along with its corresponding “discomforts” and disruptions to family life. Although Charles and Michelle were both young children when they were interned, Charles did not have as many strong recollections of the experience like Michelle did, which is evidence, from an interpretive perspective, of the fact that they connected to their experiences in vastly different ways.

Furthermore, Charles suggested that many people have interpreted internment from the angle of “hear-say or what you read, not actual facts,” which works to delegitimize certain perspectives and downplays the experience. His assertion essentially raises an epistemological debate between objectivity and subjectivity: how does one really know what is true? It is worth noting that the U.S. government collaborated with the War Relocation Authority (WRA) in publishing “official” and “credible” information (i.e., “actual facts”) about internment, yet these narratives often painted a better picture of the experience (Mizuno, 2003; Murray, 2000; Tong, 2004).

Nonetheless, Charles agreed that internment was partially instituted as a means for the whites to take back the farm land that the Japanese had cultivated, and that reparations were insufficient given the hardships endured and how much people lost. Despite these few instances when he critiqued internment (and in spite of his pilgrimages to Amache), Charles’ opinions about internment have not “evolved to be that much different” from when he was a young child to the present. Charles’ age, few memories,
general interpretations about camp, and little discussion with his parents may be contributing factors as to why internment has had a lesser impact on his personal identity than Michelle. From a critical perspective, Charles’ depoliticization of internment makes sense given the socio-historical context at that time. The general climate immediately following internment—yet before the push for redress—was one in which encouraged the silencing of the topic as some internees were too young to remember, many suffered from deep psychological scars, guilt, and collective shame that often prevented discussions whereas some feared, at certain times, resisting in ways that might give the U.S. government “legitimate” reasons to intern them again or suffer from other form of oppression (Fugita & Fernandez, 2004; Luther, 2003; Nagata, Trierweiler, & Talbot, 1999; Takezawa, 1991).

Some Japanese cultural values—e.g., the proverb, “The nail that sticks out gets hammered down”—may have also factored into a silencing of the topic by conforming to the status quo (Muller, 2001). This has been the case for Kent, another participant: “When I was growing up... [you had] a placid face and were not too expressive...You don’t stand out and that’s still a part of it, at least for me anyway.” Taken together, these factors—i.e., age, few memories, psychological scars, guilt, collective shame, fear of resisting, possible cultural values, etc.—work to hegemonically silence internment, which essentially serves the interests of the U.S. government in refraining from (adequately) addressing the injustice of internment.
Although internment has not had a significant impact on Charles’s personal identity, the critical approach sheds light on how his perspective correlated to the broader sociopolitical and historical context of the time.

**Kathryn Fujimoto.**

Kathryn Fujimoto, a fourth generation Yonsei in her 50s, was born during the post-internment era. As the daughter of Michelle Fujimoto, Kathryn’s parents and extended family members were interned. In sum, Kathryn was raised without Japanese cultural traditions and has been marked by a profound sense of “Otherness” from the mainstream Japanese American community, yet she has confronted the historical memory of internment as a means to accept herself.

The dominant theme that Kathryn communicated about herself related to being “different” in which she appears to have incorporated a sense of being “Othered” into her personal identity. For Kathryn, being “the Other” pertains not only to her racial and ethnic identity as a Japanese American, but also to extends to issues of class, gender, and her sexual identity.

With respect to class, Kathryn claimed that she was “always aware” of the socioeconomic and sociocultural norms within the larger Japanese American community and the community group her family belonged to. For instance, Kathryn noted that her family was set apart as “black sheep” and was treated as such given that they were lower-middle class in a predominately middle-class neighborhood. Her parents’ divorce

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11 Kathryn and her family were a part of the Tanomoshi group—a social group comprised of ethnic Japanese whose ancestors are typically from the same prefecture in Japan (albeit, not in the case of Kathryn’s family) that exists to provide a sense of community, financial support, among other things, to its members.
exacerbated their “difference” as it was fairly taboo (e.g., “That was just not something you would do. You didn’t rock the boat”), which essentially strained ties with her familial community group thereby granting an “exemption” from further participation. By implication, Kathryn suggested that social and cultural norms, as well as class, were factors in differentiating Kathryn’s family from a “normal” Japanese American family.

Kathryn’s “distinctness” from the mainstream Japanese American community goes further by the virtue of her gender/sexual identity as a lesbian in which she has experienced arguably more socioeconomic, racial, and gender discrimination from the LGBTQ community, perhaps on the basis of her appearance (more on this later). While Kathryn has felt pressure to conform to social and cultural norms, she questioned whether it was worth it to change her values—and therefore, her self-concept—in order to meet the expectations of others. Here, it should be noted that conforming to other’s expectations entails a performance (i.e., enacted identity) or perhaps an identity gap (i.e., personal-enacted identity gap). The dilemma of conformity, however, is quite personal to Kathryn considering her acute awareness that she is viewed and treated like an outcast from “mainstream” Japanese Americans. While Kathryn regrets not knowing this sooner, she concluded that she will not change or conform to other’s expectations of whom she “should” become (e.g., “I don’t have to have any expectations from anyone except from me”). Considering the different layers and intersectional dimensions of Kathryn’s identity—i.e., race, ethnicity, class, family, gender/sexual orientation, etc.—altering her self-concept would be no less than problematic, to which she refuses to do. Consequently,
Kathryn retains a strong sense of self despite the pulls on her identity to become someone else.

In a similar vein, Kathryn recalled that it took her a long time to accept her identity as a Japanese American, which was matter of self-acceptance in her assessment. Although Kathryn’s parents were both interned, she did not know anyone else growing up who was also interned, in part, because she claimed internment was not topic of public and/or social discussion. In Kathryn’s family, however, Michelle talked about internment frequently with her and her brother, and even took them to Manzanar (i.e., where Michelle and the rest of Kathryn’s family were interned) when they were adolescents. As with Charles, Kathryn did not become interested in internment as her identity—from an interpretive perspective—was not based on being Japanese American at that time. At any rate, Kathryn has (within the past decade or so) confronted the issue of internment vis-à-vis as a means of self-acceptance. The quotation below sheds light on how Kathryn came to terms with internment and her identity as a Japanese American:

The unfortunate thing is that I will never know what would’ve been possible but for internment…Growing up in that post-internment generation—deliberately having been raised without the language, culture, the traditions, etc.—consequently it took a very long time for me to be comfortable with identifying as a Japanese American. As a kid, I really avoided anything that was remotely related to being Japanese whether that meant learning martial arts or learning the language, admitting to being Japanese because I had no sense of what that meant.
I’ll bet I was probably in my early 40s before it finally started to sink in that it was okay to have that be part of my identity. 

Thematically, the tensions Kathryn encountered in identifying as a Japanese American could very well be analyzed as a personal-communal identity gap. Kathryn’s arrival at this juncture, however, was a matter of self-acceptance, which suggests more of an emphasis on her personal identity. Contrasted with Kathryn’s disinterest in internment until fairly recently, she insinuated that internment has been, in fact, a seminal experience (e.g., “The unfortunate thing is that I will never know what would’ve been possible but for internment”). Corresponding with a critical perspective, this suggests that the broader historical context of internment has (indirectly) shaped Kathryn’s sense of Japanese American identity in spite of her reluctance to identify as part of that group.

Kathryn proposed that part of her discomfort in admitting to being Japanese American was largely due to being raised in the post-internment era “without the language, culture, [and] the traditions,” which she assessed as a “dilution.” An interpretive perspective might question the role that Kathryn’s family played in practicing Japanese cultural values given that cultural values are, in part, passed down through the family unit and local communities (among other avenues). Here, it is also worth noting that Denver’s Japanese American community is relatively small and more dispersed throughout the metro region than that of West Coast populations, which is a factor that might have influenced opportunities for more exposure to Japanese cultural values. On the other hand, the historical context of racism and discrimination was a key determinant for many Japanese Americans in deciding whether or not to affirm their Japaneseess.
After all, looking like the “enemy” was the primary reason that landed them in camp and caused many to be discriminated against in social settings. Consequently, Kathryn “avoided anything that was remotely related to being Japanese,” which corresponds to the collective shame of being associated with, feeling, or looking Japanese (American) in fear that “they” could be rounded up again. This essentially served the political purposes of the U.S. government and reinforced their power by instilling fear and collective shame, rather than pride, in many Japanese Americans on behalf of their Japanese heritage. Kathryn is now comfortable with personally identifying as a Japanese American (e.g., “It was okay to have that be a part of my identity”) in which her political and communal involvement in preserving the Amache internment camp is a testament to this.

In summary, the narratives of Michelle, Charles, and Kathryn demonstrate the varying ways in which one’s personal experiences have impacted their personal identities. Michelle’s firsthand experience of internment has significantly impacted her personal identity, which is accentuated by her acute awareness of the sociopolitical and historical background. Although Charles was also interned, the experience has not impacted his personal identity much. Arising from an intriguing sense of “difference,” Kathryn’s personal identity has been largely constructed by her class, gender/sexual identity, and through a recent confrontation of her racial and ethnic identity as a Japanese American. From an interpretive perspective, it is evident that there are myriads of factors that (continue to) inform one’s personal identity. The critical perspective situated participants’ narratives in the broader, structural contexts to examine why, for instance, Charles was seemingly disinterested in internment despite his direct experience of it or how collective
shame factored into Kathryn’s reluctance to identify as a Japanese American. Related to one’s personal identity, the next section addresses how one enacted their sense of self to others.

**The enactment frame.**

The enactment frame posits that “identities are communicatively manifested, either directly or indirectly through social roles, behaviors, and symbols” (Urban & Orbe, 2010, p. 306). Through social interactions, identities dynamically emerge, are constructed, and negotiated as identity is necessarily a state of becoming. Enacted identity is said to be analogous to a *performance* of self in which one performs their identity to others. Accordingly, enactment is but a partial manifestation of identity as identities are hierarchically ordered depending on the situational context, social role(s), and the salience of constituent parts of one’s identity.

**Jerry Matsuoka.**

Jerry Matsuoka, a third generation Sansei in his mid-60s, was born in the post-internment era in which one of his aunts was interned. Among the participants interviewed, Jerry has been arguably the most successful both athletically and professionally as he has pursued an athletic career in judo. More than that, Jerry advocated for the preservation of the former internment camp, Amache.

The dominant theme that emerged from Jerry’s narrative traced how he became successful from his childhood to the present. From judo, to real estate management, to meeting high profile politicians and celebrities (to name but a few), Jerry claimed that he
has been able to accomplish considerably more, on a professional level, than many other third generation Japanese Americans.

However, something can be said for Jerry’s class as he grew up in a middle- to upper-middle class environment, he is highly educated, excelled athletically, professionally, and is socially accepted among his peers. The socioeconomic context following internment was not favorable to many Japanese Americans as numerous families struggled to rebuild their lives after losing nearly all of their possessions, property, livelihoods, and the like. Jerry was, in contrast, shielded from these hardships in primarily two ways: (1) He was not interned nor was his immediate family; and (2) he had access to more resources as a middle- to upper-class family. Jerry also indicated that he has always had a great support network of friends and family who guided and taught him in his personal, academic, and professional endeavors—a privilege that, unfortunately, not everyone is able to benefit from.

While Jerry participated in a variety of sports, he became highly esteemed through judo, a Japanese martial art. Following the footsteps of his father, Jerry competed in hundreds of judo tournaments, has been an Assistant Coach for the Olympics, and now instructs judo classes at the Tri-State Buddhist Temple in Denver, Colorado. The following passage highlights a performance of self as Jerry made connections among his success in judo, his personal conduct, and being well received in the community:

We’re kind of like a legend in our own minds [in] that we picture ourselves being samurais with the bushido code—excellence, integrity, persistence, loyalty. A lot of these things are ingrained in martial arts. I realized that I wouldn’t represent
this country 39 times or be in four hall of famers, the international hall of fame, if it wasn’t for the sport of judo. If I didn’t persist in trying to do the right thing with the right teaching and the right thought, the Buddhist religion says these things. You go through the seven precepts [sic] and it teaches you all of these things. If you do those things, good things happen to you. The church thinks that I’m a perfect example because of the fact that I put [in] a lot of passion and a lot of devotion ... [and] just simply because...I had the right approach, the right attitude, and not the animosity.

Despite the fact that Jerry attributed some of his success in judo to be circumstantial, — i.e., he was merely at “the right place at the right time”—he believed that much of his success came from self-imposition as he possessed the right attitude, and conducted himself accordingly with bushido code morals and Buddhist thought. While he seemed to make a connection between “doing the right thing” and why “good things happen[ed]” to him, Jerry understood that his judo accomplishments were hard-earned (e.g., “You don’t get promoted by doing nothing”). Interpretively, Jerry performed what seems to be central to his self-concept: commitment and dedication to his values has paved the road to success from martial arts to his occupational career.

Extending beyond Jerry’s apparent influence in the Japanese American community, his success is indicative of a greater accomplishment: succeeding in dominant U.S. American culture. From a critical perspective, Jerry’s excessive drive to excel seems to correspond to the “model minority myth” as he is a person of Asian heritage—i.e., the umbrella group mythologized as the model minority (Martinelli &
Nagasawa, 1987; Yu, 2006; Zhang, 2010). Teasing out this notion, it follows that mainstream U.S. American culture would likely esteem Jerry to be a perfect example for other racial and ethnic minorities to emulate because his strong work ethic, integrity, dedication, persistence, and positive attitude paved the way for the American Dream to be actualized in Jerry’s life. Rather than harboring an attitude of animosity—as a Japanese American—for internment, Jerry chose to focus on his career, perhaps as a means of acceptance into dominant U.S. American culture. In support of this, Jerry acknowledged that his athletic, martial arts, and academic ability helped him to become accepted among his high school peers in a time of racial prejudice following the end of WWII. Given the sociopolitical context at that time, Japanese Americans were perceived suspected to be “enemy aliens,” yet some served in the 44nd, 100th Infantry Battalion, and the Military Intelligence Service (MIS) as a means to dispel such notions and prove their patriotism as “good Americans” do (Kuramitsu, 1995). Likewise, Jerry may have also felt the need to prove himself as a minority—not simply to be a just good American, but to be better.

Notwithstanding, Jerry’s accomplishments are particularly noteworthy considering the sociohistoric context of other Japanese Americans who were not afforded with the class status or opportunities to do so. Therefore, it is quite evident that Jerry is satisfied with his hard work and his commitment to his values that have brought about much success.
Kathryn Fujimoto.

Kathryn, the daughter of Michelle who has felt “Othered” from the mainstream community, enacted her identity primarily through her reflections about difference, social expectations, and norms (see Appendix 7). Contrasted with Jerry’s narrative, Kathryn repeatedly acknowledged the fact that she has “never really fit in anywhere” due to the surmounting amount of social expectations that she and her family either failed to or refused to fulfill. Nevertheless, Kathryn asserted that she need not and will not please others (e.g., “Since I couldn’t please everybody, I would work toward pleasing no one”). In a performative rejection of mainstream constructs, the following account details Kathryn’s response to being profiled:

I don’t fit the stereotypical appearance of an Asian American unless it’s the stereotype of let’s say a Vietnamese gang member. Because I don’t either fit the profile of an upper middle class of perhaps what I chose to wear that day. I know that it makes me stand out. What I love doing [laughs] is I’ll go into a store, any kind of store…and the security guards will start following me around. So I take them for several laps [laughs] around the store. They’re never going to see it my way…Rather than concentrating on those [constructs], which is not to demean [them], figure out for yourself how to turn them on their head and make them entertaining for you. The reason you do that is to do otherwise would mean trying to change an entire mindset, which you cannot control. But you can control how to play with it.
Partially a matter of social class, Kathryn understood that her appearance does not coincide with the “profile of an upper middle class” individual, which is the implied norm in this scenario (e.g., “I don’t fit the profile of an upper middle class…I know that it makes me stand out”). Yet her “difference” from dominant white U.S. American culture is further exacerbated by her deviation from heteronormativity. That is to say, Kathryn is not heterosexual nor does she comply with mainstream femininity, such as socially accepted feminine roles, an outward feminine appearance, preferred methods of communication, and the like.

In a clever act of performativity, Kathryn deliberately traipsed about the confines of such stores so as to create more stress for the security guards in order to turn unfounded constructs “on their head and make them entertaining.” Kathryn’s performance of self further solidifies her commitment to remain true to, and thereby enact her identity. While the interpretive approach is useful in illustrating how Kathryn enacted her identity despite her apparent “distinctiveness,” the critical perspective is necessary to question why Kathryn, as an Asian American, was the victim of racial profiling. As perhaps the underlying factor, race or the perception of belonging to a “socially threatening” race—in this case, the Vietnamese who are stereotyped as gang members—supposedly warranted extra security measures to be taken against Kathryn. Given that the security guards followed her around the stores, it follows that Kathryn was perceived to be a “dangerous” or “suspicious” person. The actions of the security guards serve the interests of white U.S. American culture in reifying stereotypes that certain racial groups are suspect of criminality, which in turn, maintains the power of this dominant group.
According to Omi and Winant (1968), “we utilize race to provide clues about *who* a person is” and how they will behave, which are then formed into stereotypes (cited in Kibria, 2000, p. 78, emphasis in original). Indeed, I would be remiss to omit instances where I have (unfortunately) subscribed to similar racial stereotypes. I am reminded of my trip to Chicago when I attended a conference about the 3/11 disasters with my mother. I was responsible for arranging accommodations at a “safe” and cost efficient motel nearest to the location of the conference. As a young female, I cannot deny the necessity to take extra caution so as to avoid placing myself in harmful situations and while I was not alone on this trip, my mother and I (as well as my father) were concerned about our safety. Admittedly, I had notions of the crime rate in the city and as I inquired with receptionists on the phone to determine the safety of various neighborhoods, I was startled by my own subscription to the stereotype that perhaps blacks, other minority, or racial groups were somehow “intrinsically” dangerous. Hence, I have played a role in reifying these troubling stereotypes, yet I have not been racially profiled myself.

