

# Affinity Groups: Commonality in Diversity

Alexandra Shookhoff

Senior Thesis 2005-2006  
Anthropology Department, Haverford College

## Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to the members of ALAS, ASA, and BSL for welcoming me at their meetings and activities and allowing me to use their organizations for my fieldwork. In particular, I would like to thank Maria Nieves, Karla Ovalle, Helen Tang, and Nat Lippert for being so generous with their time, information, and insights.

I would like to thank William Hohenstein and Greg Kannerstein for taking the time to recall events that occurred over 30 years ago and Margaret Schaus for obtaining sources that I was unable to find.

I would also like to thank my thesis advisor, Maris Gillette, as well as the rest of the Senior Seminar Advisors – Laurie Hart, Jennifer Patino, and Zolani Noonan-Ngwane – all of whom helped shape my ideas and challenged my assumptions.

I must also acknowledge the members of the Haverford College Women's Lacrosse team, particularly, Katrina Morgan, Margaret Sampson, and Laurie Monhait, as well as my suitemates, Lauren Donaldson and Abby Schutzman, who listened patiently to my continual complaints and frustration.

Most of all, I am beholden to my parents, Carol and David Shookhoff. They have done more for me than I deserve.

This work is dedicated to my grandparents, Nai Nai and Ye Ye and Go Go, in memoriam,  
who have loved me unconditionally.

## Abstract

Over the past 40 years, student ethnic organizations have become widespread at institutions of higher learning, yet very little anthropological literature has examined ethnic identity in an educational context. In this work, I investigate the maintenance of cohesion within these organizations. Their very existence seems to assume a certain amount of commonality among members, yet, in reality, students come from exceptionally diverse backgrounds and experiences. I attempt to examine how groups negotiate their differences in order to create a common identity.

Student ethnic organizations (or Affinity Groups as they are called at Haverford College, the locus for my fieldwork) first came into existence in the early '60s and late '70s. Inspired by the Civil Rights Movement, students created Affinity Groups as a political weapon to bring equality to their colleges and universities. Over time, these organizations have expanded their roles to encompass one or more of four purposes: one, refuge from the mainstream community; two, cultural emissary; three, provision of academic aid; four, source of social activism.

I conducted my fieldwork at Haverford College, where I joined three Affinity Groups: Alliance of Latin American Students (ALAS), Asian Student Association (ASA), and Black Students League (BSL). I attended meetings and activities sponsored by the groups and conducted interviews with club members as well as faculty and administration.

Several theoretical approaches to ethnicity influenced my analysis of these groups. Barth's theory of boundary maintenance, referred to as circumstantialist, helped frame how groups distinguish themselves from the rest of the college community.

Primordialist theory, which claims an intrinsic attachment among members of the same ethnic group, and instrumentalist theory, which posits that ethnic groups are formed out of utility to create effective political weapons, both aided my understanding of how members found commonality within their groups.

I found that each Affinity Group took a different approach to forming a shared ethnic identity. This suggests that one theory of ethnicity is not sufficient for all circumstances. Instead, we must develop an approach that considers the social, political, and historical contexts of each ethnic group.

## Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Noche de Bohemia	1
Statement of Interest	4
Methods	5
Outline of Thesis	7
CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL APPROACH AND LITERATURE REVIEW	8
Theories of Ethnicity	8
Panthenicity	13
Ethnic Identity in an Educational Setting	18
Ethnic Labels	19
Conclusion	20
CHAPTER 3: HISTORY OF AFFINITY GROUPS	23
Ethnic Organizations at American Colleges and Universities	23
<i>History</i>	23
<i>Purposes and Benefits</i>	25
<i>Club Composition</i>	27
Ethnic Organizations at Haverford	28
<i>History</i>	28
<i>Absence of Records</i>	34
<i>Organizational Procedures</i>	34
CHAPTER 4: THE UNITYFEST FIGHT	36
CHAPTER 5: PATTERNS IN AFFINITY GROUPS	42
Divisions	42
<i>Goals of the Group</i>	42
Affirming Identity	46
<i>Worldviews</i>	49
Authenticity	49
Responses to Stereotypes	51
Creating Cohesion	52
<i>Affinity Group Leaders</i>	56
<i>Cultural Symbols</i>	58
<i>Experiences</i>	71
<i>Boundaries</i>	73
<i>Safe Space</i>	75
Conclusion	81
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION	83
Summary of Observations and Analysis	83
Future Directions	85

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### **NOCHE DE BOHEMIA**

For the members of the Alliance of Latin American Students (ALAS), Noche de Bohemia starts at 6pm on Friday, October 28th. The rest of the Haverford College community is invited for 7pm. The announcement for the event reads: “Come to the MCC [Multicultural Center] this Friday from 7-10pm to enjoy delicious samples of traditional Latino food. Learn about the significance of each dish and be entertained with music and poetry reading.” ALAS has been planning this annual celebration of their cultures for the past three weeks. Focusing on Latino food, they have themed the night: *Sabor Latino* [Latin Flavor]. Silvia,<sup>1</sup> the co-President of ALAS, has instructed members to “cook something that is significant in your culture” and prepare a little presentation on why it is important. For instance, she is planning to cook *tamales* because every year her entire family gathers in one house to prepare hundreds of *tamales*. Each household takes some home to freeze so they can eat them throughout the year. She also has a picture book about making *tamales* that she plans to present. In her instructions, Silvia acknowledges the varied cultures that comprise the Latino club.

As usual, I am the first to arrive at the Multicultural Center (MCC). Just as I am beginning to think I am in the wrong place, Elena and Silvia struggle through the doors carrying bags of plantains, *carne* (beef), *arroz* (rice), *leche* (milk), *tamales*, *huevos* (eggs), and various culinary items. As I help them unload, more students arrive with food and decorations. One girl puts in a CD of what might be salsa and is definitely Latino music. Carlos and Carmen, both from Puerto Rico, immediately start to dance together,

---

<sup>1</sup> All names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the students.

while others, including myself head to the kitchen. Elena (Cuban-American), Clara (Argentinean-American), Patricia (Puerto Rican), and Silvia (Mexican-American) have specific dishes they want to prepare and the rest of us offer our help.

The kitchen is small. With too many people and not enough utensils, cookware, or counter space, it quickly becomes chaotic. People frantically search for bowls, knives, and missing ingredients. Over the din of the blender Patricia is using to crush ice for Piña Coladas, Andrew (Mexican-American) offers to go to the Dining Center to find more equipment.

I am told to peel the plantains for Patricia's *tostones*. Although they look like bananas, plantains have a much thicker skin and require a knife to peel. As I struggle to remove the skin, Jaime, also from Puerto Rico, comes over to show me the proper technique of slitting the sides. When enough are peeled, Patricia shows me how she wants the plantains sliced. The slices must then be patted dry so that when they are placed in the oil they will fry quickly. After they are fried the first time, Patricia hands them to me and I smash them down with a fork so that they make little plantain pancakes. I give them back to Patricia, who fries them for a second time and adds salt. The *tostones* are wildly popular, and Patricia and I are kept busy for a long time, slicing, smashing, frying, and salting. As we cook, Patricia tells me that, for her, "*Tostones* define my household cuisine, and really Puerto Rican cuisine." When she decided to study in America, she had her mother teach her how to cook them, so she would have part of her home with her.

Silvia, meanwhile, is trying to find a plate to heat her *tamales*, which her mother has sent from home. Finally she settles for placing a paper towel in the microwave. I

offer to stir the batter for Clara's *panqueques* and somehow manage to catch my oven mitt on fire. Everyone laughs as I extinguish myself in the sink. When the batter is ready, Clara begins making *panqueques*. She adds a little *dulce de leche* and hands it to Rafael, saying, "You have to tell me if this is ok because you are the only one who will know." She and Rafael are both Argentinean, although Clara is American and Rafael is an international student. Despite their different nationalities, they perceive themselves to have a common culture, which is distinct from the other Latinos present.

The last dish, Elena's meatloaf with hardboiled eggs in the middle, is not ready until 9pm, two hours after Bohemian Night officially begins. But it doesn't matter because there are only three or four students present who are not in the club and everyone else has been eating as they cook. If anyone is disappointed that more people from the community have not come to experience Latino culture, they do not show it. Everyone is having a wonderful time, eating food, talking, and dancing. As I watch Melissa from Puerto Rico teaching Ana, a Mexican-American, the steps to Salsa, Jaime comes over to me and drags me from my chair. He begins to dance with me, patiently showing me how to move my feet and hips. He then moves on to dance with Isabel, who is also from Puerto Rico. I notice that they always seem to dance in pairs of men and women.

As I put my coat on to leave, Elena comes over to thank me for my help. I tell her I was happy to do it. Walking out the door, I leave behind the group dancing together, singing together, eating together.

## STATEMENT OF INTEREST

Student organizations dedicated to specific ethnicities and cultures, which are termed “Affinity Groups” at Haverford College, began to arise at colleges and universities during the ’60s. Some authors suggest that these clubs arose during this time period because cultural identity was becoming a celebrated trait rather than one of shame (Sokolovskii & Tishkov 1996, Van den Berghe 1981). Today almost all institutions of higher learning have these organizations.

I first became interested in Affinity Groups during my freshman year, when I, as half-Chinese, was asked if I belonged to the Asian Student Association (ASA). I had never considered joining ASA, and wondered why people thought I would necessarily have something in common with Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese students or even international students from China. What dance, music, language, or food do we share? Why did people think I would be more comfortable surrounded by Asian students than I would be surrounded by White students? Growing up in a very liberal community, I had never experienced racism. Neither had I ever struggled to prove my identity; being Chinese was one facet of my life, but it never encompassed me. But another Asian student at Haverford may have had an incredibly different experience growing up or very different thoughts on ethnic identity. As I thought more about these groups, I couldn’t understand why and how they continued to survive. The very existence of the group assumes a certain amount of commonality among members, but, in reality, students come from diverse backgrounds and experiences. How did groups negotiate these differences and create a cohesive unit? How did they create and assume a common identity?

These questions intrigued me throughout college as I was confronted with issues of race and multiculturalism. Eventually I decided the issue of Affinity Groups was significant enough to warrant fieldwork.

## **METHODS**

I conducted my fieldwork at Haverford College, where I joined three Affinity Groups – Black Students League (BSL), Asian Student Association (ASA), and Alliance of Latin American Students (ALAS). While Haverford has a variety of Affinity Groups, I chose those three in particular for two reasons. First, each adds a different dimension to my research and together offer a range of experiences. As the literature review will further discuss, Blacks, Latinos, and Asians have very distinct historical, political, and social situations within the United States. I conjectured that using a contextual framework might influence my understanding of ethnic identity formation within the groups. Second, all three organizations target panethnic populations. Having such a broad range of members would presumably highlight the tensions that arise and illuminate how organizations create a common identity despite their differences.

The bulk of my fieldwork consisted of attending club meetings and participating in events sponsored by the groups. To more accurately remember and represent members' thoughts and opinions, I tape-recorded several of the ALAS meetings and a few of the BSL meetings. I also used the transcripts to analyze exact semantic and syntactic content. During meetings, I listened intently to both formal discussions as well as side conversations, noting the topic, agreements and dissensions, and language. In addition to dialogue, I attempted to observe the general dynamic among members,

looking for signs of tension or familiarity. I would often arrive early and leave late in order to observe how members acted in a more casual setting before the official meeting began.

During meetings, I very rarely participated in formal discussions because I felt uncomfortable as an outsider offering my opinion. Even when the group was just hanging out, as they often did, I was much more reticent than I felt I ought to be. I did not often join in conversations about professors or classes because I felt shy, not knowing many people. I attempted to make up for this and get to know the group members better by participating fully during events, where I helped cook, decorate, and clean.

In addition to attending group activities, I also conducted individual interviews, either in person or through e-mail. I spoke with members of each Affinity Group, as well as administrators and staff members at Haverford. I had several goals for my interviews. I attempted to gain a sense of the history of each group, as very few records were kept about their formations and past trajectories. In addition, I hoped to become more familiar with my informants – to learn about their backgrounds, their thoughts on the purpose, benefits, drawbacks of the groups, and their feelings about Haverford. Sometimes, I also used the interviews to help illuminate a certain event or comment that had occurred during a meeting.