Not only did Kathryn discuss her experiences of discrimination, but she also considered her role in perpetuating stereotypes, which then made her “identity performance” notably distinctive due to her self-reflexivity. One of Kathryn’s most difficult and unsettling “self-discoveries” was that she has her own set of prejudices that have been perpetuated by dominant, white U.S. American culture. For example, Kathryn indicated that she has caught herself (unconsciously) subscribing to the perpetual foreigner stereotype in which she saw someone who looked Asian, yet was shocked by their perfect English. The perpetual foreigner stereotype is problematic as it assumes that
whites are the norm whereas other racial or ethnic groups are supposedly not from “here,” are somehow inferior, or who are “Othered” on the basis of their racial appearance.

She argued that while it may be natural to justify that “my prejudices aren’t as bad as yours,” she insisted that prejudice and racism is present within everyone, and ought to be acknowledged as such. At the same time, Kathryn is not advocating for a colorblind society as she certainly identifies as a person who has experienced a significant amount of discrimination, not just racially, but also on the basis of her gender and sexual identity. She went on to say that,

I’ve invested a lot of time [in] not being, what I’ll call a sheep—whether it’s in the Japanese American community, whether it’s in the gay and lesbian community, whether it’s in the women’s community. It’s not enough to claim membership. What we should endeavor to claim is making a difference whether in how other people think or how other people perceive us or how we perceive them because claiming membership does nothing more than to admit laziness. Thus, Kathryn contended that one “should endeavor to…mak[e] a difference…in how other people perceive us or how we perceive them,” rather than acting like “sheep” who passively claim membership without working towards change. Moreover, Kathryn’s reflection about her experiences, her acknowledgment of her prejudices, and her endeavor to make a change in other’s perceptions serve as an enactment of her identity.

Certainly, Jerry and Kathryn’s enactment of identity are in stark contrast to each other. Jerry enacted his identity through multiple stories about his professional
accomplishments. In a considerably divergent tone, Kathryn enacted her identity through her differentiation from the dominant culture in which she has been the victim of racial profiling and discrimination. Jerry’s success and apparent acceptance has elevated him to a position within mainstream U.S. American culture whereas Kathryn continues to fight against and challenges mainstream norms.

Thus far, the identities of Japanese Americans in this study have been considered in relation to their self-concepts and performances of self (i.e., personal and enacted frames, respectively). The next section addresses identity with respect to the role of others and one’s relationships.

The relationship frame.

The third component of CTI is the relationship frame whereby identities are mutually constructed, dynamically emerge, and are jointly negotiated with relevant others (Hecht, 1993; Urban & Orbe, 2010). This frame asserts that one’s sense of self is co-created with others and is partially defined in terms of others as well as their relationships.

Kent Hisakawa.

Kent Hisakawa, a third generation Sansei in his 70s, was born during internment in which some of his extended family members and wife were interned. All in all, Kent endeavored to learn about internment as a means to figure out who he was, and he is very active in the local community as a result of his wife’s influence.

Although Kent was not personally interned, he learned that a few of his relatives on his mother’s side of the family bore the burden of living in camp. From the little bit of information that Kent was able to gather from his mother, some of his extended family
members evacuated from the West Coast and resided with Kent’s family in Colorado for some uncertain period of time. Kent also had a number of other relatives (i.e., his grandmother, aunt, uncle) living in Japan at the height of the atomic and fire bombings as his father’s side of the family were from Yamanashi Prefecture, Japan. Kent noted that “our families had two countries at war… not really animosity, but a lot of living separate lives because of time and circumstances… [and we] weren’t able to get together until after the war.”

While Kent’s family and peers generally did not talk about internment, Kent wanted to “find out about the situation” during a time when relatively few books were published about the topic. During college, Kent endeavored to learn about internment—including U.S.-Japan relations—by reading through old newspapers as a means to figure out who he was as a Japanese American. Kent’s “identity search” was indeed a matter of grappling with his self-definitions on an individual or personal level (e.g., “I started trying to figure out who I was,” emphasis added). At the same time, his “identity search” also pertains on a communal level as Kent is a member of the larger Japanese American community as well as on a relational level because the people he knew (i.e., family and acquaintances) had been interned. But Kent is also suggesting that, to know who he is, he needs to examine the broader context of internment. He was even curious to know how his extended family in Japan managed to survive financially during WWII given the structural context of war, widespread famine, poverty, and devastation to Japanese society.
After returning to the U.S. from his first trip to Japan, Kent met his wife who has significantly influenced and shaped Kent’s sense of self. Like Charles, Kent’s wife was also interned a small child, yet she was “pretty much shielded” because of her age and consequently did not discuss much about internment. Their greatest accomplishment, as Kent put it, is their daughter. Kent’s wife passed away nearly 10 years ago battling Parkinson’s disease, yet their relationship continues to shape Kent’s life and sense of identity.

Kent’s wife nudged him to become increasingly active within the Japanese American community. Below, Kent reflects on the impact that his wife has had on him as well as her desire for community involvement:

She [was] an amazing person…All of the things that she went through and there were a lot of things that we were able to go through together…She definitely had a great impact on my life and she still does. A lot of the things I’m involved with started out because of her. That includes my time with the Bonsai group because she wanted me to do that and it was something that we could do together. There’s a lot of things that I feel to some extent that, she basically had great foresight into it and this is the kind of individual you should be…Where I’m at now [is] I’m trying to have some impact on the community because of my wife and what she wanted, those are all interrelated factors.

Kent’s current involvement in the Japanese American community—i.e., the Denver Bonsai Club, the Japanese American Association of Colorado (JAAC) that coordinates the yearly pilgrimage to Amache, the Kid’s Learning School, the Buddhist Temple,
etc.—was indeed greatly shaped by his wife’s influence. Needless to say, Kent’s bond with his wife has and continues to inform who he is. This is evidence of the fact that he is co-creating his identity with his wife, as well as with his daughter, other family members, and friends. Moreover, Kent conveyed who he is by reflecting about the people he values.

James Hashimoto.

James Hashimoto, a third generation Sansei in his 50s, was born in Japan during the post-internment era. Neither James nor his family members were interned, yet his wife’s parents were interned. As a journalist, James writes about both Japanese and Japanese American culture. However, James did not truly confront his ethnic identity as a Japanese American until his father was diagnosed with cancer and then passed away.

James lived in Japan for the first eight years of his life before moving to the U.S. Although James had a “dual cultural upbringing” (more on this in the critical-cultural hybridity section), he—unlike his parents—did not know many Asians in part because of his socioeconomic environment in white, suburban neighborhoods. He even considered himself to be white then. It follows that James felt, at least to some degree then, that he was a “member” of the dominant group. However, this could have been fueled by the pressure to assimilate into mainstream white U.S. American culture. Indeed, James often “forgot that he was not white,” but his peers took notice of his race and labeled him as inferior by shouting a racial slur at him (e.g., “Hey Jap, go home!”). This blatantly racist comment, “Hey Jap, go home,” is unfortunately not surprising as it reflected the dominant hegemony that at the time. That is to say, racially Japanese individuals were considered to be “foreigners,” “enemy aliens,” and “threats” to U.S. national security,
especially after Pearl Harbor. These attitudes were promoted by the U.S. government and through mainstream media in order to generate support for war on Japan among the general U.S. public, which later provided a “rationale” for internment camps.

Sometime after college, James wrote in a column for a Japanese American community newspaper in Denver (now out of business) about his experiences as a Japanese American because he felt he was “different.” In particular, James started to write about his experiences of discrimination and how they fit into the broader context of racism in the U.S. Around that time, James’ father was diagnosed with cancer, which made him more inquisitive of his father’s past. The following exchange explicates James’ shock when he finally learned more details about his father’s life:

“Oh dad, what was it like being in Pearl Harbor on December 7th 1941?” He said, “Umm, I don’t know.” I’m like, “Well, what do you mean you don’t know? You were born and raised in Hawaii.” He said, “Yeah, we were but your grandfather took us to Japan [in 1940] before the bombing.” …I said, “What?! You never told me this!” He never talked about it.

Hence, James expected that his father would have some profound insight or memory about Pearl Harbor given that he was raised in Hawaii during WWII, which is a logical assumption at best. James’ father was in fact a Kibei; he born in the U.S., yet educated in Japan. His father lived in Japan during WWII just before the attack on Pearl Harbor that eventually triggered U.S. involvement in the war in the Pacific against Japan. Likewise, James’ father and siblings were discriminated against as they were “treated [like] American spies by all the kids” despite the fact that many Kibeis were in Japan at that
time to become acculturated as Japanese. One of James’ uncles was even drafted into the 
Japanese army, captured as a prisoner of war by the Russian army, but later committed 
suicide after being released. Nonetheless, James learned stories of this nature from his 
aunts after his father passed away. Accordingly, James started to contemplate his identity 
as a Japanese American:

For me, it took my dad getting cancer and dying before I realized that, holy shit, 
I’ve never even thought about my identity! I accept that I’m an artist, a music 
critic…music editor. I’m a media person, a journalist. I’m this and that, but being 
a Japanese American wasn’t a part of how I described myself. For many years 
when my dad died, it’s like oh shit; I’m really interested in Japan! I’m really 
interested in that era right after the war when my dad joined the [U.S.] army and 
worked…as an interrogator [during] the American Occupation of Japan…I’m 
fascinated in all of that, but it took my dad dying to get me thinking about who I 
am and how Japanese I really am without even thinking about it.

From artist to music critic to journalist, James seemed to be comfortable and secure in his 
identity through these roles. However, it suddenly became clear to James that he did not 
consider himself to be Japanese American and Japanese until after his father passed away. 
From that point forward, James was finally able to accept his identity as a Japanese 
American and he is currently working to educate the general public about internment 
through his journalism and community involvement.

Similar to Kent, James’ second wife (a Yonsei) also prompted James to become 
involved in the local Japanese American community. Through his wife’s family and
friends, James was introduced to the local Japanese American community in Denver, became active in numerous organizations, and started reading as well as writing more material (e.g., books, blogs, columns) about Japanese American culture. Thus, it is clear that James’ father and wife, in particular, have shaped a large part of his Japanese American identity.

**Angela Fukui.**

Angela Fukui, a third generation Sansei in her 40s or 50s, was born in the post-internment era. Angela was not interned, but her parents and extended family members were imprisoned in camp. Angela is active in the Japanese martial art aikido and became increasingly interested in internment after her father passed away.

While she grew up in a fairly diverse neighborhood in Bloomington, California, Angela did not know many Japanese Americans growing up except for those who attended Japanese language school. Once Angela (and her siblings) dropped out of Japanese language school, “much to [her] family’s shame,” her interactions with other Japanese and Japanese Americans became increasingly limited. Then in 1990, Angela moved to Colorado where she has lived in Boulder and Longmont relatively isolated from other Asians and Japanese Americans. Despite Angela’s relational distance from Japanese Americans, she is fascinated by Japanese culture and tends to call her father when large-scale natural disasters happen in Japan—such as 3/11 and the Great Awaji Earthquake in Kobe—to learn if she has any family in the affected areas.

Aikido, a Japanese martial art, has been an avenue for Angela to become immersed in Japanese culture, meet friends, and connect with her father on a new level.
For Angela, the presence of shrines and flower arrangements at the *dojo* (training center) extends to a Japanese cultural setting for her *aikido* activities. Through *aikido*, Angela has been able to “to do Japanese things” that are reminiscent of her childhood such as, run and do somersaults on the green training mats that she used to do with her brother, bow, and speak a little Japanese. Angela’s father seemed to be proud of her *aikido* involvement as they have developed a common interest in Japanese martial arts:

> My dad told me that he seemed…sort of pleased that I was doing something. I said, “Yeah, daddy. There’s a Japanese *sensei* [teacher, master] and he’s from Tokyo, Hira-sensei.” He was like, “Oh that’s kind of cool. That’s Japanesey, huh?” “Yeah, I wear a *hakama*” [traditional Japanese clothing]. He even showed me a little bit of his *kendo* [another Japanese martial art] stuff. We went out and got the sticks, and it’s very different from *aikido*. He was like, “Yeah, we used to do this combination and this.”

This father-daughter exchange, as well as her retelling of the story during our interview, suggests that *aikido* was one way that Angela and her father could relate to one another. Given that Angela’s father used to practice *kendo*, their common interest in Japanese martial arts is not surprising. Angela’s involvement in *aikido* is also, in part, taken to be an interest in Japanese culture in which her father seemed particularly impressed (e.g., “Oh that’s kind of cool. That’s Japanesey, huh?”). That is not to say, however, that Angela participates in *aikido* solely because of her father or on the account that it is something “Japanesey” to do. In fact, she has also enjoyed meeting *hapas* (half or mixed Asian or Pacific Islanders) at *aikido* practices—albeit, few are Japanese Americans. Thus,
Aikido has served as a common interest and connecting point with her father, yet has also led her to make friends among other people.

While Angela is especially interested in aikido and other Japanese cultural traditions, she mentioned that nearly all of her family members (both on her mother’s and father’s side) were interned at Manzanar. Her father and grandfather, in particular, were among the most affected by internment in her family. Angela’s grandfather, an Issei, had a particularly rough time in camp because he was uprooted from his career as a fisherman, lost everything during the evacuation, and was forced to live in a desert with “nothing to do.” On the other hand, her father, a Nisei, struggled to adjust to camp life as he was in the midst of high school.

It was not until a few years ago that Angela became more interested in gathering details from her father about camp (e.g., “I made my dad flesh this out”), though she “always knew” that her family was interned. In remembrance of her (now deceased) father, Angela went on the 2012 Pilgrimage to Amache—albeit, she has not yet visited Manzanar. On the bus ride to Amache (as I sat next to her both there and back), she became ecstatic when she saw a picture of her father in one of the videos that was played. It was therefore obvious to me that her interest in internment has been largely instigated by her family’s experiences of camp, and is thus, a personal connection. She also cherished the opportunities she had to talk with other Japanese Americans on the pilgrimage, which she claimed that she does not get to do very often. Nevertheless, Angela’s relational ties with other Japanese Americans seem to be, in general, limited to her family despite her interest in both Japanese and Japanese American culture.
In summary, the relationship frame considered the role that other people have had in influencing the lives of Kent, James, and Angela. For both Kent and James, it was their wives who prompted them to become involved with numerous organizations in the local Japanese American community. Although Angela’s involvement in the community differs from James’ and Kent’s, Angela was able to bond with her father more and met other Asian Americans through her participation in *aikido*. While these participants came face-to-face with the historical memory of internment in varying ways—i.e., Kent as a means to accept who he was whereas for James and Angela, just before and after their fathers had passed away—they have all been influenced by the broader context of internment and their family member’s experiences of it. Hence, the relationship frame examines an important dimension of identity—namely, the notion that identity is co-constructed with others and through one’s relationships. Turning now to the last frame in CTI, the next section examines the role of communal identity.

**The communal frame.**

The communal frame can refer to a particular group or community, made up of individual members, who are bonded by some collective memory, traditions, heritage, values, beliefs, and so on (Hecht, 1993; Urban & Orbe, 2010). Accordingly, the communal frame emphasizes group associations and social networks, and encompasses a broad spectrum of groups or collectivities (i.e., nationality, ethnicity, cultural, religious, social, political, and occupational, etc.) that individuals are a part of. However, for the purposes of this research, the communal frame is applied in relation to ethnic and cultural affiliations (i.e., Japanese and Japanese American).
Evelyn Tsukino.

Evelyn Tsukino, a third generation Sansei in her 60s, was born in the post-internment generation in which two uncles were interned. By and large, Evelyn claimed that internment was “ancient history” as she is more interested in Japanese cultural traditions and artifacts.

For Evelyn, it is the richness of Japanese cultural traditions, values, and activities that she can take part in with other Japanese Americans that serve as the locus in identifying as part of the collective group of Japanese Americans. She is intrigued by the cultural traditions emanating from her Japanese ethnic heritage (e.g., New Year’s Day, obon, the Cherry Blossom Festival), yet not without generational shifts and American influences in some values. For instance, Evelyn noted that she does not speak Japanese (except for a few words and phrases), eats Japanese inspired cuisine with an “American” twist to it, and participates in a few organizations that she describes as “not necessarily Japanese” (e.g., ukuleles and mahjong club).

Accordingly, Evelyn often interacts with other Japanese Americans around Sakura Square in Denver, which is the block-wide plaza of Japanese businesses, a grocery store, a restaurant, an apartment complex, and more. She maintained that the Buddhist Temple (located within Sakura Square) is the cultural center to Japanese and Japanese American culture—perhaps due to the fact that lots of (but not all) cultural, religious, and organizational activities typically take place near the Buddhist Temple. Likewise, Evelyn is heavily involved in the local community in which she belongs to a number of organizations and activities ranging from historical and cultural preservation
(e.g., Japanese American Resource Center of Colorado), to entertainment (e.g., Kohaku Uta Gassen—a Japanese singing content), and to religious (e.g., Buddhist Temple). She has even visited Japan three times and is anticipating a fourth trip to visit her grandson who is in Japan for a study abroad experience, which is indicative of her strong interest in Japanese culture.