For the final stage of my fieldwork, I asked ALAS and BSL to map out their individual friend networks.<sup>2</sup> After a meeting of each group, I explained that I was hoping to understand the social networks of Affinity Group members as part of my thesis, and I would appreciate their taking a few minutes to create a chart of their friends, including their names, and whether they belonged to an Affinity Group.

---

<sup>2</sup> I did not have the opportunity to ask ASA to do this because they do not hold regular meetings.

## **OUTLINE OF THESIS**

In this work, I discuss the creation of cohesion among ethnic group members in a formal group setting. I examine how groups negotiate their differences in order to adhere to a common ethnic identity. I then use my findings to analyze current theoretical approaches of ethnicity. Chapter Two provides a review of the relevant literature and a theoretical background. I describe different approaches to understanding ethnicity and review literature on Black, Latino, and Asian ethnic identity in the United States, with a focus on educational settings. Chapter Three is a history and explanation of Affinity Groups, both their general inception and their trajectory at Haverford College. Chapter Four describes the dispute that took place during one of BSL meetings. Through my account, I hope to highlight the conflicts Affinity Groups face as well as the ways in which they maintain cohesion. In Chapter Five, I analyze the prominent divisions and points of contention in Affinity Groups. I then discuss how the groups attempt to overcome their differences and create a common identity or at least a cohesive unit. Chapter Six is the conclusion, in which I summarize my fieldwork and offer suggestions for future research.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Approach and Literature Review

### THEORIES OF ETHNICITY

“Ethnicity” is a term that refers to a group whose identity is formed around both a sense of shared cultural practices (i.e., language, music, dance) and the notion of a common origin at some level. The concept of ethnicity is distinct from those of race and nationality because it incorporates both a cultural and a biological component (Sokolovskii & Tishkov 1996). The term ethnicity was rarely used in anthropology until the 1950s when it began to replace *race* or *tribe*, both of which had negative connotations, as a label for a cultural group. The change in terminology was mainly a result of the process of modernization in Africa – *tribe* had the connotation of primitiveness, whereas *race* was perceived as too divisive and inaccurate (Zenner 1996). Anthropologists also shifted the terminology, and through terminology, ideology, in order to emphasize a sense of agency. Wolf (1994) writes, “The new emphasis on ethnicity fastened on the ways in which such groups and entities arise and define themselves as against others also engaged in the process of development and self-definition” (6). In the 1970s in the United States the concept of ethnicity really gained popularity in reaction to the idea of America as a melting pot. Cultural identity became a celebrated value and ethnic minority groups became socially active (Sokolovskii & Tishkov 1996). Many government institutions and universities instituted policies, quotas, and areas of study around the concept of ethnicity (Van den Berghe 1981).

Despite the frequency with which the term *ethnicity* is used, there has been much debate about what it actually signifies. There are many ideas concerning what constitutes an ethnicity, what are the essential elements of ethnicity, and what is the best theoretical

approach to the study of ethnic groups. Ethnicity theorists can be broadly divided into three categories: primordialists, instrumentalists, and circumstantialists. Primordialists focus on the idea of “communities of culture” whereas instrumentalists focus on “communities of interest” (Espiritu 1992). Circumstantialists, in contrast, emphasize the boundaries of ethnic groups.

A primordialist view of ethnicity focuses on a tangible foundation to ethnic identification. Ethnicity is based on a deeply rooted affiliation. Geertz (2000) terms this bond a “primordial attachment,” which he describes as “[an attachment] that stems from the ‘givens’ . . . of social existence: immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly” (259). Within this category are two schools of thought: those that view ethnicity as primarily a product of culture and those that see it as predominantly a biological phenomenon.

The former school asserts that cultural symbols and traditions are the basis for the primordial attachment. Cultural symbols are “any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception – the conception is the symbol’s meaning” (Geertz 2000: 91). Ties to these symbols are so deep and emotionally powerful that they create bonds among members within an ethnic group. Weber (1922) writes, “Any cultural trait, no matter how superficial, can serve as a starting point for the familiar tendency to monopolistic closure” (55). These traits, according to Weber, can be language, religion, physical appearance, and the conduct of everyday life. In contrast, the biological notion posits that this attachment results from genetic evolution since, in theory, genes favoring nepotism inherently enhance the likelihood of their own reproduction. Because ethnicity expresses, at some level, a feeling of shared descent, the

affiliations formed for those among ethnic community are extensions of kin affiliations (Van den Bergh 1981).

Instrumentalists, on the other hand, take a utilitarian approach to ethnicity. Influenced by Marx and functionalists, instrumentalists view ethnic groups as a political tool, a “community of interest” (Espiritu 1992) rather than of culture. While a belief in a common origin is still a component of ethnicity, the emphasis is on the political objectives of the group. Ethnic communities have claims to status and recognition, and ultimately power, in the American political arena. These claims make the groups useful to political leaders, who sometimes use or even exploit ethnic groups to their own advantages. Some go so far to say that ethnicity is nothing more than a myth created by the ruling classes to mask class interests (Cox 1948 in Van den Bergh 1981). A more moderate view states that rational interests, as opposed to deep sentimental attachment, drive ethnic cohesion or dissolution (Glazer & Moynihan 1963).

Often an instrumentalist approach to ethnicity also includes cultural symbols around which ethnic groups unite. The emphasis, however, is placed on the manipulation of these symbols by leaders, rather than on the symbols themselves. Communities, according to Brass (1991), use cultural symbols to delineate inclusion and exclusion. He writes, “In the movement to create greater internal cohesion and to press more effectively ethnic demands against rival groups, ethnic and nationalist elites increasingly stress the variety of ways in which the members of the group are similar to each other and collectively different from others” (21).

Frederick Barth (1969) rejected both the primordial and instrumental views of ethnicity on the grounds that they assumed that ethnicities were formed in isolation and

were static over time. Furthermore, these theories had preconceived notions of the significant factors in the “genesis, structure, and function” of each group. Finally, they did not take into account regional variations within an ethnicity.

Instead, in his landmark work *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Differences* (1969), Barth proposed a theory of ethnicity based on boundary maintenance. His ideas dramatically changed notions of ethnicity and his model continues to be the most influential to date. His theory, often termed circumstantialist (Lee 1991; Van den Bergh 1981), essentially claims that boundaries between ethnic groups persist, despite interaction with others, and that, in fact, ethnic groups are formed and maintained often *as a result* of the interaction with others. Therefore, in the study of ethnic groups, the focus should be on this boundary and how it is maintained, rather than the cultural traits it encloses. The cultural characteristics of a group may change, but an ethnic group persists as long as the group members continue to perceive themselves as different from others. Indeed, according to Barth, a one-to-one correlation between an ethnic group and a culture does not necessarily exist because “the features that are taken into account are not the sum of ‘objective’ differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant” (p.14). This insight leads to Barth’s second major point. Ethnic groups are categories of ascription; they are conceived of by the actors themselves, rather than by so-called “objective” observers, who create groups on the basis of what they consider to be shared cultural traits. By ascribing to an ethnic group, an individual tacitly agrees to comply with certain behavioral expectations, whether within one’s own ethnic group or among other groups. Finally, being a member of an ethnic group means sharing criteria for evaluation and

judgment. In my experience, such criteria might apply to styles of dress, athletic prowess, academic achievement, or other attributes. It might also pertain to less quantifiable social behaviors such as the willingness to accept humorous disparagement by other group members. This set of values results in constraints on the kinds of roles a member may play and with whom he may interact. Barth calls ethnicity *imperative* to emphasize that it cannot be temporarily set aside. I would argue, however, that ethnicity can be emphasized in some instances and disregarded in others. Stacey Lee (1991, 1996), for instance, demonstrates that in Asian-American youth, some individuals choose to downplay their ethnicity at school, but accentuate it at home. Indeed, in general, people often choose to express (or not express) specific personal characteristics in certain situations. Barth's model, therefore, although called circumstantial, does not adequately incorporate specific context and how it may influence the expression of ethnic identity.

Of particular relevance to my work is Barth's approach to minority ethnic groups. He believes that the marginalization of an ethnic group is, in most cases, the result of a historical event, rather than the result of institutional separation within one group (30). Blacks, for instance, who have historically been discriminated against in the United States, were forcibly brought to this country as a distinctive (supposedly inferior) population. Their oppression stems from the historical fact of their enslavement. The boundaries are maintained by the majority, or host, population, who create easily identifiable criteria to recognize members of minority ethnicities.

## **PANETHNICITY**

In this work, I do not just examine ethnicity, but also panethnicity. Panethnicity refers to the unification of distinct ethnic populations under an umbrella identity (e.g., Asian-American, Latino). A panethnic movement represents a “shift in the level of group identification from smaller boundaries to larger-level affiliations” (Espiritu 1992). Like ethnicity, panethnicity includes a belief in a common origin, whether mythical or not. While a belief in a shared history is an essential component of a panethnic identification, it is not necessarily the basis for it. Indeed most panethnic theorists would say cultural ties are not strong enough to incite panethnic unification (Espiritu 1992; Lopez & Espiritu 1999; Padilla 1985; Sommers 1999). Instead, panethnic identification stems from the need or desire to protect and promote collective interest (ibid). Panethnic theorists are similar to instrumentalists in that they both take a utilitarian approach; they often attribute the origins of panethnic movements to political and economic motivations.

Literature on panethnic identity has two main themes: one, it often questions the validity of the concept itself; two, it explains why the concept continues to exist and how it can be a useful construct. In Latino literature there has been a particular focus on the validity of subsuming individual ethnic identities under the broader category of Latino or Hispanic. Authors argue that the so-called Latino population, like other panethnic populations, actually consists of separate and distinct individual ethnic identities and labeling them as one ethnicity overlooks but does not eliminate their differences. Oboler (1995), for instance, writes,

Insofar as people of Latin American descent do not necessarily share social, national, or historical backgrounds, it cannot be assumed that all

believe that they have to have a common identity *in the U.S. public sphere* with people of other nationalities who are labeled Hispanics” (xiv).

She questions the extent to which the legacy of Spanish colonial rule up through the mid-nineteenth century can justify the homogenization of at least 23 million people who have different social, national, and historical backgrounds.

Not only do Latino countries have distinct cultures, histories, values, etc., but these countries also have different emigration patterns and migrants of different nationalities have different experiences in the United States. Mexicans, for instance, the largest of Latino groups, are in a unique position in that many Mexican families were indigenous to the United States. These individuals are original settlers with deep roots in America, yet they often live in poverty and face discrimination (Gonzalez 2002). Today Mexican immigration, both legal and illegal, is often stimulated by economic needs (ibid). Attempting to escape poverty in their homeland, Mexicans primarily find work in America in agricultural labor (Melville 1988). In contrast, many Cubans came to the United States as political refugees. This first wave of Cuban immigrants in the 1960s consisted of mostly well-educated, middle-class, entrepreneurial, and professional individuals (Calderón 1992; Gonzalez 2002). Because they were fleeing communism, the Cuban refugees were welcomed by the US government and given financial aid and citizenship. Due to their original socioeconomic status and the special treatment in America, Cubans became one of the most prosperous Latino immigrant groups (Gonzalez 2002). Puerto Ricans, the second largest Latino group, have an entirely different situation here. Although they were granted US citizenship through the Jones Act in 1917, Puerto Ricans continue to be treated as foreigners in America (Gonzalez 2002). While

some immigrants settled in the United States to escape the economic depression in Puerto Rico, particularly in the 20s and 30s (Calderón 1992), other Puerto Ricans come to America for educational reasons, later returning to their homeland.

In addition to pointing out these distinctions, Oboler, along with many other authors on the subject (Calderón 1992; Genova & Ramos-Zayas 2003; Melville 1988), highlights the fact that the common identity was assigned to, rather than selected by, individuals of Latin American and Spanish descent by state agencies and governments and the media. The term “Hispanic” was first sanctioned by the government for official and general use in 1968 when President Nixon declared a National Hispanic Week (Melville 1988). Hispanics or Latinos did not initially choose to see themselves as members of a single group.

Like Latinos, Asian-Americans also have distinct backgrounds, cultures, and experiences in America. The Chinese were the first significantly-sized group of Asians in America, arriving in large numbers in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Chan 1998; Min 2006a; Wong 1998). Originally drawn by the Gold Rush, Chinese immigrants were also engaged in the construction of the transnational railroad construction and farming along the West Coast (Min 2006b). The Chinese immediately faced prejudice in the United States. California, where many Chinese immigrants settled, enacted a series of laws that discriminated against them. In 1882 the US government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers. It was the first immigrant legislation targeting a specific ethnic group for exclusion. The Japanese were the second major group of Asians to immigrate, arriving at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Like the Chinese, they were a source of cheap labor, particularly on the

West Coast (Wong 1998). In contrast, Koreans in the United States are mostly recent immigrants (Lee 1991).<sup>3</sup> New immigrant legislation required Koreans to prove their self-sufficiency. Therefore, many Koreans in America are well-educated middle-class workers (Chan 1998; Lee 1991). Language barriers, however, cause many Koreans to have difficulty finding work in America. In order to avoid menial labor, Koreans often open small businesses. They have created business associations for economic support, which in turn enhances ethnic solidarity.

With so many differences within umbrella groups such as “Latino” or “Asian”, the concept of panethnicity seems almost absurd. Yet, the concept continues to exist, and, indeed, many authors assert its validity. Most proponents of panethnicity argue that unification is useful as a political resource (Calderón 1992; Espiritu 1992; Lopez & Espiritu 1999; Melville 1988; Padilla 1985). They take an instrumentalist approach to panethnicity, finding the utility in a broader identification. Although individual ethnicities may have distinctive histories and ideologies, most face the same structural inequalities. They suffer from discrimination in work, education, and governmental policies. By banding together under panethnic identities, members of these groups create a more powerful political weapon.

For example, based on his fieldwork on Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago, Padilla (1985) concludes that mobilization for a Latino identity “represents an attempt on the part of the Spanish-speaking groups to mount a competitive front in pursuit of emerging resources and rewards” (11). Finding themselves at similar disadvantages in terms of discrimination in education and economic opportunities, Spanish-speaking

---

<sup>3</sup> Small numbers of Koreans have lived in the United States since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Wong 1988). Some filled the labor vacuum left by the Chinese because of the Exclusion Act, others came as refugees from the Korean War.

groups unite to gain political leverage. It is a conscious unification, created and initiated by leaders, “a manipulative device used to gain advantages or overcome disadvantages in the society” (64). Panethnic identification creates a political interest group with a belief in a shared origin.

Espiritu (1992, Lopez & Espiritu 1999) agrees with Padilla’s assertion that panethnic unifications are mainly political movements with a belief in cultural ties. Espiritu terms panethnic groups “politico-cultural collectivities” (p.2). Espiritu differs, however, in his conception of the catalyst for panethnic movements. He asserts that panethnic unification derives from groups’ realization that they are viewed as homogeneous by mainstream society. Society creates common interests for groups when it fails to acknowledge their differences. The groups must then coalesce in order to protect and promote these interests. Espiritu offers the example of a Chinese American who was beaten to death by two White men in 1982 because they allegedly mistook him for Japanese. Because the public does not usually distinguish among Asian subgroups, anti-Asian violence concerns the entire Asian-American population. The Asian-American community must unite to protect itself. Espiritu concludes that panethnicity is largely a product of categorization; the panethnic identity is imposed by the majority when it ignores the subgroup boundaries. Panethnicity, however, can become a useful resource in the political arena. Moreover, with the awareness of shared common experiences, eventually individuals may come to identify with the panethnic group rather than their subgroup.

Trosper (1981) takes a circumstantialist approach to panethnicity. His theory emphasizes a common historical event, or “charter” (247), around which ethnic groups

coalesce. In his research on Native Americans, Trosper claims that their panethnic identity formed around their shared experiences with Whites. Their charter is specifically Whites renegeing on treaties. According to Trosper, a charter aids panethnic mobilization if it fulfills three functions: one, it becomes “primordialized,” creating a shared mythical symbol; two, it defines the boundaries of the group; three, it provides a guide to action. Although he does not use the term directly, Jones (1953), in his examination of “blackness,” cites slavery as the charter around which Blacks coalesce. He writes, “Afro-Americans were creating a sense of blackness based, in part, on their shared slavery” (1953: 64).

#### **ETHNIC IDENTITY IN AN EDUCATIONAL SETTING**

There is scant literature about the ethnic identity of students from an anthropological perspective. Furthermore, most of the existing literature concerns high school rather than college students. The literature that does exist, however, suggests that ethnic group formation is a result of perceived shared experiences.

Beverly Tatum (1992, 1997) has written on the identity of high school minority students, particularly Black and Latino, but from a psychological perspective. Nonetheless, much of her work is relevant to the anthropological discussion of ethnicity and identity formation. Like Barth, Tatum (1997) asserts that the dominant group sets the parameters for the minority group. The majority, holding the power, assigns acceptable roles to the minority, usually positions reflecting a devalued status. The minority groups are constantly bombarded with images and experiences indicating their subordinate status due to their ethnicity. Thus, members of minority ethnic groups, perhaps desiring to

retreat to a safe space, often seek out those who share their experiences, people from the same ethnic group (e.g., the phenomenon of the Black kids eating together in the cafeteria). Tatum contends that this is an effective coping strategy for dealing with stress.

Tatum's findings are supported by anthropological work with both Black and non-Black minority groups. In their study of Black experiences on college campuses, Esterhuysen and Nel (1999) find that Black students often create social networks of their ethnic peers to prevent and cope with stress. Urciuoli (2003) and Lee (1991, 1996) both find in their studies on Latin American college students and Asian American high school students, respectively, that any unity within an ethnic (in these cases panethnic) group usually results from perceived shared experiences. In other words, commonality is a response to discrimination. Latino and Asian ethnic students include several different nationalities with distinct cultural forms (in the case of Asians, even different languages); however, the majority students perceive the students of the same ethnic type as homogeneous and treat them as such. These shared experiences of treatment by others form the foundation for the unity of ethnic identity groups.

## **ETHNIC LABELS**

Labels for ethnic groups change over time. The accepted term often reflects contemporary mainstream ideology. Through the mid-twentieth century, the word "negro," for instance, was the most common way to refer to individuals of African-American descent. Because "negro" is associated with slavery, however, the Black Power movement of the mid-sixties rejected the term "negro" and replaced it with "Black" Similarly, debate over the terms "Hispanic" or "Latino" reflects concerns over

the status of individuals of Latin American/Caribbean origin. On the pro-Latino side, David Hayes-Bautista and Jorge Chapa (1987) argue that individuals from Latin America (and other Spanish-speaking countries) are united by the political situation (i.e., discrimination, lack of representation) they face in America. They suggest using “Latino” instead of “Hispanic” because it is chosen, rather than being imposed. In response, Fernando Treviño (1987 in Oboler 1995) claims that it would be advantageous to continue with the well-established terminology (i.e., Hispanic), rather than adding a different label, in order to ensure “the community access to much-needed resources and in making demands from the ethnically based policy structure of the U.S. government.” Others argue against any umbrella term, claiming that there is no unity or clear definition within the Spanish-speaking community (Giménez 1989 in Oboler 1995) and that governmental policies made under this assumption could help some, but harm others (Cafferty & McCready 1985 in Oboler 1995). A similar debate occurs over the use of term “Asian.” Lee (1991) notes that while some consider its use buying into White mentality, others argue that since all Asians are treated in similar ways by the White majority, a pan-Asian alliance would aid in the fight against racism and discrimination.

## **CONCLUSION**

For this paper, I use the terms Black, Latino, and Asian because these are the labels the affinity groups at Haverford ascribe to themselves. In addition I refer to individuals of European descent (except for those who self-identify as Spanish) as White. I also use the term “mainstream” to refer to students who do not belong to BSL, ASA, ALAS, or another ethnicity-based Affinity Group. This is not meant to disparage

minority students, nor to suggest that they are less than full members of the College community. I use it simply to concisely distinguish Affinity Group members from other students.

All three theories of ethnicity – primordialist, instrumentalist, and circumstantialist – were relevant in my analysis of Affinity Groups, yet none was sufficient. Barth’s circumstantialist approach was useful in framing *what* Affinity Groups did create a common identity, but not *how* they did it. Barth’s approach alone could not distinguish among groups because it did not incorporate enough context. Instrumentalist and primordialist theories, although helpful in analyzing how groups create a common identity, are not universally applicable. Furthermore, they allowed the formation of group cohesion to be viewed as static, rather than continuous.

I attempted to compensate for the weaknesses of these ethnic models by framing my analysis with Moore’s (1987) diagnostic event approach. Moore critiques these and other ethnographic approaches for detemporalizing culture. By building theoretical paradigms on structure and behavior, the anthropologist eliminates the history and current context. Instead, Moore emphasizes the importance of *process* – “the process of cultural maintenance” and “the process of cultural change.” She writes, “I prefer the term ‘process’ to ‘practice’ precisely because process conveys an analytical emphasis on continuous production and construction without differentiating in that respect between repetition and innovation. . . . Process is simply a time-oriented perspective on both continuity and change” (1987: 729). Underscoring the significance of continuity, but also change, Moore proposes to conduct ethnography through an examination of events.

Events, she postulates, illuminate the creation, contestation, or continuation of social structures, while framing them in historical and cultural context.

Drawing from Moore's theoretical paradigm, I have selected a specific event – a dispute that occurred during a BSL meeting – through which I frame my discussion of the three Affinity Groups. This event incorporates several significant aspects of Affinity Groups which I encountered during my fieldwork.

## Chapter 3: History of Affinity Groups

### **ETHNIC ORGANIZATIONS AT AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

#### **History**

Student organizations dedicated to ethnicity are a fairly recent phenomenon on college campuses. Although some Latino fraternities existed at elite college campuses as early as the 1800s (Rodriguez 1995 in Montelongo 2003), it was not until the '60s and '70s that cultural clubs really flourished (Davis 1997, Montelongo 2003, Sedlacek 1987, Treviño 1992). The existence of these organizations can, in all probability, be attributed primarily to the impetus of the Civil Rights Movement. During this period, student activism increased to support the struggle for equality. Students participated in sit-ins, protests, peace marches, playing a significant role in events such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Freedom Rides, and the confrontations at Little Rock (Treviño 1992). The Civil Rights Movement stimulated a similar movement in the Chicano community, which protested the oppressive labor conditions for Mexican-Americans (Treviño 1992). Again, students were instrumental in organized marches and protests. Inspired by a fight for equal treatment from the federal, state, and local governments, students sought to bring these same ideals to their college campuses. The drive for equality stimulated the growth of ethnic organizations because students saw them as a vehicle for social action.

Montelongo (2003) writes,

Latina/o college student organizations, like most minority student organizations, came into existence at PWI's [predominantly white institutions] during the late 1960s and early 1970s as a result of the high levels of youthful energy and activist commitment directed at social and educational issues (1).

By uniting in ethnic clubs, minority students hoped to make their educational institutions aware of the need for equal rights and to use their alliance to bring about social change toward more fairness and egalitarianism. At their inception, most groups focused primarily on increased recruitment, more representation in the administration and faculty, development of curriculum to encompass minority studies, and a general responsiveness to the needs of minority students (Montelongo 2003, Treviño 1992).