While Evelyn’s fascination with Japanese cultural traditions, interest in Japan, and involvement within the local community is a manifestation of her collective identity, her identification with the Japanese American community is complicated as she continually distances herself from internment, racism, and discrimination. Given my interest in Japanese culture (e.g., the language, food, cultural values), Evelyn’s interview was still engaging for me. As a researcher, however, the views that Evelyn espouses are problematic, perplexing, and inconsistent. For instance, Evelyn repeatedly told me during our interview that internment and WWII had “no connection” to her life. Evelyn explains in greater detail below:

During [the postwar] time[s]…it was just fun and games. That news about Japan is old history. It’s as far as saying that man is on the moon. It had no connection…Parents [had] more of a connection than us [children]. But me, I’m just trying to hold onto cultural things—the Japanese dance. Not even the language. I know I should learn Japanese, but I don’t. It’s the cultural things. It’s more important to me than World War II.

Evelyn’s lack of connection—which is to say, the absence of personal experiences and strong relational ties—to internment and WWII has undoubtedly influenced the way in
which she collectively identifies as Japanese and Japanese American. Even though two of Evelyn’s uncles were supposedly interned and one was eventually deported to Japan, she did not know this piece of information or much about internment while growing up. Rather, Evelyn’s childhood was marked by good memories, fun, and “no preconceptions of discrimination.” Added to that, Evelyn’s friends were mixed as her neighborhood, elementary school, and high school was well integrated and tight-knit.

A possible reason for why Evelyn could have asserted these things might be related to how she was raised. Evelyn told me that her mother was attending high school in a suburb of Denver in the midst of internment as her grandparents had already settled in Colorado before the voluntary evacuation (i.e., they did not have to evacuate or go to camp). However, Evelyn said that her mother was not bothered by the fact that a camp (i.e., Amache) was located in Colorado as she also felt “no discrimination…no bitterness or hard feelings with the Caucasians.” Needless to say, it seems that Evelyn has internalized her mother’s opinions about internment and discrimination. In spite of however true this was for Evelyn, her discriminatory-free childhood supports the dominant hegemonic ideology that adjusting to life after camp did not pose many challenges to Japanese Americans or was not that difficult (e.g., “it was just fun and games”). While she acknowledged that parents had “more of a connection than us [children],” her assessment does not even apply to her (immediate) family—at least, from what she discussed about her parents in our interview and how they chose to raise her. More than that, her assessment does not engage with the sense of racial inferiority that many Japanese Americans felt or the socioeconomic struggles that some parents, the
elderly, and those in certain occupations and life stages faced after camp. Instead, she repeatedly told me during our interview that internment and WWII had “no connection” to her life as it was “ancient history for us teenagers.”

At the same time, Evelyn maintained that it is important to “keep the memories [of internment] alive so that future generations know it happened.” However, it is contradictory and inconsistent for Evelyn to assert that internment is “ancient history” and that Japanese cultural traditions are “more important to [her] than WWII,” yet to also suggest that memories of internment need to be kept alive. Evelyn’s assertion becomes even more problematic when it is considered in relation to her views about the “historical” animosity between the Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans (in particular), as she believes that “everything’s changed now and [the U.S. is] a melting pot, so I don’t think anybody really cares.” Her statement is problematic because it supports the notion that the U.S. is a progressive, colorblind society in which racism and discrimination are events of the past (e.g., “everything’s changed now”).

In turn, this raises several questions as to what exactly Evelyn believes future generations should know about internment. The first question that comes to mind is how would Evelyn, in general, define racism and discrimination? Second, how would she situate Japanese American history in a context of racism and discrimination, and how internment ultimately served the interests of mainstream, white U.S. culture at the expense of Japanese Americans? And third, how would Evelyn even begin to address the compounding, cross-generational effects of internment if it is viewed as “ancient history,” which is to imply that there is no residue or impact on Japanese Americans
today? Although there may be many more questions that come to mind, Evelyn is essentially reflecting mainstream U.S. values in that the U.S. is a race-free, integrated society. To be fair, Evelyn has visited the Amache internment camp, the Japanese American National Museum (JANM) in Los Angeles, and has been to a few conventions about the treatment of Japanese Americans, so it is apparent that she has some degree of interest in internment. But it is perplexing that Evelyn is choosing to present (i.e., enact) herself as not overtly political, and is choosing to view Japanese culture as something that is separate from what from what I suspect she views as the “baggage” associated with internment.

_Cynthia Yamada._

Cynthia Yamada, a third generation Sansei in her late 70s, was born in the pre-internment era concurrent to WWII in which her immediate family evacuated the West Coast during the voluntary evacuation whereas two uncles were interned. As Evelyn’s friend (and interviewed together), Cynthia also maintained that she is more intrigued by Japanese cultural traditions and artifacts.

Accordingly, both Cynthia and Evelyn participate in a few of the same organizations (i.e., ukuleles club, mahjong club, the Buddhist Temple, etc.). They also share similar perspectives on how they connect to their communal identities as Japanese and Japanese Americans. That is to say, Cynthia and Evelyn both take pride in being (ethnically) Japanese and are fascinated by Japanese cultural traditions such as the festivals, eating Japanese food, and interacting with other Japanese Americans. Likewise, Cynthia also claimed that she has not experienced discrimination or felt bitterness against
the U.S. government for internment (more on this later), which certainly echoes Evelyn’s thoughts and mainstream interpretations. Cynthia, in contrast to Evelyn, grew up speaking Japanese with her parents and can still converse with others in an “easy Japanese”—meaning, the language that her grandparents spoke when they immigrated, but not the Japanese spoken presently in Japan as the language has considerably evolved. Furthermore, Cynthia communally identifies, in part, with a few cultural values that are embedded within the Japanese language, which may seem rather confusing and contradictory to those who prioritize direct communication. Below, Cynthia illustrates how she has (previously) adopted a Japanese cultural value in responding to questions using ambiguity and contradiction:

I understand the Japanese way. Do you find that… they’ll ask you a question—yes or no—they mean yes, but they’ll say *iie* [no] or *imimasu* [to refrain/avoid] or something? They say, “No, I do want it.” Or, “Yes, I don’t want it—*Hai, imimasen*.” They use opposites. They use yes and no in the same sentence, which means the last part is what they mean or something like that. Well like me, Evelyn won’t do what I do, but in younger days they’ll say, “Do you mind?” I say, “Uh yes, I don’t mind.” “Do you mind?” They’ll ask me again because I’m using yes and no at the same time. But now, I’m not that way.

Hence, Cynthia “understand[s] the Japanese way” as she has, in the past, replied to questions in a contradictory and incongruous manner of utilizing the yes-no response. However, Cynthia now understands that this method of response can unintentionally hurt other people’s feelings because one essentially has to guess which answer is the most
“correct” or “desired.” Consequently, Cynthia asserted that she is “not that way” anymore. Although Cynthia may not presently enact this Japanese cultural value, she can partially identify or at least sympathize with those who are confused by the ambiguous ways to interpret the phrase as she has some linguistic and cultural insight into the matter.

However, Cynthia’s communal identity cannot merely be characterized as Japanese per se as she asserted she is “not that Japanese,” but is rather a product of the multiple generational influences of Isseis, Niseis, Sanseis, and Yonseis as well as her “American ways.” However, the way in which Cynthia expressed herself—i.e., sharing her knowledge about Japanese culture, correcting Evelyn’s Japanese, commenting on the traditional Japanese food she likes, and the restaurant she used to own, etc.—suggests that being Japanese is a dominant, but not all encompassing, communal identity of hers. For example, Cynthia contended that her children are more Americanized than she is and “they don’t speak Japanese or understand the feeling of [being] Japanese because their feeling is Americanized.” While she realized that her children (similar to herself) have both American and Japanese ways, Cynthia juxtaposed her “Japaneseness” with her children’s “Americanness.” Thus, it is evident that, to some degree, Cynthia communally identifies as Japanese despite her intergenerational influences, which can be traced back to Japanese culture.

Jerry Matsuoka.

As noted earlier, Jerry is a successful man who pursued an athletic career in judo and has advocated for the preservation of Amache (see Appendix 7). Extending beyond his liking of the martial arts, Jerry has also been significantly involved in the local
Japanese American community and has been a member of numerous other organizations—i.e., the Buddhist Temple, Amache Remembrance, Denver Central Optimist Club, the Japanese Community Scholarship Program, and several others—all of which take part in constructing Jerry’s communal identity as Japanese and Japanese American.

Despite Jerry’s professional success and his acceptance from mainstream U.S. American culture, Jerry—like many other Japanese Americans—is bonded to the collective memory of internment. Even though Jerry is lauded within the local Japanese American community for his “correct attitude”—as opposed to the animosity or bitterness—towards internment, he is not indifferent or apolitical (like Evelyn and Cynthia) to the matter.

As the former president of the Denver Central Optimist Club, Jerry spearheaded the movement to preserve Amache, which was supposedly the last internment camp to be recognized: “It [was] the only one that was in weeds, in torment, in ruins, unrecognized. Nobody knew where it was.” The following excerpt demonstrates how Jerry rallied for community support to preserve the former internment camp:

I talked to each member privately at their homes, at their businesses, and I simply asked him, “If your parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, or uncles died at Amache, would you vote affirmative in trying to do something about it?” “Oh, absolutely Jerry, absolutely.” I said, “For those that died in WWII, the 442\textsuperscript{nd}, the 100\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, or the Military Intelligence Service, did they die in vain? They [the fallen soldiers] got relatives at Amache and we don’t have the time, energy, or
wherewithal to do something about Amache? Do you think that’s right or wrong?” “Oh, Jerry it’d be wrong!” “Well, can I count on you…when the vote comes to vote affirmative?” So when I talk[ed] to each individual in that perspective … [the vote] went unanimous. Prior to that … 70 to 75% said no. They didn’t want to preserve it because they felt that would bring more animosity and make the American public feel bad for what they did, the incarceration...We got to proceed simply to educate the American public of what transpired so that this atrocity will never happen [again].

Jerry’s proactive method in garnering support for Amache’s preservation has proven to be fruitful as he persuaded other members that it was indeed the right thing to do. One objective in pushing for its preservation was to “educate the American public” about internment so as to prevent another such atrocity from happening again. In order to work towards this goal, Jerry had to prevail over status quo opinions and initial opposition to Amache’s preservation, which essentially served the interests of the U.S. government as it was believed that this would “bring more animosity and make the American public feel bad for” internment. Through the means of personalization (e.g., “If your parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, or uncles died at Amache…”), Jerry successfully persuaded other members of the Denver Central Optimist Club to vote “Yes” in the measure to preserve the camp. As Jerry mobilized his social networks, the issue received news exposure, and the organization was able to raise thousands of dollars to support the preservation (among other partnering organizations). Thus, Jerry’s leadership demonstrates his identification
with the Japanese American community, especially for those who are bonded by the historical memory of internment.

In summary, the narratives of Evelyn, Cynthia, and Jerry suggest that each relates to their communal identity in (slightly) different ways. Both Evelyn and Cynthia claim that Japanese cultural traditions and artifacts (e.g., Japanese food, festivals, and entertainment) take precedence for them in being Japanese American and Japanese, rather than the historical memory of internment. Due to their political and ideological decisions to distance themselves from internment, Evelyn and Cynthia’s relation to the Japanese American community is unique because they are suggesting that internment has not impacted them nor is it relevant to their daily lives. However, their interpretations reflect mainstream U.S. culture in that they are metaphorically erasing the injustice and compounding effects of internment from Japanese American culture, but instead are suggesting that Japanese cultural traditions are far more intriguing and central to the community. On the other hand, Jerry has shown that being Japanese American for him is tied up in the historical memory of internment as he proactively fought to preserve the Amache internment camp so that the public could see with their eyes, envision the injustice, and continue to educate future generations as well as the greater U.S. community about internment. Although Evelyn, Cynthia, and Jerry do not seem to be drawn to the Japanese American community for the same reasons, internment has had an effect on the way in which they relate to their collective identities.

So far, participants’ experiences have been analyzed according to each of the four identity frames in CTI: personal, enacted, relational, and communal. Although some of
these narratives alluded to the dissonance one may experience in their identities from interacting with other people, identity gaps specifically address these tensions.

**Identity Gaps**

An identity gap refers to the discrepancies that are felt among or between constituent parts of one’s identity. Identity gaps are applied in relation to the four identity frames in CTI and have numerous analytical possibilities: such as, personal-enacted, personal-relational, personal-communal, enacted-relational, enacted-communal, relational-communal, personal-enacted-relational, personal-relational-communal, personal-enacted-communal, and enacted-relational-communal identity gaps. This research, however, focuses only on a few of the identity gaps (and is therefore not comprehensive) in order to extrapolate on some key examples.

**Personal-communal identity gap.**

The personal-communal identity gap occurs when there is some discrepancy between one’s personal and communal identity. Two examples of this identity gap will be explored that includes: (1) The impact of Japanese cultural values on generational Japanese Americans, in general; and (2) the presumed value for individual Japanese Americans to speak Japanese, in specific.

*James Hashimoto.*

In what could be attributed to a disconnect between one’s self-concept and the (supposed) deep-rooted cultural values of one’s ethnic heritage, James—the journalist who writes about Japanese and Japanese American culture—presented his take on the matter below,
For Japanese Americans,—even if we think that we’re white or even if we’re not that connected or even if we don’t want to go to Japan—our cultural DNA, our values, intrinsic values, tend to be those Japanese values that our parents gave us, who got theirs from their grandparents and then from their grandparents who were immigrants at the time.

Hence, James asserted that no matter how distant individual Japanese Americans may feel (or be) from Japanese culture, they remain tied to their ancestral Japanese cultural “DNA” and “intrinsic” values. With that said, one should exercise caution in the consideration of James’ opinion so as to avoid an over-generalization. His perspective is presented in order to consider the possible ways one might experience an identity gap.

On an individual level, James addressed the notion that some Japanese Americans may feel white, disconnected, and/or lack the desire to go to Japan—which, by implication, can distinguish them collectively from the dominant (or perceived to be) group of ethnic Japanese. James insisted that Japanese Americans “are” connected to “their” Japanese cultural values precisely due to the generational transmission of values; however, the extent of their connection is not clear. One example of this is exemplified in Kent’s account as he noted that he sometimes felt “schizophrenic because there were values that [he] had that [he] didn’t totally understand.” Hence, Kent’s values were somewhat “innate” or “intrinsic” to him—i.e., they were passed down, taught, and internalized. In effect, individuals may feel the need to examine, question, or even reject their supposed cultural values, thus creating a personal-communal identity gap. The process of transmitting cultural values, beliefs, customs, and traditions to younger
generations is not unique to any one cultural group though. What is noteworthy, however, is the notion that Japanese Americans’ cultural values are filtered through the broader context of internment and WWII.

To further elaborate what he meant, James noted that the Japanese cultural values of *gaman* and *shikataganai*—loosely translated as “patiently endure” and “it cannot be helped,” respectively—helped Japanese Americans survive during internment, yet has hurt them occupationally and in other contexts.\(^{12}\)

When we should be speaking out and complaining or just kicking butt, we’re going *gaman*—just bite the bullet, just work hard. You have a bad boss—*shikataganai*—it can’t be helped, so just keep working through it. A white co-worker wouldn’t do that. They have an innate sense of achievement and competition. They don’t have these deep rooted cultural values that are designed to hold them back, but those values really helped the community deal with what was happening to them during internment. It’s such a weird dynamic to have these *[cultural values]* that can help us in certain contexts, but hurt us in others.

According to James, *gaman* and *shikataganai* are “deep rooted cultural values”—i.e., Japanese cultural values that have been passed down throughout generations—that seem to have a paradoxical effect as they “help us [Japanese Americans] in certain contexts, but hurt us in others.” Although *gaman* and *shikataganai* may have helped former

\(^{12}\) *Gaman* and *shikataganai*, however, are contested terms as to their meanings and impact during internment. While many scholars claim that these cultural values worked to suppress speaking out against the U.S. government and are signified to mean a passive acceptance of injustice, others maintain that these cultural values helped internees to cope with the psychological damage they experienced, which then allowed many internees to form and/or verbalize their critique of internment (Shimabukuro, 2011).
internees deal with internment by continually moving forward, not losing hope, and patiently enduring until justice was served, James contended that they have—at the same time—presented challenges for some Japanese Americans to succeed in the workplace and in the greater, U.S. community. Such obstacles are not easily overcome, according to James’ view, given that they are attributed to be “deep rooted cultural values that are designed to hold [us] back.” While James’ assessment certainly can be debated in greater detail, it is important to note that individual Japanese Americans can experience a personal-communal identity gap on a cultural level.

On another note, an archetypical example of the personal-communal identity gap pertains to how individual members of a collective can be ascribed with certain cultural values derived from their ethnic or cultural heritage, irrespective of those who may be generations removed. Given that the participants in this study are racially, ethnically, culturally, or nationally, etc. a part of the collective group of Japanese or Japanese Americans, many have been assumed to or they feel like they ought to speak Japanese. The assumption to speak Japanese, however, often reflects common sense notions of what it means to be ethnically Japanese. That is to say, individuals may feel the need to learn the language of their ethnic heritage in order to become acculturated as Japanese—which is often determined by the mainstream culture and norms, but can also be perpetuated by outsiders’ stereotypes and presumptions. In fact, half of the participants interviewed for this study (i.e., Michelle, Kathryn, Angela, Kent, Evelyn) contended that they either do not speak or only know minimal Japanese: “I know I should learn Japanese, but I don’t” (Evelyn), and “As far as my expertise in [Japanese], it’s not very good”
(Kent). Thus, these participants have expressed dissonance at the fact that they personally do not speak Japanese. In effect, they have perceived their collective identity as ethnically Japanese in a somewhat different or “unauthentic” manner due to their personal differentiation from the collective (more examples related to this later).