This movement was strengthened by changing notions about ethnicity during the 1960s. Ethnic identity became a celebrated attribute, instead of being a source of shame which should disappear through assimilation (Sokolovskii & Tishkov 1996, Van den Berghe 1981). Because of the new value of ethnicity, academic institutions specifically sought out minorities (Van den Berghe 1981). Indeed, Urciuoli (2003) writes, “[Minority students’] presence at the school is part of the school’s presentation, even part of its exchange value in Marx’s sense” (156). This change in ideology contributed to an expanded federal role in education. The Education Amendments of 1972 shifted the allocation of funds from colleges’ research and development projects to student aid. The growth of federal aid allowed minority students to attend colleges and universities in higher numbers (Astin 1982). As these institutions began accepting more minorities, they created a larger pool of potential members available to form ethnic groups (Fleming 1984).

Today, almost every college and university in America has student ethnic organizations.<sup>4</sup> These clubs have expanded their roles to encompass one or more of four general purposes. One, they give students a safe, comfortable space in which to interact

---

<sup>4</sup> Notable exceptions are historically Black colleges and universities. Even these institutions, however, have organizations dedicated to different nationalities.

and relax. Two, they attempt to share the culture and traditions of their members with the rest of the campus. Three, they help students achieve academically. Four, they are sources of social activism. The organization dedicated to Koreans at the University of Pennsylvania, for example, states its mission as follows:

The Korean Students Association [KSA] consists primarily of second-generation Korean-Americans whose goal is to promote the education and enrichment of its members and the university community with aspects of the Korean culture ([www.upenn.edu](http://www.upenn.edu)).

KSA is dedicated to educating the community. In contrast, a group at Swarthmore for African-Americans (Swarthmore African-American Student Society) focuses on “helping black students achieve maximum academic success” ([www.swarthmore.edu](http://www.swarthmore.edu)).

### **Purposes and Benefits**

Writing from backgrounds in education, several authors describe the alienating environment that minority students encounter on college campuses. Environmental cues – such as the prevalence of paintings of White individuals, the predominance of minorities in menial jobs, and the underrepresentation of minorities in the administration – assert the cultural dominance of White, middle-class values (Bennett 1999). White students and faculty question the ability of minority students to achieve academically or promote other forms of racism and discrimination (Montelongo 2003). Given the apparently hostile environment and difficulties adjusting, many minority students find refuge in ethnic organizations. Montelongo (2003), for instance, writes,

Campus environments existing at PWI’s were frequently described in the literature as alienating, discomforting, and non-supportive for minority

college students (Fleming, 1984; Hawkins, 1988; Hurtado, 1994; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Smith 1981; Vela, 1977). Minority college students at PWI's were described as being treated like uninvited guests in a strange land where they did not comprise an essential part of the campus (Parker & Scott, 1985; Turner, 1994). In order to deal with such a climate, minority college students found support with their same ethnic/racial student peers (34).

According to Bennett (1999), students find comfort in these groups because they share common experiences and histories. Through ethnic organizations students may simulate a sense of family support (Barrios 1999, Bennett 1999). Several authors also describe additional benefits of ethnic organizations: enhance self-confidence and self-esteem, increase satisfaction with college, develop intellectually and emotionally, increase interpersonal and leadership skills (Barrios 1999, Bennett 1999, Montelongo 2003).

While providing some context for ethnic student organizations, the current literature has a glaring weakness: it assumes, to a certain extent, homogeneity across and within ethnic groups. Authors frame organizations as though members share similar backgrounds and experiences. They neglect to consider the implications of diversity within the broad ethnic categories.

While this critique extends to much of the literature, it cannot be applied universally. Some researchers have examined sub-groups within panethnic categories. Montelongo (2003) describes a study conducted by Wang, Sedlacek, and Westbrook (1992 in Montelongo 2003) on Asian American attitudes and involvement in college student organizations. Wang et al. found that more than any other Asian sub-group, Vietnamese Americans felt more isolated on campus and preferred friends of their own ethnic heritage. Montelongo concludes, "This finding emphasized the importance of

conducting studies that tapped into potential differences existing between ethnic groups and within ethnic groups” (2003: 43). Indeed, Montelongo himself conducts his research on differing attitudes and affects of ethnic groups between Chicana/o and Puerto Rican students. The findings described by these authors indicate that differences among sub-ethnic groups deserve to be explored further.

### **Club Composition**

The composition of every club varies depending on the specific club and the school. Some institutions allow their student organizations to determine for themselves whether they are open or closed, that is, whether they will accept anyone from the college community or be selective about membership. Other schools mandate that any group receiving funding from the college must allow any student to become a member. Closed clubs determine membership based on ethnic origin. Some clubs do not allow applicants, but accept only individuals whom they select.

Whether open or closed, all groups target specific ethnicities. Some clubs have a very narrow target population, while others choose to aim for a broader, panethnic membership. A group may specifically seek Koreans, for example, or it may advertise itself to all Asian students. Groups also differ on whether to include any student with the relevant cultural/ethnic heritage or to accept only native citizens of the country(ies) in question. Villanova University, for instance, has both the Hispanic Society (HS), which consists mainly of international students from Spanish-speaking countries, as well as the Latin American Student Organization (LASO), which admits anyone interested in Latin America (e-mail to author from David Heayn, November 8, 2005). It is commonly

understood at Villanova that each club has a different target population. When people who do not fit the criteria seek membership, they are dissuaded from joining.

## **ETHNIC ORGANIZATIONS AT HAVERFORD**

### **History**

Haverford College's Affinity Groups mirror the general trend of ethnic student organizations in the United States. The first Affinity Groups appeared in the late '60s and early '70s with a focus on social activism. Many professors and faculty believe the inception of the groups coincided with a large increase in the number of minority students matriculating at Haverford. Unfortunately, the Haverford Admissions Office has no records or statistics on matriculation broken down by ethnicity earlier than 1974. In addition, no documents record the precise establishment of any of the Affinity Groups at Haverford. By piecing together reports from faculty and staff, alumni, and school newspapers, I have gained some sense of the history of these groups.

The Black Students League (BSL) was the earliest Affinity Group at Haverford. The first mention of BSL in *The Bryn Mawr-Haverford College News* is on November 1, 1968, when the newspaper records a BSL meeting on Thursday. BSL is not mentioned again in the newspaper for a few years. Greg Kannerstein, currently the Athletic Director at Haverford, corroborates 1968 as the date of inception for BSL:

The BSL could not have started before 1968 since that fall marked the first class which had any sizable African-American presence (Haverford went from having one black frosh in the fall of 1967 to 17 – about 10% of the class – in fall 1968. Another large contingent arrived in fall 1969.) (e-mail to author, February 13, 2006).

BSL seemed to focus on social activism, striving to bring the tenets of the Civil Rights Movement to Haverford. In the Spring of 1972, BSL held a protest, which William Hohenstein, Professor of Sociology at Haverford, describes as “the most intense political action during my years on the campus” (e-mail to author, February 19, 2006). According to *The Bi-College News* (the successor to *The Bryn Mawr-Haverford College Newspaper*), the Black students were discontent with the

campus wide phenomenon of cultural insensitivity by Whites, subtle instances of racism in the classroom and in social encounters and the lack of significant black presence in the faculty, the administration, or general decision making process at Haverford (1972 *The Bi-College News*).

Hohenstein suggests the protest was a direct reaction to the removal of a large number of Black students in January of 1972. The Student Standing Committee, which is responsible for reviewing students’ academic performance, determined that a significant number of Black students<sup>5</sup> were not achieving academically. Hohenstein and Kannerstein agree that the college environment must be largely responsible for their failure because all the students were academically qualified to attend Haverford.

BSL protested the removal of the students as well as the general racist atmosphere by “going silent.” In other words, the Black students cut off communication with the administration and refused to issue demands. Instead, they boycotted all campus activities with the exception of classes and campus jobs. Students would gather silently in front of events, reminding the campus of their dissatisfaction. Kannerstein lauds their tactics as “brilliant,” explaining,

---

<sup>5</sup> Hohenstein cites this number as 19, but Kannerstein believes it was fewer. Kannerstein guesses there were about 80 Black students attending Haverford at this time.

By staying silent they were ‘holding a mirror up to the college.’ They were using the traditions of non-violence, silence, and introspection – the College’s own processes – not against the College, but to make their point more successful. If they made demands, the College would have immediately met them, but there would have been no self-examination.

The protest eventually came to an end after approximately six weeks when a group of students and administration met to discuss a resolution. The administration agreed to have higher numbers of minority faculty and administrators – including an administrator dedicated solely to minority issues, to provide more money for scholarships, and to establish the Ira D. Reid house, which continues to serve as the Black Cultural Center today. Although both Kannerstein and Hohenstein recall creating more resolutions, neither they nor Ghebre Mehreteab ’72, who participated in the protest, remembers what they were. The fact that they cannot recall the nature of the resolutions reinforces the idea that the demands were not as important as increasing awareness of the issues. Indeed, Hohenstein says that, by the end, the protest was disintegrating, and the administration created resolutions to “put a good face on something that was falling apart.” He explains that the movement lost its cohesiveness – grades were suffering, students did not want to be martyrs. Kannerstein acknowledges that, while all Black students participated in the movement, there were divisions among the protestors. A radical faction wanted to continue the protest and desired far-reaching changes, while other students wished the protest to end more quickly. Kannerstein concludes, however, that despite their differences, the group managed to sustain solidarity to achieve their goals.

The Alliance of Latin American Students (ALAS) did not exist until as late as 1999. However, other Latino student organizations, which no longer exist, were present

on campus before then. The first was the Puerto Rican Students of Haverford (PRSH), founded in 1971 or 1972, according to both Kannerstein and Hohenstein.<sup>6</sup> The PRSH joined the Black students in the '72 protest on February 11, eight days after it began.

Kannerstein writes,

The two groups worked closely together in the demonstrations and requests the students of color made in that year. It was quite unusual at that point in time for students from two different minority groups to work so closely together, and that may have been a major reason the requests of the students of color were so successfully dealt with from all points of view (e-mail to author, February 13, 2006).

It is unclear exactly when PRSH ceased to exist, although it was still present as late as 1990. María de Lourdes Seijo, an alumna from the class of 1990, says in response to my inquiry as to the goals of PRSH, “We offered support if anyone was homesick, planned La Fiesta, attended conferences, etc. But many just hung out” (e-mail to author, March 13, 2006). It seems that by 1990 the social activism that had initially driven the group, and was most likely the catalyst for its existence, had faded. Instead, the group became a resource or refuge of the sort that Montelongo and others describe.

By 1998, two different Latino groups existed: La Casa and Latin American Students Organization (LASO). Kannerstein speculates that LASO replaced PRSH. According to Alexandra Rodriguez, class of 2002, both La Casa and LASO sought to create awareness of Latino culture on campus. They differed in that LASO restricted its membership to students of Latino descent, whereas La Casa was open to anyone interested in Latino culture. LASO, which consisted mainly of New York-born Puerto Ricans and other first- or second-generation Latinos (e-mail to author from Vega, April

---

<sup>6</sup> During this period, almost all Latino students at Haverford College were from Puerto Rico.

11, 2005), had some political motivation in its attempts to support minority faculty and staff. This policy proved unpopular with some Latinos. Rodriguez writes,

I greatly disagreed with their policy of always backing minority teachers, administrators or whomever, just because they were minority not because they were the best candidate for a position. They would talk about the minority quota and how they got admitted because of that and not because they had the grades. This was a thought that greatly bothered me since I had worked hard in high school and I knew I deserved to be there just as much as anyone else (e-mail to author, March 11, 2006).

Rodriguez also recalls with some disfavor that LASO members continually complained about discrimination and the oppressed position of minorities. On the other hand, La Casa, whose members were mostly international students from Puerto Rico and Mexico, according to Rodriguez, “was about learning, enjoying and experiencing the Latino culture whether you were Latino or just interested in that culture” (e-mail to author, March 11, 2006). The two groups would unite to organize large events, such as La Fiesta, but otherwise remained separate. Apparently, each group was dominated by a senior woman; both leaders constantly fought with each other. Their feud, ostensibly about whether to admit non-Latino students, although perhaps including additional issues, kept the groups separate.