As an aside, James (the journalist) noted during our interview that there are different expectations for whites compared with Japanese Americans to speak Japanese in Japan. For whites, James maintained that they are not expected to speak the language due to their *foreigner* status, and if they can speak Japanese, they are treated like celebrities. On the other hand, Japanese Americans, in James’ view, are expected to speak Japanese because of their racially marked Japanese bodies even though they, too, are foreigners in Japan. As a white U.S. American, I was lauded by the Japanese for speaking the very few words I knew at the time when I travelled to Japan. They were patient with me when I mispronounced words and they even insisted that my Japanese was good even though it was not. My white privilege essentially exempted me from knowing how to speak the language correctly, and I was instead warmly received into the culture. Unfortunately, this is not always the case for some Japanese Americans as their acceptance into Japanese culture can be contingent upon their ability to speak their “native” tongue, among other factors.

Turning now to specific cases of participants’ capabilities to speak Japanese, the next identity gap addresses what happens when one enacts their sense of self, yet their communal identifications are different than others’ presumptions.
**Enacted-relational-communal identity gap.**

An enacted-relational-communal identity gap can occur when one performs their sense of self in an interaction with other people, yet other’s presumptions about one’s communal identity may be different than one’s own (or dominant) communal identifications, thus creating dissonance.

**Sophia Akiyama.**

Sophia Akiyama, a fourth generation Yonsei, was born in Japan during the post-internment era in which none of her family members were interned. Sophia is nationally Japanese, but culturally more American. Nevertheless, she “embraces the confusion” of her bicultural identity.

Although Sophia was born in Okayama, Japan, she was raised in San Diego, California. Despite the fact that Sophia lived in Japan for just six weeks, she still claims her Japanese citizenship along with the rest of her family and regularly visits her extended family in Japan every other year. Compared with other participants in this study, Japanese is Sophia’s first language as it is the main language she speaks with her family both in the U.S. and in Japan. Needless to say, Sophia is fairly comfortable speaking Japanese, and she culturally identifies in some ways as Japanese (e.g., nationally, some religious beliefs). However, she has spent the majority of her life living in the U.S. and insists that she is “culturally more American” (emphasis added).

During one of her visits to Japan, Sophia (correctly) asked a question in Japanese to some strangers, yet the nature of the question coupled with her appearance as “native Japanese” resulted in an enacted-relational-communal identity gap:
For me [Japanese is] my first language so I don’t have an accent, but my vocabulary is limited. I don’t know my geography in Japan. So we’re at a train station and to say, “Oh, what train do I need to get onto to go to…” For them, they can’t imagine a 20-something year old having to ask how to get somewhere and if it’s in perfect Japanese it’s all the more confusing to them…People always ask me, “Why do you not know how to get somewhere?” Very few people will have the courage, but I’ve definitely had people ask or I’ll say it [that I’m American] because I can tell they’re questioning me, and they have all these questions for me running through their head.

Although Sophia is a foreigner in Japan, she contended that “foreigner” is not what typically comes to mind in the eyes of native Japanese when they see her. Sophia is aware that she looks Japanese, and while she can speak Japanese without an accent, she does not know her geography. It follows that, Sophia should know, as the reasoning goes, how to navigate though Japan without the help of an adult as she in her late 20s (e.g., “People always ask me, ‘Why do you not know how to get somewhere?’”). However, Sophia did not grow up in Japan nor does she live there.

Sophia enacted her Japaneseness by conversing with others in Japanese fluently (for the most part), yet the stranger’s incorrect presumptions about her ethnic identity and linguistic ability as a “native Japanese” led her to experience an enacted-communal identity gap. She also experienced an identity gap relationally in this interaction given that people have questioned her and she is particularly conscious of what people might be thinking about her (e.g., “I can tell they’re questioning me, and they have all these
questions for me running through their head”). Sophia then felt the need to clarify that she is an American to the people who seem curious or who are perhaps judging her for not knowing her geography in Japan as one who looks Japanese (e.g., “I’ve definitely had people ask or I’ll say it”). Consequently, it is apparent that Sophia experienced an enacted-relational-communal identity gap during interactions like this while in Japan.

In contextualizing why these strangers seemed to be confused by Sophia’s inability to navigate through Japan, Sophia maintained that some Japanese do not know much about Japanese Americans and “assume that if you look Japanese and you can’t speak the language that you have some sort of disability.” More to the point, Sophia attributed this assumption to a lack of historical understanding—among not just Japanese culture, but also mainstream U.S. American culture—about the internment of Japanese Americans and the compounding effects it had on the generations. Thus, internment has impacted the extent to which individuals desire to or possess the ability to speak (native) Japanese.

Shifting now to cases where participants have struggled to learn and speak Japanese, the following two identity gaps address the tensions that one may encounter among other aspects of their identities.

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13 In Japan and in similar types of interactions, Sophia has found that it is easier to say that she is an American, yet identifies as Japanese when she is in the U.S., which is a testament to the context-dependent and fluid nature of identity: “When I go to Japan, I say I’m American… but in the U.S., I don’t say that I’m American because it just provides a context to people.”
**Personal-enacted-communal identity gap.**

The personal-enacted-communal identity gap corresponds to a discrepancy among one’s self-concept, how one performs their sense of self, and their membership as part of a collective.

*Angela Fukui.*

Angela, who dropped out of Japanese language school yet enjoys being immersed in a Japanese cultural setting when participating in *aikido*, explained to me what happened when she has enacted her ability (or lack thereof) to speak Japanese. While she was shopping inside a Japanese marketplace in the U.S., Angela gathered that she won a prize from a raffle drawing, yet she could not understand what was said as it was all in Japanese:

> That was a problem because I realized that I won, but I didn’t know what they were saying. It was like [laughs], “Uhh, puraizu [prize]?” Finally, they got someone who spoke English, but it was tough because I won and they would all ring the bell. Ahhh! I don’t know what you say for congratulations, but… I was bowing a lot because I was just frantically nervous. I’m bowing to everyone saying, “Help me! Help me! I don’t speak Nihongo [Japanese]. *Wakarimasen!* *Wakarimasen!* [I don’t understand! I don’t understand!]*

Although Angela performed “Japaneseness” by speaking the Japanese she knew and by “frantically” bowing, it is evident that Angela does not personally identify with the ascribed collective value of speaking Japanese—that is to say, fluently or proficiently. Said another way, Angela attempted to communally identify as Japanese precisely
through her enactment; however, Angela experienced dissonance as she personally could not respond in ways that she desired to. Therefore, Angela experienced a gap among her personal-enacted-communal identities when she attempted to speak Japanese at a Japanese marketplace, which falls outside of Angela’s personal relation to the collective group of ethnically Japanese. This situation can become further problematic if one desires to speak the language(s) of their ethnic heritage as a means of identifying with a collective, yet has no one to speak the language with, thereby resulting in a personal-relational-communal identity gap.

**Personal-relational-communal identity gap.**

When there is some disparity among one’s personal, relational, and communal identities, it follows that a personal-relational-communal identity gap is experienced.

*Kathryn Fujimoto.*

Kathryn, who was raised without Japanese cultural traditions, told me about her experiences speaking Japanese. Kathryn’s explanation is detailed below:

I tried to learn Japanese once. I think I got as far as telling time. Then I said, “Screw this!” There are times when I wish I knew and I always tell myself that this is a deficiency and I need to correct that. But I never quite get to it… Frankly, one of the reasons why I haven’t pursued that is, who would I speak with? Especially the postwar Japanese Americans, most of them my age, they know about as much as I do about the culture.

As a member of the collective group of ethnic Japanese, Kathryn felt—to some extent—that she should learn Japanese (e.g., “There are times when I wish I knew”). As noted
earlier in the results (i.e., the personal frame), Kathryn contended that she was raised in a “diluted set of circumstances” where she was “deliberately...raised without the language, culture, [and] the traditions.” Hence, growing up in the post-internment generation partially explains her inability to speak Japanese, to which she assessed as a “deficiency” that should be “corrected.” Kathryn’s pursuit in learning Japanese could have also been halted due to the difficulty and frustration in learning another language (e.g., “I got as far as telling time. Then I said, ‘Screw this!’”). However, the greater issue appears to be a lack of relational connections with people—namely, ethnic Japanese—who she can speak Japanese with. For Kathryn, learning Japanese seems to be no less than impractical given that she has no one to speak the language with. She also quickly eliminated the possibility of speaking Japanese with other postwar Japanese Americans (in the Denver community) because “they know about as much as I do about the culture.” Even if there were a few Japanese Americans who she could speak Japanese with, Kathryn does not really have friends who are Japanese Americans, but who are instead acquaintances. Moreover, learning Japanese may be of interest to individual members of the collective group of ethnic Japanese, yet a lack of relational connections with others who can also speak Japanese can lead one to experience a personal-relational-communal identity gap.

In a somewhat different vein, the personal-relational-communal identity gap can also depict interactions where other people make premature or incorrect judgments about one’s communal identity, of which one personally does not relate to or has become unaware of (e.g., racial appearance, ethnic identity). Therefore, a gap among one’s personal, relational, and communal identities emerges.
A frequent situation cited by participants (namely, Kathryn, James, and Sophia) reflected the nature of people (presumably strangers) making comments such as, “Where are you from?” and “Your English is really good.” Although these comments may appear to be innocent or merely inquisitive, they are problematic as they assume that people of color are not from here—that is, the U.S. In particular, the question, “Where are you from,” assumes that one should respond with an answer—not necessarily in relation to one’s geographic location of birth or hometown—but rather in relation to one’s race (or ethnicity) as the comment is likely to be racially motivated or involves some internalized probing of that nature (Kibria, 2000). Similarly, the comment, “Your English is really good,” is underscored with surprise and shock at the level of seemingly proficient English coming from a perceived “foreigner.” Consequently, this is a form of the perpetual foreigner stereotype that upholds white U.S. Americans as the dominant group simultaneously while “Othering” certain racial and ethnic groups who have, in fact, lived in the U.S. for generations.

After expressing her frustration towards hearing the above comments on numerous occasions, Kathryn was taken aback as her race has become invisible to her, yet was (or is) quite apparent to other people: “Sometimes I really do forget that I’m Japanese. I can’t see what the hell I look like [to others].” In effect, Kathryn has experienced an identity gap on numerous levels. First, the notion of being Japanese is not a part of Kathryn’s self-concept as she was not raised with Japanese cultural traditions, does not know the language, and has never lived in Japan. Since she does not have these cultural values or practice the traditions, Kathryn does not, in her view, personally
identify herself as “Japanese.” Second, which is related to the first, Kathryn does not communally identify with the collective group of Japanese as she does not know (many) native Japanese and does not participate in exclusively Japanese organizations in the community. Third, Kathryn also experienced relational dissonance during the interaction itself as people’s comments have worked to “Other” her, perhaps unknowingly. In spite of looking Japanese (or just Asian) to others, Kathryn is not Japanese. She does not feel connected to the overall Japanese community and does not resonate with (many) Japanese cultural values on a personal level. Thus, a personal-relational-communal identity gap can be experienced as a result of others’ preconceived notions.

As I contemplated about these stories, I could not overlook the same tendency in my own thought processes. I have noticed that I, all too often, make educated guesses as to what a person’s race, last name, or language spoken signifies about their (possible) ethnicity. While I have become more conscious of my own preconceived notions in the past few years, I cannot stress enough how problematic this is because people of color are frequently asked these types of questions, which can further exacerbate their “Otherness” from dominate white U.S. American culture. In my view, “Where are you from” and “Your English is really good” can also function as preconditions for racial discrimination because these comments (indirectly) affirm whites to be “the true” and “accepted” racial group in the U.S., which can render other minority and racial groups into the margins of inferiority.

Notwithstanding, another example of the personal-relational-communal identity gap pertains to people assuming that individual Japanese Americans have some direct
link with internment solely on the basis that they are a member of the culture—in which one might arrive at such a conclusion through a racial or ethnic categorization.

Angela Fukui.

In the quotation below, Angela—whose family was interned and became more interested in internment after her father’s death—elaborated what went through her mind when people have apologized to her on behalf of the U.S. government’s imprisonment of Japanese Americans:

Now lately, people come up and apologize, which I don’t know if that’s better or worse [laughs]. I wasn’t there! I usually just say, “Thank you.” But sometimes I’m tempted to say, “Well you know, let’s see whose left: my mom. Okay, you can fly to LA and apologize to my mom because she was in the camp. Basically, they’re the ones who were there. I wasn’t there!”

While people may be guided by an honest intent (or whatever the motivation) to acknowledge the injustices of their government’s wrongdoings, the apology—on behalf one people group to another—did not register with Angela because she “wasn’t there.”

Even though Angela politely says “thank you” when people apologize to her—as a Japanese American—for internment, the apology was out of place given that Angela was not interned. Angela’s mother, on the other hand, was interned and is still alive. Thus, the better person to be on the receiving end of the apology is Angela’s mother or other people who have actually been interned, not Angela. That is not to suggest, however, that former internees will be receptive to the apology either as the experiences and interpretations differs among internees.
For the above reasons, it seems that Angela has experienced an identity gap among her personal, relational, and communal identities. In particular, there is a disconnect between Angela’s personal and communal identity given that she has not been interned, yet she is part of the collective group of Japanese Americans who are typically thought of in relation to this historical memory. To further complicate the situation, people have offered apologies to Angela for an injustice that Angela has no direct experiences with, which seems to have created some (perceived) relational dissonance during other such interactions. Hence, a personal-relational-communal identity gap transpired.

In brief, identity gaps have sought to explore the dissonance or gaps one may feel among constituent parts of their identities in social interactions. For participants in this study, many have experienced identity gaps in relation to their ability to speak Japanese and simply because they look Japanese. A huge contributor to the gaps experienced often arose from stereotypes as well as ascribed and presumed cultural values. While the above examples only presented a glimpse into some of the tensions individuals regularly encounter among different aspects of their identities, the concept is useful in conceptualizing identity as an entity that involves conflict and contradiction.

Related to identity gaps, the concept of critical-cultural hybridity also addresses the tensions individuals feel among their identities, yet focuses more on dissonance as it pertains to one’s race, ethnicity, culture, and nationality.
Critical-Cultural Hybridity

Critical-cultural hybridity is a theoretical concept utilized in this research that combines interpretive and critical perspectives of hybridity. In its interpretive usage, cultural hybridity captures the multiplicity, overlapping, conflicting, and/or contradictory nature of one’s racial, ethnic, and cultural identities, which are commonly associated with (though not necessarily exclusive to) the experiences of generational immigrants who have mixed ethnic heritages. Cultural hybridity can be applied in contexts where individuals collectively identify as “both/and” as well as “neither/nor”—i.e., both Japanese and American, neither Japanese nor American, respectively (Moreman, 2005; Young, 2009). From a critical perspective, critical hybridity is employed in order to situate narratives of cultural hybridity within their respective sociopolitical and historical contexts. Likewise, critical hybridity is attuned to issues of dominance, power, ideology, and hegemony.

James Hashimoto.

In a “dual cultural upbringing” of Japanese and American influences, James—who lived in Japan for eight years and is now a journalist who writes about Japanese and Japanese American culture—found himself (in retrospect) to be intrigued, yet conflicted by his cultural values. James insisted that his upbringing was significantly more Japanese than the typical Japanese American family in Denver because he lived in Japan, ate Japanese food on a regular basis, and observed Japanese cultural traditions (e.g., taking off shoes inside the house). Outside of his house and as a teenager, James mainly associated with whites as he had an American education at a U.S. military base in Japan,
and knew no other Asians when he moved to the U.S. and on throughout high school. While one may postulate how James’ dual cultural upbringing might have clashed at times, James did not perceive any tension among his cultural identities then (e.g., “My identity was never in question”). As previously indicated, James’ Japanese American identity became pertinent to him after his father passed away (see this analysis in the relationship frame section for a more detailed elaboration).

James is now, in general, comfortable expressing himself as a cultural (hybrid) mix between being Japanese, American, and Japanese American—thus, a multicultural identification. Even when he visits Japan, James confidently enacts his identity:

In like two or three days I can at least have a conversation [in Japanese]… and do okay even though they can tell I’m not really Japanese because of my accent or because I walk like an American. I dress like an American. I’m too loud, too loose.

I still like it.

While James may feel relatively comfortable in Japan, he acknowledged that other Japanese Americans may be more hesitant and self-conscious in similar situations (see identity gaps for illustrations of this). James is well aware that he walks, dresses, and carries himself as an American, yet he still visits Japan and converses with people in Japanese. Unlike the majority of the participants in this study, James was raised in Japan and can speak Japanese better than most (but not all) participants, which may be contributing factors as to why he is relatively comfortable expressing himself in Japan.

On another note, James pursued a journalism career and has written extensively about Japanese American culture and internment (e.g., “Because I had the opportunity
and… I was a little big mouth, I became the voice… I hope that it projects to other Japanese Americans’), which he thought was a rare move for the typical Japanese American in relation to the public visibility and the possible consequences for doing so. James appreciates the “two-way street of culture,” the trading and mixing of Japanese and U.S. American culture as he claims it makes Japanese Americans “cooler.” It is therefore apparent that James identifies with both Japanese and U.S. American culture as well as Japanese American culture. Hence, James embraces a multiplicity of cultural identities, as maintained in cultural hybridity.