In 1998, the freshmen class discussed combining the two groups, and in 1999, La Casa and LASO united to form ALAS.<sup>7</sup> Rodriguez and Janelle Vega '02 were instrumental in joining the two groups and became the first co-Presidents of the newly-

---

<sup>7</sup> La Casa still exists, not as an affinity group, but as a cultural center for students interested in Spanish culture. Like the Ira D. Reid House (also referred to as the Black Cultural Center), students live in La Casa and organize events for the campus that relate to the culture. Because of the limitations of time and the scope of my research, I was unable to properly distinguish between Affinity Groups and cultural centers. However, the main distinction seems to be that students live together in cultural centers, whereas Affinity Group meet periodically.

founded ALAS. She describes how the two groups had several meetings to discuss their merger. One of the main points of contention was whether or not to admit non-Latino members. LASO members were eventually convinced to accept all students on the condition that a certain percentage of officers were of Latino descent; this compromise permitted the merger to proceed. Rodriguez notes that as years passed, the rule was not enforced because not enough Latino students wanted to hold office.<sup>8</sup> This disregard of the rule did not become a source of tension, however, because according to Rodriguez, once the seniors with their “separatist issues” had graduated, everyone quickly forgot about past divisions. She writes,

That year ALAS really took off and we did major fund raising, put on the biggest La Fiesta ever with a live salsa band, we did community service and mentoring at Roberto Clemente School and had monthly gatherings to share poetry, food, and music called Noches de Bohemia. I feel our main objective in ALAS was to have a family, a place we could go and speak Spanish, eat our food, dance, and be in touch with that culture we missed so much. On the other hand we also wanted to share this culture with the rest of our community (e-mail to author, March 11, 2006).

Although Rodriguez feels that divisions in the groups were eliminated by her sophomore year (1999-2000), Silvia, the current co-President of ALAS, reports that she was made uncomfortable by the arguments in the group that took place during her freshmen year (2002-2003). She explains that there was a lot of friction between the international Puerto Ricans and the rest of the group. This tension between native-born and American-born ethnic minorities has a long tradition at Haverford. Indeed, Hohenstein comments that from the very beginning (i.e., 1971) there were disputes between Americanized and native Puerto Ricans (e-mail to author, March 11, 2006).

---

<sup>8</sup> Today there is a new rule, which states that there must be at least one president who is non-native, that is, an American-born student (whether of Latino descent or not).

The history of the Asian Student Association is much less bumpy. Kannerstein believes it developed in the '80s, although he is unsure. There are no records describing its inception or history.

### **Absence of Records**

Without records, it is difficult to truly understand the impact of Affinity Groups on the campus. I have depicted them here as vehicles for social change, but it is possible that these groups also conceived of themselves as havens for minorities. Because functioning as a haven would not have impacted the campus as much, it would not have been written about in school newspapers. The fact that few records exist seems significant in itself. Educational institutions, organizations, and other institutions often prominently display their date of inception and, perhaps, their founding mission, as a source of pride. Yet Affinity Groups at Haverford seem not to have made efforts to preserve records of their activities and history. This phenomenon may suggest that the members find the intrinsic benefits of membership (i.e., social network, refuge from the mainstream community, support, etc.) more valuable and important than defining the Group's position and role within the community.

### **Organizational Procedures**

Today Affinity Groups are open to anyone in the Haverford Community by administrative mandate. The only officially closed group on campus is Sunz of Africa, which allows only Black males to join. The college permits this because the group does not receive funding from Students' Council. Reflecting its Quaker roots, Haverford

discourages exclusion in formal organizations in order to create a stronger community.

Affinity groups also tend to have a broad target population, perhaps due to the small size of the student body and its even smaller numbers of ethnic minorities.

Groups at Haverford typically meet once a week for an hour. The first half of the meeting is spent on administrative matters (i.e., upcoming events, announcements), the second half is a discussion. Leaders choose topics (or other members suggest topics) that they feel are pertinent to the lives of the members. Discussion topics range from abstract ideological issues (e.g., “mixed-race” marriages) to debate about current events (e.g., Kanye West’s comments on NBC about Hurricane Katrina victims). Not all members attend every meeting. While leaders encourage everyone to attend, they understand that students have work and other commitments. Affinity Groups usually organize a few large events on campus each semester. These activities are generally intended to add to the cultural enrichment of the campus. ASA, for instance, holds an Asian Cultural Show, which includes dinner (Asian cuisine) and Asian performance pieces (dance, music, etc.). The main event ALAS holds is La Fiesta, a schoolwide dance, which celebrates Latino dance and music.

## Chapter 4: The UnityFest Fight

There was a huge fight at BSL (Black Students League) tonight (October 6, 2005). The first part of the meeting went smoothly. We opened with “What’s Good?,” the ritual that begins each BSL meeting; as always, everyone in turn mentioned one good thing in his or her life. After announcements, Erin explained that tonight’s discussion would be about the comment made by Bill Bennett on his radio show. She passed out a sheet with a transcript of the show and explained that on September 28, 2005 he claimed that America could reduce its crime rate by aborting every Black baby. BSL members expressed outrage at his assertions and were insulted by his stereotypes. They were also frustrated that his racism got so little attention in the Haverford community.

When the discussion slowed, John said he had an announcement. As he said this, I remembered that he had wanted to say something right after the regular announcements at the beginning of the meeting, but Gina had asked him to wait until after the discussion. I realized later that she must have known what he was going to say, perhaps through their mutual friends.

Clearly upset, John immediately began to yell, “You are going to go up there and literally shake your ass in front of the whole campus and Demont’s going to crip walk. I don’t think it’s the right forum. What does the dance bring to UnityFest?” From the reactions by Ashley, Gina, Kim, Pamela, Deandra, and Amina, I sensed that John’s rage was directed at them, but I could not understand what John was upset about. I knew that UnityFest was an upcoming 3-day event, celebrating multiculturalism on campus. It included a show by a professional actress, a lecture, and student performance pieces. But I was uncertain what dance John was referring to or what exactly “crip walking” was.

Looking around, however, no one else seemed confused, but perhaps apprehensive about the brewing fight.

Pamela told John, “OMA (Office of Multicultural Affairs) wants us to do the dance. They asked us to do the dance.”

John responded, “As African-American students you have the obligation to perform something that brings respect to the African-American community. We are intellectuals. We want to be treated with respect. We demand respect.” John’s focus on intellectualism reminded me of his behavior earlier in the year. At the first meeting, the Executive Board of BSL had given a small, informal quiz on Black history. John had been eager to answer every question. At the end, he claimed he had gotten the most correct (although no one had been keeping score) and, for the next few meetings, kept asking for his prize. Clearly John was intent on proving and displaying his intelligence.

Abebi, agreeing with John, said, “We are BSL. We are representing Black students on this campus. This is our opportunity to show people our culture.”

Pamela argued, “We’re not performing as BSL, we’re performing as DUI. We’re representing DUI!”

Simultaneously Kim said, “Isn’t dance part of our culture?”

Gina agreed, “By rejecting this dance, it’s kind of like the mainstream in this country rejecting who we are. This is who we are.”

But Abebi said, “This is not who I am.”

Through their heated discussion, I eventually came to understand that some of the Exec Board members had also formed a hip-hop dance group, DUI – Dancing Under the Influence (of Music) – which was performing at UnityFest. John was upset because he

felt it was undignified and improper given that faculty and staff would be present. I couldn't figure out, however, why John was so upset given that he was not involved in the performance. As the discussion progressed, I realized that John was against the dance because he felt it misrepresented Black culture, and, what's more, it reflected poorly on him as an African-American. When one man told John to distance himself from the performance, John shouted, "I can't change my color! I can't!" Another male member of BSL agreed, saying, "You will always be looked at as another Black person in this school. They don't care. We're all the same."

Many BSL members were clearly invested in this dispute. The main argument occurred between John and the members of DUI. Other BSL members, however, contributed to the discussion because the issues of the argument clearly concerned them. For instance, John brought up stereotypes when he said that the dance "plays into stereotypes" and "doesn't bring anything new." In other words, it confirms what people already think about Blacks and does not enlighten anyone or enrich the community.

To this Ashley responded,

There are stereotypes about Black people, there are stereotypes about white people, there are stereotypes about Hispanic people, there are stereotypes across the board. And whether we get up there and dance, whether we recite poems, or whether something else occurs, or whether we don't do anything at all, let me tell you something: those stereotypes are stayin'.

Abebi, increasingly frustrated, then said,

I'm very very confused about us as Black people expressing ourselves as a group. Why are we here? Why do we come here tonight and talk about stereotypes and how people think Black people are responsible for crimes or whatever, if we do not care.

Later she added,

If I'm in a classroom, and, like, maybe I'm the only Black person in this class full of White people and probably, like, most of these people are probably thinking, oh, you know, stereotyping, she's probably dumb. What am I going to do? I'm going to try all my best to prove that I'm not dumb, and I'm going to do whatever it takes so that I can be even better than the people that are sitting next to me, than the people in the same class.

And Kenyon agreed with her: "In the classroom we have to *prove* that we're smarter."

The fight continued with neither side conceding a point. Everyone was angry and upset. Eventually John said, "After this I'm gone. When you guys sat together and decided this is what we really want to do at UnityFest, this is the first thing that came to mind, that only came to mind?" Pamela told him,

When we sat down to talk about this, was this the only thing that came to mind? No. Did we first think that DUI wasn't going to do anything and we wanted BSL to do something as a whole? Yes. Did we have help coming up with any solutions? No. Did we decide that DUI was going to do something? Yes. Did we almost – was it guaranteed that it was going to be a dance? Yes. Because DUI is a dance group.

But John said,

No, no, no. I didn't ask that. I asked, you as individuals whether or not you're in DUI, but as individuals, as people that lead the Black Students League Executive Board, this was it?

Amid a mumble of yes's, John stormed out. Everyone called after him, including myself, asking him to stay, but he determinedly walked out the door. Three or four men

went with him. Despite the fact that John had left, the fight did not end, nor did it become less emotional. The women in DUI were angry and upset that the dance on which they had been working so hard had been rejected by some of the group. They were also furious that John had insulted them and then left so that they could not discuss it further.

Demont, one of three boys still at the meeting, then spoke. He first apologized for John's behavior. He then told the DUI members that although he enjoyed the dance and thought they should be able to perform, he personally no longer wanted to be a part of it because he agreed with John that it was the wrong forum.

I thought that, as a disinterested party, perhaps I could help. I knew I would be perceived as neutral by the BSL members, partly because I am not Black and partly because I presented myself as a researcher at the beginning of the semester. I suggested that the women make an announcement before the dance as a disclaimer, explaining how the dance represents part of their culture, but that not every Black person identifies with it. I also thought that perhaps they could confer with John when writing the disclaimer in order to appease him. Kim, and later Gina, thanked me for trying to come up with a constructive solution instead of bringing up more problems. I appreciated their intentions, but their comments reinforced my standing as an outsider. They seemed to say, "This is not your problem, but we appreciate your attempts to help us."

While the women were willing to make an announcement before the dance, they did not want to talk with John because he had left the meeting. Erin then said,

Even though you guys say that you don't want to say something to John, the fact is we're a very small group. And if it continues to be hostile, you'll see this many people and it will be less and less and less. We, even

though it sounds like a bad thing, we need to send out a mass e-mail or have a group thing to come back together because this is gonna cause damage that could last for three years. Because I met seniors before who said, 'Oh no, I don't want to deal with BSL.' Probably because of something like what happened now. So, because of the fact that most of you are on the Exec Board, you do, or we do, need to say something.

After two and a half hours, the meeting finally came to a close. Pamela ended the discussion suggesting that people who disagree with the dance should perform their own piece at UnityFest.

## Chapter 5: Patterns in Affinity Groups

### **DIVISIONS**

The UnityFest Fight highlights some of the divisions within Affinity Groups. Particularly striking are the differences in visions for the clubs and in worldviews. These differences can prove destructive to the group, but if appropriately negotiated do not interfere with the groups continued ability to function.

### **Goals of the Group**

One of the main points of contention among group members is the purpose of the group. At one point during the fight, Abebi asks, “I’m very very confused about us as Black people expressing ourselves as a group. Why are we here? Why do we come here tonight and talk about stereotypes and how people think Black people are responsible for crimes or whatever, if we do not care.” Her comment touches on a major obstacle to cohesion for many clubs. Groups have difficulty finding an agenda for the club on which all members agree. Some students want Affinity Groups to be cultural emissaries, while many see them as refuges from the mainstream community. Others view the groups as vehicles for social activism. Identifying a shared group objective is an issue that continues to manifest itself every year.

Although it is impossible to know for certain without proper documentation, articles in the student newspapers seem to indicate that the clubs had a more clearly defined agenda in the '60s and '70s. In keeping with the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement, BSL and PRSH seemed to be political organizations, attempting to bring equality for minorities to Haverford in terms of faculty and student

representation and curriculum. (Of course, it is possible that these groups also saw themselves as havens for minorities, but because this would not have impacted the campus as much, it did not make school newspapers.)

Today, most clubs tend to articulate their official goal as cultural enrichment. In their online mission statement ALAS explains,

The goal of the Alliance of Latin American Students is to raise awareness on the different Latin American cultures within the Haverford community and more importantly, to increase the appreciation of these various cultures.

Similarly BSL writes,

We pledge to stimulate dialogue and heighten awareness about issues in the Black community, within the college and in the wider world of Africa and the Diaspora and to enlighten the community about the rich cultural heritage of our people.

Despite the fact that both groups have delineated their mission, members have different views about the club's purpose. Knowing that identifying a goal can be a point of contention, ALAS dedicates their first meeting each year to discussing what Latino culture is and what the goals of ALAS are. This year the discussion was so lengthy that they continued it at the next meeting. Some members emphasized the importance of educating the community, while also recognizing the merits of ALAS as a haven.

Melissa, a freshman from the Dominican Republic, says,

I find the educating really important. The other day one of the people on my hall asked me what politics were like in Puerto Rico and I basically just sat down and some people from my hall came and talked about what politics were like and what the struggle was. And people really seemed to be interested. . . . I guess at the same time it is a refuge. I remember

getting here and I'd be introduced to people and you'd have to shake hands. I hate shaking hands.

Other people stress the importance of having a distinct place for Latinos. A sophomore from Puerto Rico, Jaime, tells the group,

For me ALAS was a refuge all last year. I can pinpoint my happiest moments last year are always somehow linked to ALAS. . . . To me ALAS is the refuge I sometimes need here at Haverford and whether or not we go out to the community – and I like going out to the community and educating them and showing them what we have – but for me at least the point of ALAS is to be able to be Latino amongst Latinos.

Ana, on the other hand, is adamant about not educating the community: “And everyone says ‘I feel the need to educate people on this campus’ – I’ll be honest. I don’t feel I need to educate a damn person on this campus. No one. No one. I am here. I am Mexican. OK, if you want to know about my culture I’ll tell you.” Instead, she sees the merit of uniting under the label of Latino as a political strategy:

What happens is Black people, for example, people of color, they really are getting educated. They’re forced together. Not all of them are Black from the same setting. Being able to lump together they are able to find strength and get into higher levels of education. Whereas in Latinos – and this is proven – everybody got to go their own way. Puerto Ricans got to go that way, Mexicans got to go that way. Dominicans, Cubans, Argentineans, Mexicans . . . we all got to go our separate ways because we’re too good for everybody. So we don’t come together and that is why we aren’t progressing. Because we tend to keep ourselves in our own boxes and until we can come together – I’m not saying let’s be universal and let’s everyone speak the same Spanish and eat the same food. Absolutely not. I would never give that up and I would never expect anyone else to – but for now. . . .

By banding together, Ana is arguing, Latinos will be able to exert political pressure and bring about reforms in education.

ASA has similar conflicts over whether the club should be a haven or an educational resource. Last year saw a major clash between the President of ASA, Tess, and the rest of the club. Both Tess and Eileen, the current co-President of ASA, agree about the arguments that took place. Tess wanted the group to focus on enriching the campus culture through events such as the Asian Cultural Show and becoming politically active. Many of the members, on the other hand, including Eileen, felt the club should serve the needs of its members more than the outside community by creating a relaxing, social environment. The argument was resolved only when Tess was “deposed,” as she puts it, at the end of the second semester last year.

Despite this drastic action, tension still remains over the purpose of the group. The new co-presidents, Eileen and Mary, have very different agendas. Mary wants to involve the group in the local community, whereas Eileen is focused on holding current affairs discussions. In the presence of only myself and one other member Mary vents, “Eileen wants to turn ASA into a Current Affairs club. She even took the ASA mailing list to use for her discussion group and signed it Current Affairs Club!”

Ana and Tess are the only two members I heard suggest using a common identity to bring about change. Tess’s goals are repudiated by the vast majority, who would prefer to focus on the social and academic benefits of the group. Ana does not offer a course of action, but only mentions the possibility of using the group as a political vehicle. Perhaps politics has been deemphasized in Affinity Groups because injustice and oppression are no longer quite as visible, so minority groups no longer have a clear

agenda or compelling course of action. Erin raises the question in a discussion on assimilation: “Is assimilation something we should be striving for? Do we want a color-blind society? Or should we try to go for a more multicultural society?”

### *Affirming Identity*

Literature on student ethnic organizations cites sharing culture, seeking refuge, or creating a political weapon as the central reasons that students become members (Montelongo 2003, Barrios 1999). There is, however, another reason students join these groups, not acknowledged by literature or by the group members themselves. Many minority students join Affinity Groups to affirm their identity. In other words, by virtue of being a member of a group, students are able to claim this aspect of their identity and express it to the rest of the community. Evelyne Laurent-Perrault, Coordinator of Multicultural Programs, says in an interview, “It is important for the students, first of all, to have a place where they can . . . where students who are underrepresented in the mainstream community can get together and affirm themselves – their cultural heritage, if there is a different language, if there is a different kind of music, music, food, you name it.”

For some students, particularly non-native students, proclaiming their ethnic heritage to the community can be a struggle. Celine is a senior at Haverford. While this is only her first year in ALAS, she has been involved in Latino activities in the past and currently lives in La Casa, a house dedicated to Spanish culture. Although she does not state it directly, her comments suggest that she is defensive about her Latina identity, not because she is ashamed, but because she feels the need to prove her ethnicity. Celine is

part Argentine and part Chilean (and part French). She has incredibly fair skin with White features. She is very cognizant that people do not immediately perceive her as Latina. She is quick to offer ways that she identifies with Latino culture (touching people, kissing hello, speaking Spanish), and she gets very upset when people mention her fair skin. When Ana tells her that people (i.e., Whites) will assume she is a “White American,” Celine comes close to tears saying, “Well, I don’t know why they say it! I am not American. They’re wrong!”

Celine’s situation is similar to that of many American-born Latinos, particularly those of mixed heritage. Silvia, half-Mexican and a senior co-President of ALAS, says, “Honestly, sometimes, I wish I were darker so that people would look at me and see me for who I am.” She also comments, “I’ve struggled my whole life to prove that I’m Mexican and now I’ve embraced it. . . . My Mexican part is so much who I am because I’ve to try so hard to prove it.” Unlike the international students, who seem not to have conflicts about their identity as Latinos, these members have struggled to demonstrate their Latin heritage to mainstream Americans. Joining ALAS is one way of publicly claiming their identity for themselves as well as proclaiming it to the rest of the community.

Claiming identity implies a choice. Celine and Silvia, because of their skin color and features, are in a position to either embrace or disregard their ethnic identity. Yet Barth writes that ethnic identity is imperative (Barth 1969). Is ethnic identity self-ascribed or assigned? That is, are minority students able to choose their ethnic identity or is it imposed on them by the mainstream community? At one point during the UnityFest Fight, in response to one man suggesting John distance himself from the dance, John

exclaims, “I can’t change my color! I can’t!” John’s skin color confines him to his ethnic identity. He feels he will always be viewed in relation to the Black community. He is frustrated, therefore, because he cannot distance himself from the DUI dance which claims to present a piece of Black culture. Abebi feels similarly to John: “It doesn’t matter if you’re trying to represent yourself or if you’re trying to represent the whole. They see you as Black. They don’t see you. They don’t see me as Abebi. They see me as Black.”

Here race and ethnicity have blended together. Physical features serve as markers of ethnic identity. Those with typically White features, like Celine and Silvia, have the option of choosing to identify as a minority. John and Abebi, however, cannot opt not to identify as a minority. Because of the mainstream community’s perception, their features define their ethnicity.

And yet, it seems, to some extent, minorities are able to negotiate their ethnic identity. Gina, a full Dominican, is on the Exec Board of BSL. Although she identifies as Dominican, she has chosen to associate herself with BSL and has successfully integrated herself into the Black social circle. As another example, I overheard this conversation between Kenyon and Deandra before and after one BSL meeting:

Kenyon is saying that he doesn’t like Harry Potter because there are no Black people in the movies. He calls her “white” because she defends Harry Potter. After the meeting is over, the two pick up where they left off.

Kenyon: “Why you hatin’ on me all the time?”

Deandra: “’Cause you called me White!”

Kenyon: “You are White. You read Harry Potter.”

Deandra: “I’m White!?! You’re White!”

Kenyon: “I’m not White, I’m Black.”

Deandra: “You’re Puerto Rican.”

Kenyon: "I'm darker than that."

While Kenyon's use of "White" as an insult is interesting and deserves some examination, I would like to focus the last two lines of the dialogue. Kenyon is from Puerto Rico, yet he identifies as Black. He attends BSL meetings, rather than ALAS meetings. While Deandra uses his ethnic identification as an argument against him during their debate, in a normal interaction she does not question his ethnic choice. Perhaps, within certain boundaries defined by physical appearance, individuals are able to self-ascribe their ethnic identity. It seems that individuals with typically "White" features, to some extent, are able to claim membership in an ethnic minority. Individuals who look "ethnic," however, cannot disassociate themselves from their ethnic identity.

## **Worldviews**

### *Authenticity*

Other divisions occur over worldviews and experiences. ALAS, for instance, dedicated one meeting to a discussion of interracial marriage. Silvia says that her parents tell her not to marry a Latino because of machismo, but Melissa disagrees about its importance. She says,

I don't think that machismo is an issue. I don't think a guy should have to fry an egg for breakfast if he lives with a woman who knows how to. My father says, "The woman is the boss inside the house. I'll be the boss outside of the house." My father doesn't even know where the forks are in my house.

A multitude of shocked faces greet Melissa's comment. Many members, particularly those who grew up in the United States, are troubled by this repudiation of basic feminist

egalitarianism. While a serious debate does not occur, tension is clearly present in the room.

One of the underlying issues in this interaction is native versus non-native beliefs. Affinity Group members use “native” to refer to international students, while “non-native” signifies American-born students. Tensions between these two groups arise in other contexts as well. At one meeting, for instance, there is a heated discussion over whether non-native Latinos are “just as Latino” as natives:

Melissa: [Rose] was saying how since she was raised in New York she’s not really Puerto Rican, she’s Nuyorican? Is that how you spell it? And just like in the Dominican Republic, you have Dominicans and then you have New Yorkers – Dominican Cookies, is what you call them.

Carla: Living in New York doesn’t make you any less Dominican though. Can they not identify as being Dominican?

Melissa: It’s not that they’re less Dominican, but it has less of the culture. I know what you mean – you’re still Dominican and you feel Dominican. When you feel Dominican, you’re Dominican automatically. But it’s not the same to live in the States, where you have a schedule . . . a mode of living that you have to adjust to, like using a microwave, um . . . like different schedules, being on time, that’s not a part of the culture at home. Here you’re never going to experience going into a car with 18 people when it’s supposed to be 5 [*laughter*] and being like, Come sit here, come sit on my lap, you fit here. It’s just some things I can point out – the clothes, the food, the weather, the ways of living.

Carla: “I have gotten into cars with 18 people because no one else in my family has a car. It’s not correct to make assumptions about people because of where they live.”