That is not to suggest, however, that James has attained a sense of belonging in either U.S. American or Japanese culture. On the contrary, James empathizes with the struggles, tension, and energy it takes to juggle conflicting cultural values. Below, James articulates his feelings of non-belongingness that can also be characteristic of other bicultural and multicultural individuals as well:

The sad part of feeling like you don’t belong in Japan when you’re Japanese American is that you’re often reminded that you don’t belong in the U.S. because of racism, because of this sense of being “the Other,” because of not seeing people like us in politics, unless you’re from California or Hawaii. Not seeing people like us on TV… To me, American means white. That’s the crux of Asian American identity issues is that we are not quite accepted as Americans, and yet we’re too American to be Japanese.

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14 As an aside, Japanese American culture could be read as a “third space,” that is, a new or different culture that emerged from the mixing of Japanese and U.S. American culture.
The historical context of racism, being “Othered,” little exposure in media and politics, and “not being Japanese enough” are just a few reasons why, according to James, many Japanese Americans may not feel like they belong in Japan or in the U.S. Alternatively, James begs the question: If America means “white” and Japan means “Japanese,” where do Japanese Americans belong? In the absence of a perceived sense of belongingness with either culture, Japanese Americans may be rendered into a “third space”—an in-between space, a space that presents more challenges than it solves. Despite previous literature that esteems third cultures (or the “third space”) to be unique, opportunistic, cooperative, border-crossing, and a “harmonization” of cultures into a cohesive whole (Sunman Lee, 2006; McEwan & Sobre-Denton, 2011; Patel, 2004), this research takes on the view that third cultures are not absent of struggle and conflict, nor are they to be conflated with some assimilative phenomena as that would erase the realities that many bicultural individuals face (Halualani, 2008). Implicitly, James presents a critique about the dominant group in the U.S. (i.e., “To me, America means white”), and “authenticity” (i.e., “we’re too American to be Japanese”). In sum, James’ profound sense of pride in being Japanese American is contrasted with the struggle to become integrated within both U.S. American and Japanese culture.

**Sophia Akiyama.**

Sophia, who “embraces the confusion” of her bicultural identity, was born in Japan yet raised in the U.S. Again, Japanese is Sophia’s first language and is the only language she speaks with her family. During her childhood in San Diego, Sophia and her brother attended both an American school during the weekdays and a Japanese school on
Saturdays because returning to Japan was still a possibility then. However, Sophia did not adjust well to her Japanese school from about fourth grade on partially because the school was designed for Japanese immigrants who were in the U.S. on a temporary basis (i.e., two or three years). At her American school, she was sometimes bullied and teased because of the food she ate and the language she spoke. Below, Sophia describes some of the tensions she experienced:

Culturally growing up, I was really torn between figuring out what my identity was and I didn’t get along very well with the kids who were at my Japanese school. So the majority of the people, my friends, people who I considered to be my friends were from my American school and they were of mixed backgrounds… I was very Americanized in [the] eyes of my [Japanese school peers], the outlier of the class. I was never Japanese enough for my Japanese school peers and not American enough for my American school peers.

Sophia’s struggle to “discover” her identity could perhaps be analyzed as a typical adolescent phase; yet, her identity struggle was exacerbated by the demands of her bicultural education, competing cultural values, and her peer’s expectations. As a result, Sophia did not fit into the normative molds of being “Japanese” or “American”—i.e., cultural hybridity’s “neither/nor” dynamic—as she was considered to be “very Americanized, “never Japanese enough,” “the outlier of the class,” and “not American enough” by her peers (respectively). On the contrary, Sophia felt that she fit in better with people of mixed backgrounds as opposed to the ethnic groups she “belonged” to. Thus,
Sophia’s predicament corresponds with the tensions, in-between spaces, and the “third space” that bicultural individuals can be situated in or forced into.

As an added dimension in her identity struggle, Sophia recalled learning about Pearl Harbor in her American school while she was taught about the atomic bombs at her Japanese school. She noted that “it was just confusing for me to know what actually happened and why one [was] emphasized more than the other depending on which history book I [was] reading.” Certainly, the ways in which history is written can often reflect the power of dominant group as they attempt to determine “official” narratives while silencing others. Wartime animosity between the U.S. and Japan not only affected Sophia intellectually as she struggled to learn what exactly happened during WWII, but also extended to a personal level as her grandparents lived in Hiroshima and Tokyo during the atomic and fire bombings. In particular, her maternal grandparents suffered the loss of their home at it was burned to the ground due to the fire bombings in Tokyo. Needless to say, her grandparents still harbor some bitterness—albeit, decreasing over the years—towards her parents who moved to the U.S. (e.g., “To think, how can you go to the country that bombed us?”). All of this contributed to Sophia’s confusion and struggle to figure out who she was. Consequently, Sophia equated her childhood and adolescence with “WWII and internment [where she] didn’t want to be Japanese.”

In retrospect, Sophia is thankful that she went to Japanese language school in order to learn about her language and culture as she is “proud to be Japanese” and “loves Japan.” When she moved to Denver in 2008, she became more involved in Japanese American and Pan-Asian American organizations (i.e., Japanese American Citizens
League (JACL), Asian Round Table, Asian Pacific Development Center, National Association of Asian American Professionals, Buddhist Temple, etc.) where she started to realize “how Japanese [she] actually” is and contemplated her core values. Yet still to this day, Sophia claims that “culturally, I’m just not someone who would do well in the Japanese community [in Japan]” which is juxtaposed with her love for Japan. Hence, Sophia does not **entirely** identify as Japanese, but insists that she is culturally more American and is “more of a global citizen.” For instance, Sophia is drawn to diversity and the “more progressive mindsets…in the U.S.” (e.g., the disability community, multiracial families, and the LGBTQ community), which she maintains, Japan is slow in accepting.

At the same time, Sophia does not consider herself “Japanese American” per se as the term suggests to her—at least within the Denver Japanese American community—that one was born in the U.S. and is therefore a U.S. citizen, which Sophia is not. Even though Sophia does not identify as a Japanese American, she has enjoyed interacting with the local community, particularly through the JACL, as she desires to bridge the gap between the Japanese and Japanese American community.

Nevertheless, Sophia “embraces the confusion” of her bicultural identity in that she does not “have to choose whether [she is] Japanese or American.” In other words, Sophia **partially** identifies with both cultures and thus, embraces a multiplicity of conflicting identities.

In summary, James and Sophia both exemplify the pride, struggles, and tensions they feel in being bicultural. James’ account focused on his dual cultural upbringing, his
relative ease in expressing his hybrid identity as well as his struggle to attain a sense of belonging in both U.S. and Japanese cultures. On the other hand, Sophia’s narrative directed more attention towards her conflicting cultural identities as she is not entirely Japanese, Japanese American, or U.S. American, yet she identifies with and/or values these cultures in varying ways. Although critical-cultural hybridity and CTI along with identity gaps are thematically similar in a number of ways (e.g., partial, overlapping, conflicting identifications that causes tension in one’s identity and that one has to negotiate), critical-cultural hybridity, in my view, is more explicit towards one’s simultaneously multiple identifications with cultural and ethnic communities.

Thus far, the theoretical concepts of CTI, identity gaps, and critical-cultural hybridity have been employed in order to understand the nature of Japanese American identity for participants in this study. Each theoretical concept illuminates different (albeit, overlapping) elements and layers of participants’ identities in consideration of identity as a dynamic and complex entity, and not to mention, the vast amount of diversity within Japanese American culture. As a recap, CTI conceptualized identity by examining four distinct, albeit overlapping dimensions of oneself: the personal frame, enacted frame, relationship frame, and the communal frame. Identity gaps were then utilized to explicate the dissonance one experiences and negotiates through communication when interacting with others. Lastly, critical-cultural hybridity specifically addressed how one makes sense out of their multiple, intersecting, and/or conflicting racial, ethnic, national, and cultural identities. In order to present these findings in a synthesized manner, the research questions are now addressed.
**Research Question 1: How has internment and the personal experiences of Japanese Americans shaped their identities?**

Eight out of 10 Japanese Americans in this study were either interned or had family members who were interned. Of the eight, two were interned as young children (i.e., Michelle and Charles). All participants condemned internment and insisted that it must not be forgotten lest another racial or ethnic group be imprisoned again, but some were more critical than others (i.e., Michelle, James, Kathryn, and Sophia).

Although internment has had a continual and profound impact on Michelle’s identity (e.g., “the most defining part of my life”) that extends to nearly all other facets of her identity, the experience has had little resonance with Charles. Indeed, Michelle was the most critical as she claimed that internment was deeply “traumatizing” to her whereas Charles maintained that he was “too young” and did not perceive that camp greatly impacted his sense of self. Consequently, Charles has not become overly critical toward the U.S. government for internment.

For James and Angela, the deaths of their fathers have made them curious about their family’s history during WWII and internment in particular, yet have also led them to become more interested in these historical events in general. However, James was led to a deeper introspection of his Japanese American identity: “It took my dad getting cancer and dying before I realized that, holy shit, I’ve never even thought about my identity! … I’m this and that, but being a Japanese American wasn’t a part of how I described myself.” One reason for this was that James was, as a journalist, already thinking and writing about his experiences prior to his father’s death. Through the influence of his
wife and as he heard more stories from the local community, James started to and continues to write about internment. Angela, on the other hand, does not have many relationships with ethnic Japanese except for her family (e.g., “I don’t know any…Maybe there are some… [But] I just don’t know any”) and is not as active in the local community compared with James. Notwithstanding, Angela participates in the Japanese martial art aikido in which she was able to establish a closer relationship with her (now deceased) father, meet other Asian Americans, and immerse herself in Japanese cultural traditions.

Similar to James, both Kent and Kathryn confronted internment as a means to accept their identities as Japanese Americans: “I started trying to figure out who I was and what happened” (Kent) and “I think [confronting internment] had more to do with this concept of accepting who I was” (Kathryn). Not long after his identity search, Kent met his wife (now deceased) who had a tremendous impact on him, and she even encouraged him to become active in the local community (e.g., “She said ‘it’s a duty of anybody to try to help the community as best as you can and I think you should join up’”). However, it took Kathryn much longer to accept her Japanese American identity given that she was not raised with Japanese cultural traditions, but also because she has had to grapple with her difference from the mainstream Japanese American community with respect to her family’s reputation, class, as well as her gender and sexual identity. For the previous reasons, Kathryn is not as involved in the local community, but she is active in one organization (i.e., Friends of Amache) that works to preserve the former internment camp, Amache.
Following a similar sense of difference yet experienced in other ways, Sophia’s family and history, bicultural education, and conflicting cultural values posed numerous challenges for her to: (1) know what actually happened during WWII; (2) fit in with her peers at her schools; and (3) determine her identity. Sophia has learned, however, through her involvement in the Denver Japanese American community to embrace both her Japanese and American identities in spite of the contradictions she feels between her identities (e.g., “I sort of embraced the confusion. I don’t have to choose whether I’m Japanese or American…. [I] can be both”). Consequently, Sophia has taken leadership positions in numerous organizations (in particular, the JACL) in which she aims to educate and bridge the gap between Japanese and Japanese American culture.

Unlike Sophia, Jerry was accepted among his peers and has even been accepted into mainstream U.S. American culture. More than that, Jerry has experienced a greater degree of upward mobility due to his class and through his numerous professional accomplishments, which has clearly impacted how he relates to his identity (e.g., “Among the third generation of Japanese Americans, I’ve accomplished more than most of them. … [And I was] able to succeed in the American mainstream”). Similar to Sophia in relation to his leadership in the local community, Jerry was instrumental in advocating for the preservation of Amache, though he was shielded from internment: “Most people were [initially] against [preserving Amache]… I talked to each member privately at their homes, at their businesses…When it came [time] to vote, it went unanimous.”

In contrast, Evelyn and Cynthia are primarily drawn to the local community in order to interact with other Japanese Americans, but also to practice and preserve
Japanese cultural traditions: “I’m just trying to hold onto cultural things” (Evelyn) and “I like to keep the Japanese tradition” (Cynthia). Accordingly, they posited that internment and WWII has had little to no impact on their self-concepts: “I wasn’t [interned]…so I don’t know or have that bitterness because we never experienced it….We were free to do whatever we wanted” (Cynthia) and “[Internment] was just ancient history for us teenagers growing up…It ha[d] no bearing on who we are today” (Evelyn). Precisely due of their dissociations from internment, however, Evelyn and Cynthia are reinforcing mainstream interpretations and the power of dominant culture in viewing the impact of the internment (i.e., with respect to it creating compounding effects on the generations, even for those who did not directly experience it) as over-exaggerated and not as harsh as some may claim. In doing so, Evelyn and Cynthia seem to have internalized how the U.S. government might prefer Japanese Americans to relate to their identities.

In sum, the data revealed that Japanese Americans in this study were, in some way or another, impacted by the structural context of internment. However, participants related to their experiences and expressed their identities in markedly different ways.

**Research Question 2: How has historical racism and discrimination shaped Japanese Americans’ identities?**

While a couple of participants asserted that they have not been discriminated against (i.e., Evelyn and Cynthia), the majority attested that they have been victims of discrimination (i.e., James, Jerry, Angela, Charles, Kathryn, Sophia). For participants who recalled experiences of racism and discrimination, their answers came, for the most part, in response to the following interview discussion questions: (1) Tell me about a time
when you felt proud to be Japanese American; and (2) Can you recall a time when you felt uncomfortable being Japanese American? For instance, James—the journalist who writes about Japanese and Japanese American culture—responded with the following explanation:

It’s easier for me to tell you about times when I felt bad to be Japanese American. That would be on December 7th—any year—growing up and even into my teen years and even afterwards, but not so much in recent years. I would cringe every December 7th walking out the door and thinking, who’s going to tell me to “go back home” or who’s going to yell, “remember Pearl Harbor!” because that’s what I heard every year on December 7th. I got to hate December 7th and think, “Shit, why do I have to be Japanese American? Why do I have to be Japanese?” Then I go, “Wait, I’m not Japanese! I didn’t do that! I didn’t bomb Pearl Harbor! My dad was in the U.S. army for God’s sake!” So you get all of these conflicting things.

Due to the repeated accusations that James was somehow “responsible” for Pearl Harbor, he “hate[d] December 7th” as he anticipated that people were going to make some racist remark towards him. While these offensive comments were provoked relationally—i.e., they were made by other people—they have wider implications for the communal and personal identity gaps. That is to say, discrimination materialized through a reduction and stereotype of the “collective” group of Japanese who attacked Pearl Harbor (i.e., the Japanese imperial military) to James, in particular. Hence, James was personally accused of belonging to this group. The reason for this being, James and other Japanese
Americans are perceived to be “Japanese because of [their] ancestry, because of the way [they] look”—meaning, because of their race. In effect, James internally struggled with his communal identity as he inadvertently believed he “was Japanese” even though he knew he was not Japanese, had no part in Pearl Harbor, and in spite of his father’s U.S. military service. For these reasons, the discrimination James encountered corresponds with a personal-communal identity gap.

However, these discriminatory remarks were predicated on the political and hegemonic ideology of the U.S. government that essentially framed all racially Japanese individuals to be responsible for Pearl Harbor and/or threats to national security. Accordingly, James concluded that Japanese Americans may share a sense of collective guilt for the atrocities committed by the Japanese imperial military during WWII, which was cultivated by the U.S. government in “justifying” their incarceration. In turn, this has implications for present and future societies to question how we might be perpetuating racism and discrimination—not merely toward Japanese Americans, but also toward other racial, ethnic, and cultural groups—by consenting to similar hegemonic ideologies. Moreover, James’ experiences demonstrate that racism and discrimination has impacted his identity, and he continues to challenge these problematic constructs through his journalism.

Similarly, Jerry—the successful man who launched his athletic career in judo—was racially discriminated against for being Japanese American, or perhaps on the basis that he was/is Asian (American). However, Jerry’s experiences of discrimination also
extended to his religious identification as a Buddhist, which some people equated with “extremism.” Jerry explained that,

Back then we had dog tags that had your name, address, phone number, the blood type, and then in another corner it had your religion. I had “B” that stood for Buddhist…Later on they see Buddhists because of the Vietnam War and they would torch themselves in protest of the war…Then in WWII with the kamikaze pilots…killing [themselves]. People said, “Man, you’re real radical” [and] “You guys are a crazy lot of people.” At that time, I wished I was…[not] Japanese American because everybody said, “You know why you’ve got slanted eyes? Oh my God, rice again?” A can of toothpaste was supposed to be the whitening agent. “I wonder where the yellow went.” Then everybody turned right at you, and kind of ridiculed you. So that was the low point.

Despite the fact that Jerry was fairly popular among his peers during his childhood, he was not exempt from racism given his Buddhist religion, “yellow” race, “slanted” eyes, and his atypical diet of eating rice. Consequently, these derogatory and extremely racist comments have impacted Jerry’s identity to the extent that he did not want to be Japanese American (e.g., “At that time, I wished I was…[not] Japanese American”), which can also be paralleled with the personal-communal identity gap.