Melissa: “It doesn’t mean that you’re less Dominican, or that you’re not Dominican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, whatever you are. It’s just that you live in a different environment so you have different ideas. I know that if you go back home, you’re – many hands raising here, finding controversy, huh? [*laughter*]. It’s not like I feel that they’re not Dominicans, I just feel they’re Dominicans outside home. If they are to be brought back and stay with us for, lets say, two months they’ll become just what they’re supposed to become [Carla interjects: “Supposed to become!”], real. . . . No, no, no! No, I mean [*getting flustered*], not

what they're supposed. I don't mean like what they are supposed to become, but less Americanized. Because in some way you have to become Americanized.”

Ana smooths over the debate by agreeing that she is not Mexican, she's Mexican-American. Members recognize the cultural differences between growing up in Latin America and growing up in the United States. However, international students in particular seem to assume that the culture in Latin America is the “real” culture, the identity that everyone in the group strives to attain. Even the terms “native” and “non-native” suggest that international students are the true Latinos. It takes a conscious effort to remind the group that Mexican-American or Dominican-American is a viable, worthwhile identity. Latinos raised in America are going to have different cultural experiences than those raised in the Latin America. On the other hand, Latinos raised in America have different experiences from mainstream Americans. In order to achieve a common identity, the group must agree that international Latinos and American-born Latinos have more in common with each other than with any other group, particularly mainstream Americans.

### *Responses to Stereotypes*

Other divisions within affinity groups arise over reactions to stereotypes. John and Abebi are of the opinion that negative stereotypes are worth fighting. John continually urges BSL to take a more academic approach at UnityFest in order to counteract negative stereotypes about Blacks only being good at physical, rather than mental, activities. Agreeing with John, Abebi describes the need to fight stereotypes in the classroom:

If I'm in a classroom, and, like, maybe I'm the only Black person in this class full of White people and probably, like, most of these people are probably thinking, oh, you know, stereotyping, she's probably dumb. What am I going to do? I'm going to try all my best to prove that I'm not dumb, and I'm going to do whatever it takes so that I can be even better than the people that are sitting next to me, than the people in the same class.

Ashley and Kim, on the other hand, believe it is not worth the effort to fight stereotypes because it is unlikely the endeavor will be successful. Instead they propose that everyone should act as they would, regardless of stereotypes. Ashley says,

There are stereotypes about Black people, there are stereotypes about White people, there are stereotypes about Hispanic people, there are stereotypes across the board. And whether we get up there and dance, whether we recite poems, or whether something else occurs, or whether we don't do anything at all, let me tell you something: those stereotypes are stayin'.

Kim adds,

There are a lot of things that I see day to day that I'm like, wow, that's just fulfilling the stereotype. . . . Stereotypes, like Ashley said, is going to be stereotypes. If I spent every day of my life trying not to fulfill a stereotype, I might as well drop the hell dead.

## **CREATING COHESION**

With all these divisions and tensions within the group, how do the groups continue to exist? What unites members? Why do they continue to belong to the group and attend meetings? Each group has a different approach to creating a common panethnic identity. A shared Black identity derives from a primordial conception of a deep-seated bond. Within BSL there exists a sense that all members fundamentally relate

to each other. The language in their mission statement, which refers to “the Black community,” suggests that all Black students automatically share an identity, whether they attend BSL meetings or not. This identity is created by a sense of common heritage and shared experiences that stem from their ethnicity. Although Gina is Dominican-American and identifies as Latina, she feels more welcomed and “incorporated into the collective identity” at BSL. Her ability to identify with Black students stems, in large part, from her belief in a shared ancestry. She says, “I like to acknowledge my African heritage, no matter how far back that may go.”

In contrast, ALAS has a more instrumentalist and circumstantialist approach to ethnic identity. Members are aware and openly acknowledge differences in their heritage and culture. The group does not always recognize an inherent similarity. In its mission statement, ALAS describes the various Latino cultures that exist within the Haverford community. It does not assume that all Latinos automatically share the same identity or that all students of Latin American descent will necessarily claim this identity. Commonality within ALAS, instead, comes as a reaction to the mainstream community. It derives from the situation and structural circumstances of being a minority in the United States or at Haverford. Because grouping individuals of Latin American descent under one label (i.e., Hispanic or Latino) is a distinctly American concept, for international students, in particular, embracing a panethnic identity is a response to living in the United States. Rafael comments,

Pretty much all Argentineans have a problem feeling isolated from the rest of South America. I had to realize that we have a huge problem. When I came to America I realized that there are a lot of things that have nothing to do, like the dancing, the food, and a lot of thing in American culture, and I realized that I have a lot more in common with Jaime from Puerto

Rico, which I *never* would have thought I would with someone from Puerto Rico.

Even for students of Latin American descent who grew up in America, identifying as Latina/o can sometimes result from going to college. Elena, for instance, says,

Being Latino is not something that I thought of until I came to college because when I was at home I was just Cuban and that was what everyone was. It wasn't something that you thought of and it wasn't until I came to Haverford and people were like, "Where are you from? No, where are you really from?" that I was like wait, I'm not just from Miami.

Elena relates that she always identified with her ethnic group rather than her panethnic group before coming to Haverford. Her eventual association with her panethnic identity came in response to mainstream categorization. Structural conditions at the college, namely the small size of the student body, make it almost impossible to form groups on a lower ethnic level. Thus, the Latina/o identity is created, in part, by Haverford.

Despite awareness of differences and divisions, ALAS members are able to maintain a panethnic identity by shifting the boundaries of their ethnic identification. That is, within the group, members discuss and acknowledge cultural differences. When confronted with the mainstream community (either in physical form or in concept), members subsume their individual ethnic identities into the larger panethnic identity.

Although their main approach to ethnicity is primarily instrumentalist and circumstantialist, ALAS members do have a primordial component. Members have some sense that they share basic similarities due to their ethnicity. When the leaders ask at the second meeting, "What does being Latina/o mean to you?" members immediately respond with comments, such as:

“Having a smile on my face, speaking my own language, doing my own walk – with my hips.”

“Being loud, singing.”

“Being able to touch people when I talk to them.”

Other comments about commonalities among Latinos are interspersed throughout meetings. For instance, in response to Elena mentioning that when her mother came to visit she stayed in Elena’s dorm room, Clara says, “Oh Latin families. We fit four to a bed.” The fact that they believe in fundamental commonalities derived solely from being Latina/o reveals their primordial attachment.

Asian ethnic identity, on the other hand, does not seem to fit any of the given models of ethnicity. The group’s commonality stems not from a primordial attachment, nor from a desire to be a political weapon, nor because they perceive themselves as fundamentally different from White students, but rather from a shared intellectual interest. Their mission statement, for instance, proclaims,

The Asian Students' Association (ASA) of Haverford College facilitates the exploration of the Asian-American consciousness. Our manifold interests revolve around topics such as history, politics, local and global current events, lifestyles, traditions, fine arts and the media. Our activities consist of energetic discussions as sounding boards for progressive ideas as well as ethnic enrichment for the mind and senses from TriCo and local color. We are a resource that intends to season the academic mind with cultural complements.

Both their language and their content speak to the academic nature of the group.

## **Affinity Group Leaders**

The attempt to create unity is, in part, a conscious effort by the group leaders. Having experienced dissension in the past, leaders are aware of the need to actively develop solidarity and of their role as the facilitator of this endeavor. After the UnityFest Fight, Erin, a member of the BSL Exec Board, tells the rest of the Exec Board,

We, even though it sounds like a bad thing, we need to send out a mass e-mail or have a group thing to come back together because this is gonna cause damage that could last for three years. Because I met seniors before who said, ‘Oh no, I don’t want to deal with BSL.’ Probably because of something like what happened now. So, because of the fact that most of you are on the Exec Board, you do, or we do, need to say something.

Still frustrated by the response of the group to their dance, some of the Exec Board protested that because some members presented the problem and stormed out, they do not feel like communicating with them. Erin persists, saying that because the members who walked out are not on the Exec Board, it is not their responsibility to maintain the group. Erin recognizes that an event such as this has the potential to tear the group apart, particularly because she is aware of similar divisions in the past. As one of the group’s leaders, she considers it her responsibility to ensure the cohesion of the group. Indeed, to Erin, being on the BSL Exec Board means subordinating one’s own feelings for the benefit of the group. Unlike the other Exec Board members, her more objective position allows Erin to see the broader ramifications of the disagreement. The anger of the other members on the Exec Board prevented them from taking this larger view.

In the end, no e-mail was actually sent out to the group. Two meetings after the UnityFest Fight, the topic was “What is Black culture?” chosen in response to Abebi’s comments on her confusion about Black culture and the point of BSL. At this meeting,

the Fight was never alluded to. The leaders' non-action, non-verbalization of the event is in keeping with past attempts at conflict resolution. Intrigued by Erin's comment that "I met seniors before who said, 'Oh no, I don't want to deal with BSL.' Probably because of something like what happened now," I later asked her for clarification. She responded that she knew little of the event except that it resulted in tension between the Black males and females on campus a few years ago. At her suggestion, I asked Evan and Matthew, two seniors in BSL, if they could tell me more of the details. Shawn agreed to meet with me, but could tell me little more than Erin. Matthew responded to my e-mail by writing,

Do you know how some families will keep certain situations private, as not to continue certain trends within a family? That's similar to BSL a few years ago. There was tension between certain member [*sic*] over events that occurred before you and I got here. These former members graduated a few years ago, and the upperclassmen of BSL wish to keep this information quiet so that they will not repeat. BSL is growing, and we like the bonds that arise between its members. Therefore, I hope you understand that I wish not to share the little that I know about these past events, and I hope you will understand my request that you do not seek this information from other members of BSL.

The leaders of BSL have chosen to shroud past conflicts in silence in the hopes of avoiding future divisions. Openly acknowledging their differences would threaten the unity that stems from their primordialist assumption that they share a common identity.

ALAS, in contrast, attempts to avoid future conflicts by engaging in dialogue. Even without an obvious current controversy, group leaders often take measures to ensure group cohesion through discussion topics. Patricia, a past Co-President of ALAS, informs me, "At the beginning of the year, we discuss what it means to be Latino/Latina because we are all different, but we come together with some similarities. The club moves slowly because every year we have to remind everyone of our differences, that

we're not all from the same place.” The Latina/o discussion, which occurred during the second and third ALAS meetings for the second year in a row, is meant to highlight commonalities, but also to make members aware of their differences. By acknowledging dissimilarities outright, members can appreciate and respect them. Members feel that does not detract from unity if differences have been previously acknowledged. And as we shall see later, ALAS members are often able to bond through differences.

ASA, as mentioned previously, combats divisions through action. When confronted with serious opposition between leaders and group members, group members took an active role in eliminating the controversial voice.

Because Affinity Groups draw from students of diverse experiences, backgrounds, and individual opinions differences are inevitable. Unity is essential to maintaining the group and it is not automatic. Leaders have recognized from past experience that they must take an active role in dealing with dissent, controversy, and differences of opinion.

### **Cultural Symbols**

Members tend to unite through cultural symbols and perceived shared experiences. Experiences tend to be in terms of relationships with the mainstream community. Cultural symbols, in this case, signify “any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception – the conception is the symbols’ meaning” (Geertz 2000: 91). They are the tangible form of an abstract idea. In this case, the abstract idea is the unity of the group; the cultural symbols signify a shared group identity. These commonalities are derived from the cultural aspect of the given ethnicity

rather than from relationships with outsiders. In theory, each member can recognize these cultural symbols and claim them as an essential part of their identity. Thus, they are tangible proofs of the group's common bonds. In the Affinity Groups, the main symbols through which members create a shared identity tend to be dance, food, and language.

This manner of creating cohesion is neither conscious, like the effort of the group leaders, nor entirely unconscious. Because the cultural symbols are a product of ethnicity and because the meetings are dedicated to the ethnicity, these commonalities become salient. Members gravitate toward the use of the symbols, emphasizing their prominence through discussion and behavior. Thus, members affirm their identity and validate the group's existence.