Angela, whose family was interned and became more interested in internment after her father passed away, has also been racially discriminated against. For example, Angela recalled instances where she has received “funny looks…a ‘go home’…some intelligible yells from pickup trucks [and] a black guy [who] shouted, ‘My family was
here before your family was!’” While Angela somewhat downplayed these situations to insist that racism “happens everywhere” (i.e., racism is not unusual), she has contemplated her difference. Angela grew up in a diverse environment and contended that she is more comfortable in mixed cultural settings, but she “always check[s] first” to see if people are okay with her, especially in more conservative and homogenous areas. That is to say, Angela gauges the situation and observes people before expressing herself: “I started to be more careful about how I presented myself…I spend more time looking at them thinking, ‘Are they okay with me?’ If they’re not okay with me…I just sort of back away, but I just want to make sure it’s okay.” Hence, Angela is aware of her race and given her previous experiences of racism, she enacts her identity carefully. Insofar as this process seems to be quite stressful for Angela, she could be negotiating a personal-communal identity gap through her conscious enactment. Another interpretation of this is that Angela could have enacted her identity in this way during our interview so as to communicate a message to a larger audience. As a person of color, Angela may be suggesting that members of minority groups may not necessarily view racism and discrimination merely as “historical” or “distant” events. Rather, they are actual, lived experiences that presently inform how she and others may perform their sense of self to others (e.g., “I started to be more careful about how I presented myself”). Moreover, Angela carefully and consciously chooses how to present herself when she suspects that, by inference, someone may view her as racially inferior (e.g., “Are they okay with me?”), but she is also suspicious of dominant white U.S. American culture as this group has, in the past, exerted their power over Japanese Americans. In fact, Angela keeps the
historical memory of internment in the back of her mind as she remains somewhat “cautious of the general American community because you [don’t] know if they [will] put you in a camp again,” which is a statement that is rooted in fear.

On another note, both Charles and Cynthia were refused restaurant service during the post-WWII era, yet they had differing interpretations as to whether the experience qualified as racial discrimination. Charles—a former internee who did not perceive that internment impacted him given his young age—knew why he and his military friends were refused restaurant service: Charles was “the only Japanese” in a whites-only bar. Consequently, Charles “felt bad about being Japanese” because he was refused service not merely because of his race, but also “because it kind of affected the other guys [as] they couldn’t get service either,” which seems to coincide with a personal-relational-communal identity gap. While it is understandable for Charles to have felt an additional layer of shame because his friends were also refused service, he appeared to be more concerned about how others were affected as opposed to why his race engendered discrimination, which works to depoliticize the situation. It follows that Charles may have negotiated his experiences of discrimination by attenuating the role of his race—and therefore, his communal identity as ethnically Japanese—from the situation to instead focus more on the personal-relational dynamic.

On the other hand, Cynthia—who is more interested in Japanese cultural artifacts despite her family’s conscious decision to evacuate the West Coast so as not to be interned—seemed to entirely dismiss overtones of racial discrimination when she was “refused” service. For instance, even though salespersons “kind of ignore[d]” Cynthia,
she did not categorize the experience as “discrimination,” but rather as an unintentional mistake (e.g., “They never said we don’t want to help you or anything. They just ignored us”). Accordingly, Cynthia did not perceive that this experience affected her as she was unsure if she was “ignored” because the restaurant was too busy, if that was the way people were, if it was because she was “Japanese,” or for some other reason. Cynthia’s interpretation, however, corresponds with the hegemonic ideology of white U.S. American culture in eliminating race as a determining factor in the situation, and instead focuses on more “convenient” interpretations (i.e., the restaurant workers “accidentally” forgot about her because they were too busy). Nevertheless, Cynthia could have downplayed this situation due to the relational dynamic of being interviewed with her friend, Evelyn, who claimed earlier in the interview that she had “no preconceptions of discrimination” and who also chooses to prioritize Japanese cultural artifacts rather than being overly political. Hence, Cynthia could have sidestepped a more critical interpretation of her experience as a means to maintain relational harmony and/or minimize possible relational conflict. Regardless of the reason for Cynthia’s interpretation, it is clear that she wanted to make it known to me that she did not perceive this experience impacted her.

In summary, these narratives demonstrate that participants have experienced some degree of historical racism and discrimination. Again, participants related to their experiences in different ways in which some (i.e., James, Jerry, Angela) have been more affected by racism than others (i.e., Charles, Cynthia).
Research Question 3: How did Japanese Americans relate to the 3/11 disasters in Japan and to others who were affected by it?

On March 11, 2011, an earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident devastated the Tohoku region of Japan (i.e., the northeastern coast). In order to answer the above research question, participants were asked to comment on the following during each of their interviews: how did you learn about the 3/11 disasters, what were your reactions to it, did you know anyone in the region, how much did you follow the news media for updates, did you participate in any fundraising or volunteer campaigns, have the disasters changed your self-perceptions, and other related questions. All participants remembered learning about and/or watching the 3/11 disasters unfold (via news media, social media, social networks, etc.) as they recounted their shock of its magnitude, and could mention some basic facts of what happened—most notably, from the first couple of months.

Common reactions to 3/11 included feelings of sorrow and helplessness, evaluations of its unprecedented nature as a triple disaster, concern and/or curiosity about their (distant) relatives living in Japan, and admiration for Japanese culture for no apparent cases of looting or rioting reported in the news media. While many participants were suspicious of the radioactive contamination from the Fukushima nuclear power plant, the majority was not overly critical of the Japanese government and TEPCO’s handling of the disasters. However, some participants expressed their skepticism: “My

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15 The aftermath of 3/11 left an approximate combined total of 28,000 people dead, missing, and injured, between 150,000 to 330,000 (or more) people displaced from their homes, thousands of buildings and infrastructure destroyed or damaged, a contaminated area around the Fukushima nuclear power plant, and an uncertain (albeit, controversial) future for nuclear power in Japan (Hasegawa, 2012; Herod, 2011; Hommerich, 2012; Ishii, 2012; Matanle, 2011; Sharma & Arora, 2011).
mind kept going back to safe levels of plutonium [laughs], which okay what exactly is that?!” (Kathryn), “There are people that have to be in suicide battalions going into the area [the Fukushima nuclear power plant] to work like 15 seconds at a time” (Michelle), and “Politicians are saying that everything is safe. You just wonder about that. Is it publicity or is it really true? You know that the ground is contaminated for life” (Evelyn).

As a journalist who wrote about and followed the 3/11 disasters relatively more than most participants, James offered a possible explanation (albeit, somewhat speculative) for ways that Japanese Americans might have connected to 3/11 in its immediate aftermath. However, a caveat warning against an over-generalization must not be taken lightly as this study has only considered the personal experiences of 10 Japanese Americans, which is clearly not meant to be a representative sample. Nevertheless, James’ interpretation is detailed below:

I think it can be safe to say that Japanese Americans felt…as an entire community …a connection that they hadn’t felt before to Japan. Because...the scope of the tragedy was so huge, it made them think about [it] even if they didn’t know anything about their family, their distant family… [Or] it made them think, “Oh, I wonder if I have any family in that part of Japan,”…because all of a sudden we were connected to this 20,000 people who were affected by this horrible tragedy. Given that “the scope of the tragedy was so huge,” James postulated that Japanese Americans thought and/or wondered about Japan, the 3/11 disasters, or possible family members of theirs and their approximate distance from the affected region. Alternatively, James seems to be implying that while some Japanese Americans may not feel that
connected to Japan or might not regularly think about their (distant) family in Japan, the 3/11 disasters sparked or rekindled some contemplation about their family’s heritage (relational identity), and subsequently triggered thoughts about their ethnic identities as Japanese (communal identity). While James’ assertion alone seems to be somewhat intuitive yet unsubstantiated, several participants did in fact express curiosity and/or concern towards their extended family in Japan. For instance, Angela—who was able to connect with her father through the Japanese martial art, aikido—asked her father if she had any family in the affected parts of Japan, thereby indicating her own uncertainty in knowing. Michelle—who was deeply traumatized by her experience of internment—discussed how her father (also Kathryn’s grandfather) was from the Tohoku region, and that both Michelle and Kathryn have an interest in visiting the region. Sophia,—who was born in Japan and has extended family who still live in Japan—was initially scared because “it was just nerve wracking knowing that we have some family…in Tokyo.”

However, upon learning that participants’ relatives lived relatively far from the affected Tohoku region—i.e., the closest region with familial relations was Tokyo (approximately 150-200+ miles away) whereas most were concentrated on the southwestern coast of Japan near Hiroshima (several hundreds of miles away)—their feelings of concern consequently dissipated given that their families were safe.\(^{16}\) It seems that participants were primarily interested in gathering information about the 3/11

\(^{16}\) But it is worth mentioning that the first wave of Japanese immigrants to the U.S. were primarily from Southern Japan as they were in search of work because of a severe drought that jeopardized the agricultural livelihoods of many (Asakawa, 2004). Thus, it is not too surprising that the Japanese who have settled in the U.S. are more commonly from Southern Japan, rather than from the northern Tohoku region (unless they are more recent immigrants from 1965 to the present).
disasters as it related to their families and relational identities. That is not to suggest, however, that participants did not connect to their ethnic and cultural identities as Japanese in response to the 3/11 disasters (more on this later). Rather, the overwhelming response that participants in this study had to 3/11 was that the lack of personal connections—that is, with people in the Tohoku region—influenced why they, more or less, did not feel a significant shift in their identity perceptions.

A few participants (e.g., Kathryn, Evelyn, Cynthia, Angela) even noted that they were more active in relief efforts and/or felt a stronger connection to Hurricane Katrina because it was geographically closer to them as opposed to Japan. A few examples illustrate this: “I didn’t know anyone specifically out there” (Kent), “Not really having personal ties… I don’t think there’s a strong enough connection to Japan to have created any major shift in my own perception” (Kathryn), and “The prefecture that my family is from is a lot south of there … so I wasn’t worried. I did feel bad for those people, but…I don’t have a direct [contact]” (Evelyn). This finding is consistent with previous literature, which suggests that there is corresponding relationship between identity salience and the location of the disaster in predicting people’s likelihood of intervening or volunteering in the aftermath of a natural disaster (Levine & Thompson, 2004). Therefore, it is not surprising that participants perceived, in a general sense, that the 3/11 disasters were not salient or pertinent enough for their identities given their lack of personal connections with people in the affected regions and their physical distance from Japan.

In light of my previous findings, it is necessary to give due consideration to how participants in this study have constructed their communal identities as ethnic Japanese in
order to understand why they did not have a stronger connection to 3/11. For instance, even though Kathryn expressed interest in visiting the Tohoku region in Japan, one must not forget that she has a conflicted sense of Japanese identity—most notably, because of internment. As it was previously discussed, Kathryn was raised in the post-internment generation without Japanese cultural traditions, she cannot speak Japanese, does not have many friendships with Japanese or Japanese Americans, and was not able to accept her Japaneseness until fairly recently. Certainly, this does not negate Kathryn’s interest in going to Japan, but it provides more insight into her overall assessment about 3/11 in that she does not have a “strong enough connection to Japan [for 3/11] to have created any major shift[s] in [her identity] perception[s].”

Nevertheless, nearly all participants were actively involved in fundraisers, concerts, and events hosted by Japanese American organizations (among others) in Denver as they assisted in volunteer booths, donated money, bought t-shirts, and/or spread the word about how people could offer aid to Japan. Thus, active involvement in Japan’s relief efforts seems to be a plausible indicator, at the very least, of some degree of concern for the people affected by disasters, some interest in Japan, and/or as a means to express their Japanese ethnic identities.

In support of James’s assertion, Angela—who participates in the Japanese martial art *aikido*—noted that she had “some connection” to 3/11 as she followed a number of blogs and news media coverage in its aftermath: “You sort of go, ‘Oh, that’s Japan.’ I mean I sort of related to that even though my family wasn’t there.” In a similar vein, Kathryn even considered going to Japan in order to tangibly help with the clean-up
efforts as she stated that she identified with the Japanese. However, Kathryn eventually decided that it was “probably not such a good idea,” which is a likely reference to the possible exposure of radioactivity present in various areas of Japan following the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear power plant accident. But again, Kathryn’s decision not to help with the relief efforts in Japan could have also been informed by her discomfort in identifying as or interacting with other Japanese. Also consistent with previous literature, this finding confirms the notion that people may favor the idea of volunteering to help with relief efforts after a natural disaster because the disaster or its location is relevant to their identity to some degree even though their thoughts may not translate into action (Levine & Thompson, 2004).

Therefore, although participants may not have had any personal connections or strong shifts in their identity perceptions, as Japanese Americans, they felt some connection (however varying and slight it may have been) to the 3/11 disasters.
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

Accused of being “enemy combatants,” nearly 120,000 Japanese Americans were systematically rounded-up by the U.S. government and were “relocated” to internment camps for over three and a half years during WWII (Hayashi, 2004; Kashima, 2003; Miksch & Ghere, 2004; Robinson, 2001). Insofar as the lives of Japanese Americans were disrupted, altered, and/or ruptured by internment, this experience has left a lasting imprint on generations of Japanese Americans—both for former internees and non-internees, directly and indirectly (Asakawa, 2004). Indeed, internment is often conceptualized as a collective, historical memory among Japanese Americans that has impacted their lives in markedly different ways (Fugita & Fernandez, 2004; Kuramitsu, 1995).

Previous literature on Japanese Americans has extensively analyzed internment from numerous angles, including (but not limited to): the importance of the experience, the varying impacts it had on certain generations and demographics, the historical and political context leading up to internment, the loyalty questionnaires, conditions in camp, daily activities of internees, Supreme Court cases, the redress movement, and so on (Asakawa, 2004; Fugita & Fernandez, 2004; Hayashi, 2004; Kuramitsu, 1995; Mizuno, 2003; Nakagawa, 1990b; Robinson, 2001; Saito, 2005; Smith, 2008; Takezawa, 1991).

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This study, however, sought to understand how Japanese Americans have conceptualized their identities by examining how their experiences have been shaped by the broader, historical contexts of internment, racism, and discrimination. In addition, this study also explored how Japanese Americans have interpreted the 3/11 disasters in Japan so as to understand how they connect to the Japanese side of their identity as they are generations removed. Hence, this discussion will explore the various ways that Japanese Americans perceived their identities, the numerous ways they were impacted by the historical contexts of internment, racism, and discrimination, as well as how they interpreted the 3/11 disasters. Lastly, I will discuss the theoretical implications and present my critique of CTI’s communal frame.

Japanese Americans’ Identity Perceptions

In order to understand how Japanese Americans in this study (both for internees and non-internees) have constructed, enacted, and related to their identities in different ways, this research utilized the CTI framework. The CTI framework was chosen because it broadly explores multiple dimensions of identity as it relates to individuals, relationships, communities, and is enacted through communication (Hecht, 1993; Hecht et al., 2003; Martin & Nakayama, 2010).

While the former internees in this study were both young children at the time of their imprisonment, their relation to this experience could not be more different. For instance, Michelle viewed internment to be the “most defining” part of her life whereas Charles hardly perceived that camp influenced his identity perceptions given his young age and few memories. This stark contrast can be explained not only by the greater
amount of traumatic memories that Michelle had about camp compared with Charles, but also because of Michelle’s unique fusion of the political into her personal identity, her desire to establish many relationships with her family and friends around the subject of internment (relational identity), and through her political activism in the local Japanese American community (communal identity). Hence, Michelle’s experience of internment continues to permeate through several facets of her identity. Somewhat antithetical to Michelle, Charles is not overly political and he has not altered his self-concept (personal identity) or general opinions about internment in the ways that Michelle has despite the pilgrimages he has taken to former internment camps and learning more about camp in recent years. In effect, these findings suggest that identity construction influences how former internees may perceive their past experiences of camp as well as the degree of salience it has (or does not have) for their sense of self. These findings are consistent with previous literature in that while some Japanese Americans may have been interned, they have not been equally affected by internment in part because of demographics (e.g., age, generation, gender, occupational and educational status, life experiences), the collective role of shame, and other such factors (Fugita & Fernandez, 2004).

Similarly, this study has also suggested that non-internees do not necessarily base their communal involvement with the Japanese American community around the experience of internment simply because they are members of this group. Although some non-internees (e.g., James, Sophia, Kent, Jerry) are active in the local community as a means to educate the public and other Japanese Americans about internment, others (e.g., Angela, Evelyn, and Cynthia) are drawn to the local community in order to preserve their
Japanese cultural traditions, participate in martial arts and other activities, as well as interact with other Japanese Americans and/or Asian Americans. It is therefore problematic to assume that Japanese Americans relate to the experience of internment on the basis of their common ethnicity or “shared” history as their personal experiences, self-concepts, relational connections, and communal identifications are also factors that inform how individuals might relate to their identities.

That is not to suggest, however, that participants were not impacted by the historical context of internment. In order to provide a commentary about why participants might have expressed their identities in the ways they did, I employed the critical perspective to establish relationships between their narratives and the broader, historical context of internment.

**Impact of the Historical Contexts of Internment, Racism, and Discrimination**

Given that several participants (e.g., Charles, James, Angela, Kent, Evelyn, Cynthia) did not know many details about their family’s experiences in camp because their parents and other family members rarely or never discussed it with them, this finding is consistent with previous literature in that collective shame seemed to have played a key role in how Japanese Americans have come to learn (or not learn much) about internment (Nagata & Cheng, 2003; Shimabukuro, 2011; Takezawa, 1991). The exception was Michelle as she repeatedly talked about internment with her daughter, Kathryn, because of her traumatic memories and politicization of the experience. However, these discussions did not prompt Kathryn to become interested in internment nor did they reveal some striking revelation to her when she was younger. Rather,
Kathryn noted that she avoided nearly anything that was “remotely related to being Japanese” and admitting to being Japanese. While Kathryn indicated that growing up without many Japanese cultural traditions played a role in why this might have been the case, the primary culprit for her denial and avoidance of being Japanese should be attributed to the U.S. government for instilling collective shame in Japanese Americans for their racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

Nevertheless, it is significant that the majority of participants in this study (i.e., Kathryn, Kent, James, Angela, Jerry, Sophia) have confronted internment at different life stages despite a lack of direct experiences, little knowledge about their family’s history in camp, and their varying interest levels in the experience. In effect, these participants addressed internment in one or more of the following ways: As a means to determine who they are, accept their sense of self, express their sense of self to others, learn more about their family members, connect with others in the local Japanese American community, and to educate the general public about internment.

For instance, even though James wrote about his experiences of difference and discrimination in community newspapers as a journalist, he did not truly begin inquiring about the details of his father’s life vis-à-vis WWII until his father was diagnosed with cancer. Granted, James’ father did not willingly talk about his life with James either. It is possible that James’ father may have felt ashamed to discuss WWII with James as he may have been forced to grapple with his supposed racial and cultural inferiority as a Japanese American. Notwithstanding, James began to contemplate his Japanese American identity for arguably the first time in his life once his father passed away.
which then led him on a journey to learn about his family’s history, establish relationships with other Japanese Americans (largely because of his wife), and to become what he referred to himself as “the voice” about internment and Japanese American culture.

Another, albeit different, example of how participants have confronted internment relates to Jerry’s fight to preserve the former internment camp, Amache. Despite his professional success and acceptance in dominant U.S. culture, Jerry’s actions attest to the notion that internment is important to his sense of self as well as to the greater Japanese American community. Likewise, Jerry’s leadership in preserving Amache demonstrates that the general public should also remember the horrific experience of internment so as to never imprison another racial or cultural group again.

While James and Jerry express their identities in different ways, both individuals contend that internment is immensely significant for the Japanese American community. Therefore, my findings suggest that internment is not merely a “historical memory” nor is it an experience that has only affected former internees. Rather, internment still affects, shapes, and informs how Japanese Americans make sense of their identities, which is a testament to the compounding effects the experience has had on the generations.

Be that as it may, some Japanese Americans in this study (i.e., Charles, Evelyn, and Cynthia) maintained that they were seemingly “unaffected” by internment as it holds little relevance for their daily lives and identities. For instance, Evelyn repeatedly claimed that internment is “ancient history” to her as she is more intrigued by the richness of Japanese cultural traditions. Here, it is worth restating the key distinctions of “relates to”
and has been “impacted by” internment that I have argued for throughout this study. It is clear that Evelyn did perceive that internment impacted her sense of identity, but one must not overlook her conscious decision to distance herself from internment, which is indeed a bold, political stance. Essentially, Evelyn is suggesting that internment is not (or perhaps, should not be) as central to the Japanese American community as opposed to the cultural traditions, the food, language, and cultural values. In doing so, Evelyn minimizes the injustice and long term effects of internment, which works to metaphorically erase memories of internment and releases accountability from the U.S. government.

Accordingly, Evelyn’s dissociation from internment is contrasted with Jerry’s actions in preserving a former internment camp so that people can continually remember what happened. It was Jerry’s “right approach” in preserving Amache and his “correct attitude” about internment—which is to say, he did not have animosity, bitterness, or indifference toward the experience—that has lead the Denver Japanese American community to uphold him as the “perfect example.” Likewise, it can be inferred that the local Japanese American would not benefit from Evelyn’s declaration that internment is merely “ancient history,” lest Jerry’s efforts become in vain.

However, another interpretation to Evelyn’s dissociation from internment could be a strategy for survival. While Evelyn was not personally interned, it is possible that she was socialized into an environment of survival in which many Japanese Americans avoided talking about internment because it was too painful. For many Japanese Americans, the cultural values of *gaman* (Japanese for “patiently endure”) and *shikataganai* (Japanese for “it cannot be helped”), remaining silent or choosing not to
discuss internment with their children, painting, drawing, sculpting, and doing other such activities helped some of them cope with the psychological trauma suffered from internment (Kuramitsu, 1995; Nagata & Chen, 2003; Shimabukuro, 2011). As such, other Japanese Americans distanced themselves from and/or completely turned their backs on their “Japaneseness,” and chose to instead perceive themselves as any other American (Asakawa, 2004; Harada, 1998; Hayashi, 2004; Takezawa, 1991; Uchida, 1982). Whether these participants have distanced themselves from internment due to their personal, ideological, and political preferences, as a strategy for survival, or perhaps as a form of collective resistance, it is clear that internment has impacted Japanese Americans even if they do not claim to relate to the experience.

Similar to the notion that people construct and relate to their identities in different ways, CTI’s theoretical concept of identity gaps was useful to explore the dissonance that one negotiates among constituent parts of their identities when socially interacting with others (Drummond & Orbe, 2009; Jung & Hecht, 2004; Maeda & Hecht, 2012; Urban & Orbe, 2012; Wadsworth et al., 2008). In interpreting the identity gaps that participants encountered, it useful to come back to the concepts of ascribed and avowed identities. Identity ascription refers to the characteristics, assumptions, and possibly stereotypes that other people assign to members of a collective (Chen & Collier, 2012; Hecht et al., 2003; Moss & Faux, 2006). Several Japanese Americans in this study have encountered bewilderment, tension, and conflict when others have ascribed to them an identity that they personally did not relate to—such as assuming they speak Japanese, that they are somehow “from” Japan, and they have all been interned or have some profound insight
about it. It can be logically concluded that many of these identity ascriptions were the result of others’ racial categorizations and assumptions. However, members of the Japanese American community may also assign (or avow) similar cultural values of speaking Japanese, visiting Japan, and relating to the experience of internment to individual members. Likewise, identity ascription and avowal can sometimes be problematic as they can contribute to discrepancies within one’s identity. Furthermore, these processes can exacerbate Japanese Americans’ difference from the dominant U.S. American culture in addition to distinguishing them from the mainstream Japanese American community who insists upon attaining these cultural values. These findings, however, are not new within intercultural communication or in CTI research (Drummond & Orbe, 2009; Halualani, 2000; Urban & Orbe, 2010; Witteborn, 2004; Yep, 2002).

Although the concept of identity ascription can explain these identity gaps to some degree, the historical context has greatly impacted the extent to which generations of Japanese Americans might, in particular, speak Japanese. In light of the U.S. government’s demonization of all racially Japanese individuals during WWII, Japanese Americans are members of this supposed “enemy race.” As such, their cultural traditions were regarded as “threatening” to white, U.S. American culture. Considering the psychological trauma, racism, discrimination, and collective shame that Japanese Americans felt because of internment and for simply being ethnically Japanese, it makes sense that Japanese Americans might not want to speak Japanese or teach it to their children as some (e.g., Angela) even fear the possibility of internment happening again. Therefore, it is important to consider how internment might have contributed to these
identity gaps of not being able to speak Japanese fluently and/or proficiently, as well as not wanting to speak the language due to their personal preferences or due to a lack of relational connections with other Japanese Americans. Indeed, my findings suggest that no matter how distant Japanese Americans may feel from the historical context of internment, the experience continues to shape their sense of identity.

Unfortunately, Japanese Americans in this study have also been the victims of historical racism and discrimination—most notably, due to their ascribed identity as an “inferior race,” as well as their presumed connections with Pearl Harbor because they resemble the “enemy.” While some Japanese Americans may not always think about their race when interacting with others (as was the case with Kathryn), Japanese Americans seem to have an inescapable minority identity in which other people have ascribed them to be Japanese because of their racial appearance. Likewise, many participants have been called “Japs,” have been told to “go home” and to “remember Pearl Harbor,” and have been denied restaurant service because of their race. These slurs, comments, and actions are profoundly racist, but my findings necessitate a deeper examination of Japanese Americans’ bicultural identities in order to understand how such comments can continually “Other” Japanese Americans and pose numerous identity struggles for them to juggle.

In particular, critical-cultural hybridity is relevant for understanding how bicultural and multicultural individuals often straddle several cultures as they “operate within contrasts trying to hold these differences together” (Moreman, 2005, p. 74). Critical-cultural hybridity was useful to depict the simultaneously multiple cultural
identifications and pride that participants had in identifying as both Japanese and Americans, but the concept was also useful in explicating their struggle to find a true sense of belonging with either culture. For instance, both James and Sophia contended that they are “too American to be Japanese, yet are too Japanese to be American.” Although Japanese Americans may not all attest to the same struggles that these participants have encountered, my findings suggest that it is worth considering how Japanese Americans’ bicultural identities have posed numerous challenges for them to attain a sense of belongingness and acceptance in the face of being “Othered” and discriminated against.

The next portion discusses how Japanese Americans in the Denver community have interpreted the 3/11 disasters.

**Interpretations of the 3/11 Disasters**

Despite participants’ initial concern about the 3/11 disasters, no one had family who lived in the affected regions where the disasters struck. My findings suggest that a lack of personal connections to 3/11 explains why participants did not, more or less, continue to follow-up with news media coverage about the disasters (with the exceptions of James and Michelle). Consequently, this suggests that they did not feel strongly connected to the 3/11 disasters nor did it greatly impact their identity perceptions. Nevertheless, many wondered about where their ancestors were from in relation to where the disasters were located, which somewhat substantiates James’ conjecture in that Japanese Americans were tenuously “connected to this 20,000 people who were affected by this horrible tragedy.” Even if Japanese Americans do not regularly think about Japan,
my findings suggest that the 3/11 disasters at least prompted them to contemplate where their ancestors were from.

Furthermore, all participants noted that they were active in fundraising efforts for 3/11. While it is not clear if participants joined the fundraising efforts because the disasters affected Japan, if it was because they are civically minded people, if they felt some sense of obligation to participate given their membership within the Japanese American and/or Asian American communities, or for other such reasons, this finding demonstrates that participants did in fact feel somewhat connected to the 3/11 disasters.

One explanation for Japanese Americans’ slight connection to 3/11 can be explained by the ways in which they related to their communal identities as Japanese and Japanese Americans. Notably, the majority of participants contended that they cannot speak Japanese, do not have the desire to put forth the effort to learn the language, and that they have no one to speak Japanese with. As my findings have already indicated, many participants encountered identity gaps when other people have assumed that they can speak Japanese simply because they look Japanese. In turn, this may lead to a fractured sense of Japanese identity when they are reminded of this and it is possible that they could perceive themselves to be “inauthentic Japanese” for not knowing how to speak the language. Needless to say, speaking and learning the language of one’s ethnic and cultural heritage is one way that members of a community express their identities. Even though some participants (e.g., Kathryn) expressed a desire to volunteer in Japan after the 3/11 disasters, Kathryn’s inability to speak Japanese somewhat inhibited translating her desire into action as it is another obstacle for her to negotiate. In some
cases, this rupture in not speaking Japanese may be related to internment because of the profound effect it had on generations of Japanese Americans. Consequently, it would be worth investigating the extent to which Japanese Americans were taught Japanese by their parents and what kind of effect related to identity that might have created within families.

At the same time, another reason for participants’ tenuous connection to 3/11 may be the result of whom I interviewed. Without a larger sample or comparative data, it is difficult to definitively suggest why they did not have a stronger connection to the 3/11 disasters or to Japan.

As previously mentioned, my initial interest in pursuing the topic of 3/11 arose from the concern I felt for my friends in Japan, which then became the entry point that allowed me to start a conversation with Japanese Americans. While my findings were not as strong as what I expected, there was a connection that I could not dismiss. Initially, I expected that participants would have been more critical of the Fukushima nuclear power accident because of the historical context during WWII when the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. However, most participants did not see a strong relationship between these events as they repeatedly told me that these events happened on completely different scales (i.e., one was to end a war, the other was a natural-human made disaster) and were not fitting to compare. In effect, many participants were not that critical (though a few were, e.g., Michelle and Kathryn) of the Japanese government’s handling of the 3/11 disasters with the exception of a few statements (e.g., Evelyn: “Politicians are saying that everything is safe…You know that the ground is
contaminated for life”). But then again, some participants were not that critical of internment either. It could be the case that participants side-stepped a critical interpretation to 3/11 as any other American would. This essentially works to reinforce power relations as people can place too much confidence in their government’s ability to act in the “best” interests of civilians.

**Theoretical Implications**

Certainly, the openness of the CTI framework is beneficial as it allows for narratives about culture and identity to creatively emerge; however, its vagueness raises more questions than it answers. In particular, I am arguing that CTI’s communal frame should be further developed as it currently defines collective identity to be “something [that is] held by a group of people” (Hecht, 1993, p. 80). One flaw of the communal frame is that it is conceptualized as a unified whole in which a given community is said to be bonded by some collective memory, shares visions together, transcends individuals, and is a group-based identification (Drummond & Orbe, 2009; Faulker & Hecht, 2011; Hecht, 1993; Hecht et al., 2005, 2002, 1993; Jung & Hecht, 2004; Maeda & Hecht, 2012; Urban & Orbe, 2010).

It may be that groups form an identity of their own as certain beliefs and values are held by (or are imposed upon) the collective. However, what is problematic about the communal frame is that collective identity is assumed to be shared among its members as the community “define[s] a repertoire of identities that are jointly held/remembered and taught to new members” (Hecht, 1993, p. 80). My findings, however, suggest that members of the Japanese American community do not necessarily “jointly hold” the
memory of internment nor do they perceive the experience in the same way as what the communal frame posits. It is worth noting that the Japanese American community is unique because the experience of internment has created so many reverberations throughout the community, which has, in turn, led many to relate to their ethnic and cultural identities in varying ways. Nevertheless, it cannot be assumed that members of any collective will be bonded to the same memory, cultural values, and political beliefs, etc. as this denies heterogeneity within the group. Even though Hecht et al. (1993, 2003) claimed that cultural groups are complex and heterogeneous, the communal frame articulated in the theory centers around the idea that the group shares some memory or bond together, which mimics traditional conceptualizations of culture. To be fair, Hecht et al. (2002) made a disclaimer in their work to suggest that when collective images “are assumed to be characteristics of individual group members and are applied to them in fixed or rigid ways, they are stereotypes” (p. 853).

However, some scholars (Jung & Hecht, 2004; Kam & Hecht, 2009; Kim & Hecht, 2009; Wadsworth et al., 2008) have even excluded analyzing the communal frame in their research because it is taken to be a macro level of analysis, thus implying the “consensus” of a collective whereas other scholars (Hecht et al., 2002; Urban & Orbe, 2010; Witteborn, 2004) have included it in their studies. Questions then arise as to who determines the collective beliefs, values, and histories held by a given group? Is it not the mainstream group? How can the communal frame account for contested meaning within a given collective for individuals who do not conform to the normative values or beliefs that are supposedly shared among its members? Michelle and Kathryn, in particular, have
refused to conform to mainstream, Japanese American norms. However, CTI’s communal frame does not comment on what happens when conflict arises among and/or between one’s *collective* identities other than suggesting that an identity gap emerges.

Indeed, I invoked identity gaps to account for the dissonance that participants have felt through identity ascriptions and being “Othered,” which the concept of critical-cultural hybridity can also address. However, the concept of critical-cultural hybridity is more explicit in elaborating how tension arises among one’s *collective* identities—i.e., race, ethnicity, nationality, culture, etc. Accordingly, such individuals can also be rendered into “third spaces”—i.e., in-between spaces—in which they may have a “neither/nor” type of identification and may feel marginalized, even within their own cultural communities. I do not dispute the notion that both theories are useful in elaborating the tensions and discrepancies that individuals must negotiate. However, the communal frame alone does not adequately address contention that is present *within* a given *cultural group*.

Nevertheless, Kam and Hecht’s (2009) contribution to the study of identity gaps has suggested that dissonance can also occur within one particular identity frame (e.g., communal), which could potentially address the issue I am raising. However, I am arguing for a revision at the base of the communal frame to incorporate a critical perspective in the conceptualization of communal identity. That is to say, the communal frame should be re-conceptualized so as to pertain to a group of individuals who may share some commonality together, but is also contested. My proposed revision to the communal frame is informed by a critical definition of culture as it reflects the nature of
my dualistic interpretive and critical study, yet it is also consistent with my findings that suggests Japanese Americans do not all relate to or share the historical memory of internment together.

**Conclusion**

As this study sought to explore Japanese American cultural identity, my findings necessitate a continued consideration of how internment has profoundly shaped the cultural identities of generations of Japanese Americans as they are situated within this complex history. One example of this concerns language. Due to the fact that many participants cannot speak Japanese, yet they are expected to know it, many have encountered identity gaps. This is suggestive of a fractured sense of Japanese identity given that it was a common theme in several of my participants’ narratives, but the rupture in language is more fully understood when it is considered in the context of internment. During and after internment, many Japanese Americans decided to stop speaking Japanese, did not teach it to their children, and/or did not learn it themselves, in part, because of the collective shame that the U.S. government instilled in them for being ethnically Japanese (Asakawa, 2004; Fugita & Fernandez, 2004; Kuramitsu, 1995; Murray, 2000; Takezawa, 1991). In effect, further research can continue to explore the impact that internment had on Japanese Americans’ cultural identities—such as not learning Japanese or practicing other Japanese cultural traditions, as well as presenting oneself like any other American, and the like. In particular, it would be worth exploring the impact that the loyalty oath questionnaires had on families and how their answers
might provide more of a context to analyze the effects that internment had on Japanese Americans.

As my findings have indicated, Japanese Americans have been impacted by the historical context of internment even if they do not claim to relate to the experience. In turn, this illustrates the critical importance of U.S. school curricula including in depth material on Japanese American history. Unfortunately, a lot of U.S. school curricula is dominated by master narratives about internment that essentially serve the interests of the dominant white, U.S. American culture. In doing so, the “need” to intern thousands of Japanese Americans was supposedly “justified” given the worldwide context of warfare—most notably, because of Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor. As such, ethnically Japanese individuals were accused of being “threats” to U.S. national security as they were supposedly “enemy combatants.” It then became common sense for the U.S. to declare war on Japan and to mass intern Japanese Americans under the guise of “protection.” However, this rationale not only undermines the injustice of internment and the cross-generational effects it had on Japanese Americans, but it also maintains the power and hegemony of white, U.S. American culture.

Indeed, racial prejudice against Japanese Americans was one of the main reasons why the U.S. government interned Japanese Americans as the times were marked with anti-Japanese and anti-Asian sentiments. Likewise, several participants in this study recalled that they have been racially discriminated against and “Othered” because of their race and due to their presumed connections with Pearl Harbor. This suggests that we cannot overlook the role that non-Japanese Americans play in perpetuating racial
discrimination against Japanese Americans—as well as for other racial and ethnic groups—as our actions can exacerbate their “differences” and may contribute to identity struggles for them. One should give due consideration to the notion that Japanese Americans—including former internees and non-internees—may experience everyday racism as more traumatic because it can trigger their collective memory of internment, invoke collective shame for being ethnically Japanese, and it may bring up (or intensify) fears that internment could happen again (e.g., Angela: “You [don’t] know if they [will] put you in a camp again”). Accordingly, future research could conduct a comparative study between Japanese Americans and their experience of internment with Jewish Americans and the Holocaust in order to explore the impact that everyday racism might have on groups of people who have traumatic and/or oppressive historical experiences.

**Limitations.**

Using a qualitative design, the sample size of Japanese Americans used in this study was small in order to explore their identity conceptions in depth. It was not the intent of this research to generalize the findings to the Japanese American community writ large or to assume that all Japanese Americans relate to their identities in the same way. Likewise, other Japanese Americans may express their identities in completely different ways than those who participated in this study. Hence, a larger sample of participants may be beneficial so as to examine a wider breadth of data. The location of this study in the Denver metropolitan area may have also impacted the data in that the Japanese American community is relatively smaller and more dispersed in Denver than in West Coast populations. Thus, it is possible that Japanese Americans in Denver may not
feel as connected to other Japanese Americans or the local community compared with
Japanese Americans who live on the West Coast. Also, the subject population mainly
consisted of middle-aged and elderly third generation Japanese Americans, but included
one young adult and a couple of fourth generation Japanese Americans.

Another limitation in this study is related to the research method. Data was
collected over the course of two months through face-to-face interviews ranging from one
to three hours per participant. While this approach was useful to explore in-depth
narratives about participants’ lives, data was collected over a fairly short period of time
(Cruickshank, 2012; Rakow, 2011). Hence, there is only a limited amount of information
that a person can or is willing to reveal about oneself during this time period and it would
be an oversimplification to assume that one interview could expand on all the intricacies
that have informed one’s sense of identity. Data collected over longer time periods might
reveal different findings as the interviewer and interviewees might be able to establish
more rapport and develop closer relationships (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). That is to say,
more identity frames might emerge as participants are interviewed over a longer time
period.

In light of research on identity that suggests that identity is contextual, it is also
necessary to keep in mind that people express their sense of self depending on the nature
of the situation, their role, their relationships, the dynamics of who they are interacting
with, and other such factors (Chen, 2009; Hall, 1996; Hogg et al., 1995 Luther, 2003).
As the interviewer and researcher, I did not have prior relationships with participants before this study. As such, participants may not have disclosed intimate details about their lives because of our limited relationship.

Be that as it may, it is likely that my participants also had expectations for what they thought I, as a researcher, wanted to know about them. Here, it is worth noting that the method of conducting research interviews may be a form of enacted identity because participants could have been narrating stories about themselves in relation to what they assumed I want to know or what they wanted me to know about them, which may (or may not be) how they personally think of themselves and their experiences. Furthermore, my role as the researcher—a white, female graduate student—could have influenced how participants, as Japanese Americans, interacted with me. The stories they narrated could have been impacted by the power dynamics of my whiteness as I am a member of the dominant group in U.S. American culture.

Lastly, the research objectives for this study impacted the kind of data that was obtained. Through a semi-structured interview format, I directed participants to think about themselves in relation to their ethnic and cultural identities, internment, WWII, racial discrimination, and the 3/11 disasters even though they may not regularly think about these topics in their day-to-day lives (Cruickshank, 2012; Rakow, 2011). Participants’ narratives were also impacted by the act of the interview itself as well as the interviewer-interviewee dynamic as I interacted with them, listened to their stories, asked follow-up questions, commented, made gestures, and so on (Cruickshank, 2012; De Fina & Perrino, 2011; Mori, 2012; Rakow, 2011).
Suggestions for Further Research.

While very thorough, this study raised a number of issues and questions for future research. In order to address one of the limitations in this study related to the size of the Japanese American population in Denver, future research could conduct a comparative study between the community in Denver and one on the West Coast in order to explore how Japanese Americans in different communities construct their identities. Additionally, future studies could be more systematic in choosing participants from a more diverse range of generations, ages, and socioeconomic classes.

The findings in this study suggested that while Japanese Americans related to their identities in different ways, internment has impacted their lives in some way, and perhaps more than some may admit or realize. Thus, future research could extend the analysis of how Japanese American identities have been shaped by internment, but could analyze specific historical events and/or documents in greater detail. For instance, future research could examine the decision-making process and implications of signing (or not signing) the loyalty oath questionnaires within the family unit, if and how it later impacted what parents taught to their children about what it means to be Japanese American, and how (or to what extent) the questionnaires might have contributed to the general lack of discussion afterwards about internment among Japanese Americans. Could the loyalty oath questionnaires provide insight into an evolving sense of Japanese American cultural identity?

Although my study did not reveal significant findings for how some Japanese Americans within the Denver community have interpreted the 3/11 disasters, another
suggestion would be to explore why exactly participants got involved in fundraising efforts for 3/11. Did Japanese Americans get involved with 3/11 fundraising efforts because they felt connected to Japan, because they felt that it related to their Asian American identity, or perhaps because they were civically minded people who joined in with others? It is possible that the above questions cannot be adequately addressed without expanding the length of data collection.

Rather than examining the relation between Japanese American cultural identity and the 3/11 disasters in Japan (or natural disaster literature in general), future research could alternatively pursue a comparative study of the impact on certain groups of people of being aggressively oppressed by those in power. For instance, one could analyze Japanese Americans’ experience of internment in comparison to Jewish Americans and the Holocaust. While one may argue that the Holocaust lead to more widespread death, devastation, and trauma than internment, it is worth exploring how collective memory of these events may lead a Jewish American or a Japanese American to interpret everyday racism at much deeper levels or perhaps as more traumatic in fear that the Holocaust or internment could happen again.

In closing, I leave you with Kent’s words as he imparted his reasons for addressing internment in order to figure out who he was, which alternatively leads us in the same direction: “I think it’s [internment and WWII was] something that I need to know because that’s all part of what impacted myself whether I liked it or not…Everything from being the enemy…then to being accepted as citizens.”
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The Events of the March 11th Disasters

Appendix 2: Evacuation Zones from the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant

EXTENDING EVACUATION ZONES

March 11: The Japanese Prime Minister orders the evacuation of residents in a 10 km radius around the Fukushima 1 and Fukushima 2 nuclear power plants.

March 12: Authorities extend evacuation zone to 20 km around the Fukushima 1 nuclear power plant, and urge people within a 30 km radius to stay indoors.

March 15: Japan establishes a 30 km radius no-fly zone around Fukushima 1.

Appendix 3: Map of Nuclear Power Plants in Japan

Appendix 4: Map of Internment Camps, Assembly Centers, Military Centers

Source:

http://www.amerikanskpolitikk.no/wpcontent/uploads/2013/02/japanese_internment_camp_map.jpg
Appendix 5: Japanese American Evacuation Order

WESTERN DEFENSE COMMAND AND FOURTH ARMY
WARTIME CIVIL CONTROL ADMINISTRATION
Presidio of San Francisco, California
May 7, 1942

INSTRUCTIONS
TO ALL PERSONS OF
JAPANESE
ANCESTRY

Living in the Following Area:

All of the City of Sacramento, State of California.

Pursuant to the provisions of Civilian Exclusion Order No. 52, this Headquarters, dated May 7, 1942, all persons of Japanese ancestry, both alien and non-alien, will be evacuated from the above area by 12 o'clock noon, P. M., on Saturday, May 9, 1942.

No Japanese persons living in the above area will be permitted to change residence after 12 o'clock noon, P. W. T., Thursday, May 7, 1942. Without obtaining special permission from the representative of the Commanding General, Northern California Sector, at the Civil Control Station located at:

Civic Memorial Auditorium,
Fifteenth and I Streets,
Sacramento, California.

Such permission will only be granted for the purpose of uniting members of a family, or in cases of grave emergency.

The Civil Control Station is equipped to assist the Japanese population affected by this evacuation in the following ways:

1. Give advice and instructions on the evacuation.
2. Provide services with respect to the management, leasing, sale, storage or other disposition of all kinds of property, such as real estate, business and professional equipment, household goods, boats, automobiles and livestock.
3. Provide temporary residence elsewhere for all Japanese in family groups.
4. Transport persons and a limited amount of clothing and equipment to their new residence.

The following Instructions Must Be Observed:

1. A responsible member of each family, preferably the head of the family, or the person in whose name most of the property is held, and each individual living alone, will report to the Civil Control Station to receive further instructions. This must be done between 6:00 A. M. and 5:00 P. M. on Thursday, May 7, 1942, or between 8:00 A. M. and 5:00 P. M. on Saturday, May 9, 1942, or between 8:00 A. M. and 10:00 P. M. on Sunday, May 10, 1942.

2. Evacuees must carry with them on departure for the Assembly Center, the following property:
   a. Clothing and linens (no mattresses) for each member of the family;
   b. Toilet articles for each member of the family;
   c. Extra clothing for each member of the family;
   d. Sufficient knives, forks, spoons, plates, bowls and cups for each member of the family;
   e. Essential personal effects for each member of the family.

3. All items carried will be securely packaged, tagged and plainly marked with the name of the owner and numbered in accordance with instructions obtained at the Civil Control Station. The size and number of packages is limited to that which can be carried by the individual or family group.

4. No pets of any kind will be permitted.
5. No personal items and no household goods will be shipped to the Assembly Center.

6. The United States Government through its agencies will provide for the storage, at the sole risk of the owner, of the more substantial household items, such as pictures, washing machines, pianos and other heavy furniture. Cooking utensils and other small items will be accepted for storage if crated, packed and plainly marked with the name and address of the owner. Only one name and address will be used by a given family.

7. Each family and individual living alone, will be transported in the Assembly Center or will be authorized to travel by private automobile in a supervised group. All instructions pertaining to the movement will be obtained at the Civil Control Station.

Go to the Civil Control Station between the hours of 8:00 A. M. and 1:00 P. M. on:
- Friday, May 8, 1942
- Saturday, May 9, 1942
- Sunday, May 10, 1942

Lieutenant General, U. S. Army
Commanding

Appendix 6: Interview Guide Questions

Note: Questions may be altered, changed, added, or deleted depending on the flow of the conversation.

1. What is your name?
2. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
3. Where did you grow up?
   a. Tell me more about that. Who lived with you then? Did you/do you have any brothers/sisters, parents, grandparents, other relatives? What was the neighborhood like where you grew up? Were there other Japanese and/or Japanese Americans living there? Any friendships with them?
4. When was the first time you heard about the 3/11 disasters? Where were you? What was your reaction? What did you do in response (e.g., did you call someone right away- if yes, who did you call, did you get online for news, etc.)?
5. How did you hear about the disasters (i.e., from new sources, (social) media, friends, family, social networks, etc.)? To what extent do you still follow the developments of the disasters? How often do you follow the disasters over time?
6. Do you know someone (such as friends, family, acquaintances, etc.) who has been affected by the disasters? What was their reaction? How did this affect you?
7. How did you relate to the Japanese American community in response to 3/11?
   a. Did you participate with other Japanese Americans to raise awareness/concern about 3/11? Were there a lot of Japanese Americans involved?
   b. Did you participate or advocate for fundraising or volunteer campaigns for Japan following 3/11?
8. How do you think the 3/11 disaster has changed ideas of yourself as a Japanese American? When did you first realize that your self-perception changed?
9. What does it mean to you to be Japanese American?
10. What do you think about the Japanese American community in Colorado?
11. Tell me about a time when you felt proud to be Japanese American. Can you recall a time when you felt uncomfortable being Japanese American?
12. Have you participated in Japanese and/or Japanese American organizations or activities? If so, how?
   a. Did you have any leadership roles?
13. Tell me about a time when you participated in an event with other Japanese and/or Japanese American organizations? (e.g., organizing cultural events, membership in an organization, holidays, visiting Japan, making Japanese food)
14. You said earlier that you felt pride in Japan when ____ (participants answer to question 10). Do you think that you saw the same kind of character/compassion/etc. in 3/11? Tell me about that.
15. Now I’d like to talk about Japanese history in relation to the U.S. How important do you think internment during WWII was to the Japanese American community?
   a. (If it seems like they’re willing to talk freely):
Did you know anyone who was sent to an internment camp in the 1940s (e.g., any family members or friends)? Can you tell me about that?

16. What can you recall about WWII (e.g., internment camps, atomic bombs)? How have your ideas about WWII changed over time?

17. When 3/11 happened, do you think it made some Japanese Americans/or you (if willing to discuss) think about their/your WWII experiences? The Japanese government’s response? Peoples’ suffering without reason?

18. Has Japan suffered other catastrophes besides 3/11? If yes, then what? How are these catastrophes similar or different from 3/11?

19. As you can tell, what I’m really interested in is how what it means to be Japanese American might have changed over time and how those changes can be understood in relation to the experiences of disasters and in the way that people think about the role of the state in responding to disasters. It seems to be that you do/don’t see a great deal of difference between how you thought of yourself as Japanese American in relation to WWII and now. Do you think you’ve changed in your views?
   a. What do you think your children’s sense of Japanese American identity is like?

20. Is there anything else you think I need to know to understand Japanese American identity? Is there someone you can recommend who I should speak with next?
### Appendix 7: Guide to Participants in Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Approximate Age</th>
<th>Personal/Familial Relation to Internment</th>
<th>Key Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Fujimoto</td>
<td>3rd (Sansei)</td>
<td>Early-70s</td>
<td>Born in pre-internment era; Interned as a child at Manzanar</td>
<td>Internment was traumatizing and profoundly impacted her, Politically active in community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Nishimura</td>
<td>3rd (Sansei)</td>
<td>Mid-70s</td>
<td>Born in pre-internment era; Interned as a child at Tule Lake and Amache</td>
<td>Did not perceive that internment had much of an impact on him, He was “too young”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathryn Fujimoto</td>
<td>4th (Yonsei)</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Born in post-internment era, daughter of Michelle; Parents and extended family interned</td>
<td>Raised without Japanese cultural traditions, “Othered,” Confronted internment to accept self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry Matsuoka</td>
<td>3rd (Sansei)</td>
<td>Mid-60s</td>
<td>Born in post-internment era; Aunt interned</td>
<td>Successful, pursued athletic career in judo, Advocated for preservation of Amache</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kent Hisakawa</td>
<td>3rd (Sansei)</td>
<td>70s</td>
<td>Born during internment; Some extended family and wife interned</td>
<td>Addressed internment to figure out who he was, Wife influenced his community involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Hashimoto</td>
<td>3rd (Sansei)</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Born in Japan during post internment era; Family not interned, wife’s parents interned</td>
<td>Journalist, writes about Japanese/Japanese American culture, Contemplated ethnic identity before father’s death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela Fukui</td>
<td>3rd (Sansei)</td>
<td>40s or 50s</td>
<td>Born in post-internment era; Parents and extended family interned</td>
<td>Participates in Japanese martial art aikido, Became more interested in internment once father died</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evelyn Tsukino</td>
<td>3rd (Sansei)</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Born in post-internment era; Two uncles interned</td>
<td>Deemed internment to be “ancient history,” More interested in Japanese cultural traditions/artifacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynthia Yamada</td>
<td>3rd (Sansei)</td>
<td>Late 70s</td>
<td>Born in pre-internment era; Immediate family evacuated West Coast; Two uncles interned</td>
<td>More interested in Japanese cultural traditions/artifacts, Evelyn’s friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia Akiyama</td>
<td>4th (Yonsei)</td>
<td>Late 20s</td>
<td>Born in Japan during post-internment era; Family not interned</td>
<td>Japanese is her first language, “Embraces the confusion” of bicultural identity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Appendix 8: Guide to Categories and Subcategories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category/Subcategory</th>
<th>Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication Theory of Identity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Frame</td>
<td>Michelle, Charles, Kathryn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enacted Frame</td>
<td>Jerry, Kathryn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Frame</td>
<td>Kent, James, Angela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal Frame</td>
<td>Evelyn, Cynthia, Jerry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identity Gaps</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal-Communal Identity Gap</td>
<td>James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enacted-Relational-Communal Identity Gap</td>
<td>Sophia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal-Enacted-Communal Identity Gap</td>
<td>Angela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal-Relational-Communal Identity Gap</td>
<td>Kathryn, Angela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical-Cultural Hybridity</strong></td>
<td>James, Sophia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>