The central concern during the UnityFest Fight is whether hip-hop adequately represents Black culture. Hip-hop is a cultural symbol that serves as the focal point for the cohesion of several BSL members. Indeed, it is such a central piece to some of the students' identities that they formed a school-recognized club dedicated to this form of dance. Pamela says, "DUI was created because we thought we should be able to dance the way we want to dance, we should be able to do the things we want to do the way we want to." Kim adds, "[Hip-hop] is the part of Black culture that I identify with." Hip-hop can be an important aspect of Black culture. At a joint meeting with Bryn Mawr's African-American Affinity Group, Sisterhood, the main topic of conversation is the music. Participants discuss which singers they like, the latest albums that have been released. Throughout the meeting, hip-hop and rap music have been playing in the background and several of the girls get up to dance, or at least nod their heads in beat

with the music. Yet some members are international students who did not grow up with hip-hop; others are uninterested in that aspect of Black culture. Because they do not identify with this aspect of Black culture, they do not want this element displayed to the community. Their resistance to hip-hop is controversial because it challenges the primordial bond that unites the group. Because cultural symbols are a manifestation of their common identity, dissent threatens the notion that all Blacks fundamentally relate to one another.

Similarly, specific forms of dance are not a part of the cultural identity of everyone in ALAS. At the first meeting, several members of Puerto Rican descent (both native and non-native) discuss holding salsa lessons. They talk animatedly about the music and the details of teaching others. They are really excited by this opportunity for ALAS, but Ana suddenly interjects, “I don’t know salsa. I’m Mexican.” She reminds the group of their differences by asserting her own individual ethnic identity. She reminds ALAS that not all members share the same music and dance in their cultural heritages.

Yet music and dance serve as one of the central unifying symbols in ALAS. The main event ALAS sponsors is La Fiesta, a school-wide dance held in the main hall. It is a pretty popular event and I have heard Silvia refer to it as “*the* party of the year.” While explaining La Fiesta to a group of girls visiting from Rosemont’s Latina club, Silvia says, “The band is salsa and merengue. And the DJ plays everything.” Ana immediately corrects her, “Well, not everything.” “Everything Latino,” Silvia amends. Although this would ordinarily be assumed in ALAS, the Rosemont girls have not been present for previous discussions. Ana does not want them to have the wrong impression about

something as significant as music; she doesn't want them to think ALAS would pollute their own music with hip-hop, rap, or techno. It does not matter right now that salsa is native to Puerto Rico and Ana is Mexican.

Melissa, the President of the Rosemont Latina group agrees, explaining that for their party the majority of the music will be Hispanic, but she adds, "I don't want to discriminate against anything. . . . I just want anybody of any culture to be able to shake their hips." Silvia agrees with her, but Ana says, "Well, in theory we want them to be able to shake their hips, but do they know how to? That's the question." Everybody laughs, understanding Ana's comment as a funny insult directed at White people's stereotypical inability to dance. But this comment is more than just a humorous quip. Ana has formed a boundary around Latinos – White people may or may not know how to dance (although the assumption is they don't), but Latinos, by virtue of being Latino, automatically have rhythm and can shake their hips. Indeed, in both her comments to the Rosemont girls, Ana has distinguished Latinos from Whites. When confronted with outsiders (i.e., the thought of White students) she shifts her, and the group's, ethnic identity from individual ethnicity to panethnicity.

Food similarly both highlights differences and creates cohesion in ALAS. At one meeting, several Puerto Rican members are comparing techniques for cooking *tostones*, and again, Ana interjects, "I don't do that. I'm Mexican." Silvia also reminds the group of their cultural differences when she explains Bohemian Night to the group. Bohemian Night, as it was briefly explained to me, is an opportunity for ALAS to present its different Latin cultures to the community. Traditionally, it has been a night dedicated to Latin poetry, but last year the theme was music. As noted in Chapter 1, Silvia instructs

everyone to “cook something that is significant in your culture” and prepare a little presentation on why it is important.

Despite the awareness of differences in food, there seems to exist at times a sense of commonality derived from food. Much informal discussion is dedicated to yearnings for *tostones*, *arroz con leche*, or other Latin foods. In response, Melissa tells the group that her mother is coming to visit from the Dominican Republic and she is taking food requests. Despite the fact that no one else is from the Dominican Republic, no one seems surprised by her offer. The assumption is either that the Dominican Republic will have foods from all of Latin America not readily available in the United States or that foods from the Dominican Republic are familiar enough that they will satisfy cravings for foods from “home.” This is apparently understood by all because nobody questions why someone from Argentina, Chile, or Mexico would want food from the Dominican Republic.

And indeed, requests are made. Someone mentions Melissa’s mother should bring rum for Piña Coladas, and people make jokes about alcoholism and being Latino – “We’re like Alcoholics Anonymous.” Although alcoholism is associated with several different ethnicities, in this instance, ALAS members perceive it to be unique to Latinos. Even though it is, perhaps, not a positive attribute, it is something they feel they can all identify with. They are able to joke about it because they all understand it.

The discussion of food often translates into behavior. At one meeting Elena brings *arroz con leche* she has cooked. At another Patricia makes Piña Coladas. Indeed, the group perceives food as such a fundamental aspect of Latino culture that they theme Bohemian Night as “*Sabor Latino*” [Latin Flavor].

Although Silvia, and the rest of ALAS, has presented Bohemian Night as a celebration of cultural differences within Latino culture, when the actual event takes place divisions are minimized. The dishes are all placed together on one table with no distinguishing signs and the presentations are never made. Only a few White students attend Bohemian Night, and no one from ALAS mentions the differences that are ostensibly being celebrated. If I had not been privy to the meetings planning this event, I would have had no inkling that ALAS was attempting to display their diverse cultures. Instead, the presentation manifests a feeling of solidarity. ALAS is presenting not Mexican, not Argentinean, not Puerto Rican, but Latino culture to the community. Within the group, however, members are still well aware of their differences. Clara, who has cooked *panceces con dulce*, gives the first one to Rafael, saying, “You have to tell me if this is ok.” As the only other Argentinean, Rafael is the only one in a position to critique her cooking; *panceces* are part of their Argentinean heritage rather than Latino culture.

Language has a similar position to food or dance in ALAS. At the first meeting, conversations around me took place in Spanish or Spanglish. Although the formal discussion was held in English, side conversations would constantly break out, of which I could understand little despite my six years of high school Spanish. It was only towards the end of the meeting that Clara, one of the co-Presidents, suddenly asked, “Does everyone here speak Spanish?” It had not occurred to anyone before then that someone who identifies as Latino might not speak Spanish or that people outside the Latino community might be interested in ALAS. As it turns out, they were correct to assume

that ALAS members speak Spanish. Only one other woman besides myself did not speak Spanish and she did not identify as Latina, but had come to support her roommate.

Oboler, who concentrates her study on ethnicity and national belonging in the Americas at the University of Illinois, and Urciuoli, a Professor at Hamilton College, who examines Puerto Rican identity in the United States, both write that speaking Spanish can be problematic for their informants because it can have negative connotations. Oboler's subjects perceive Spanish as a barrier to being accepted by the majority culture. One informant comments, "If I have problems in this country, it's not because I'm from Ecuador, but because of the language. . . . That's why it's important to learn English: so that they can't take advantage of you" (1995: 148). Similarly Urciuoli (2003) writes that bilingualism and code-switching "are likely to be interpreted as signs of poverty, poor education, and low intelligence, all routinely associated with 'being Spanish'" (54).

In contrast to these findings, members of ALAS show no hint of being ashamed of their language. Perhaps this is because, unlike many of the informants in Oboler's study, all members of ALAS are matriculated in an institution of higher education and speak fluent English. Thus, they do not feel such a need to prove their intelligence. Another factor may be that at this academic institution, mainstream students study incredibly hard to learn Spanish. To members of ALAS, Spanish is a source of pride as well as a source of commonality.

At the end of the meeting, the members decide that, although they will not hold meetings in Spanish so as not to exclude anyone, they can still speak to each other in Spanish during meetings because it is "part of our culture."

Speaking Spanish resembles other cultural symbols that both divide and unify the group. Regional variations in the language mark differences among members. In her examination of the term Hispanic, Melville (1988) writes,

The similarities are based on a somewhat similar use of the Spanish language. . . . It is ironic, however, that it is precisely in the use of the Spanish language, which provides a common means of communication, that the members of these different national groups can distinguish one term from the other. Syntax, phonology, and vocabulary provide clear evidence of the different historical, regional, and national influences (71).

More than once, group conversation turned into a discussion of various meanings for the same word and the misunderstandings that occur. Rafael says, “I need to thank every other Spanish speaker because they have made my life a lot more cheerful by using the verb ‘coger’ for pretty much everything.” Everyone laughs at this. Jaime, in agreement, tells a story: “When I was on a bus in Mexico, I was talking on my phone, saying, ‘Cojo el wawa.’ And everyone just looked at me like I was disgusting.” Again, everyone laughs. Eventually it is explained to me that in Argentina and Mexico “coger” means “to have sex” or “to fuck,” whereas almost every where else it means “to take.” Furthermore, “wawa” in Puerto Rico means “bus,” but in Mexico it means “baby.” So when Jaime, who is from Puerto Rico, thought he was saying, “I am taking the bus,” everyone around him heard, “I am fucking a baby.” They also mention how often ALAS members have difficulty understanding each other because they come from a different country.

But despite the fact that language clearly highlights differences in the group, members manage nonetheless to unite through their language differences. Joking about faux pas makes meetings enjoyable and entertaining. But more than that, in order to be

able to understand the joke, members must share some common knowledge. Unlike me, who did not know about the various meanings of “coger,” the other ALAS members immediately found these comments amusing. Thus, while the content of language highlights their differences, the misunderstandings also emphasize their commonalities.

Language can also be a marker of identity in BSL. Although seldom discussed explicitly like in ALAS, language also factors into BSL unity. Many, although not all, BSL members speak in a slang typically associated with African-Americans. It has a simpler grammatical structure than standard English, for instance, the verb “to be” is either dropped or unconjugated, and it is characterized by a lengthening of vowel sounds, an omission of the “g” at the end of “ing,” a substitution of “d” for “th.” Some typical phrases I heard at BSL meetings were:

“Don’t you be bending my pages like dat, girl.”

“He ain’t got no money to do nothin’.”

Ashley, the head of BSL, has the most pronounced slang, so I was surprised to learn that at one point she was considered “too white.” During a meeting dedicated to discussing Black culture which occurred in response to Abebi’s questions about Black culture during the UnityFest Fight, Ashley relates,

I grew up in Jersey, and in elementary school, I didn’t see the difference [between Blacks and Whites]. But then I moved to Philly and I couldn’t think like that anymore. I went to Lotus Academy, which, for those of you who don’t know, is an all Black school and you learn only Black things. My friends there told me, ‘You gotta get Black quick,’ and I did.

To them I was an Oreo or a coconut – I talked White, dressed White. I didn't know who I was.

One of the ways Ashley “became Black” was by changing her patterns of speech.

Black slang was discussed during one BSL meeting on assimilation and code-switching. The Exec Board provided a handout with a definition of code-switching citing Wikipedia.com:

A term in linguistics referring to alternation between one or more languages, dialects, or language registers in the course of discourse between people who have more than one language in common (BSL handout).

The handout also listed a number of questions for discussion, including, “What is code-switching?” “Do we admit to doing it?” “Is that a good or bad thing?” During the meeting, members described the need to change the way they talk depending on with whom they are speaking. Although most people adopt different speech patterns and vocabulary in different contexts (e.g., speaking to parents versus speaking to friends), BSL members are acutely aware of the need to code-switch depending on the ethnicity of their audience. Code-switching is salient for Black students because, as a minority, one marker of their identity is language.

Aside from Ashley's comment and the meeting on code-switching, language is hardly ever expressly mentioned at BSL, yet it is institutionalized at meetings. As noted in Chapter 4, a BSL tradition that began last year is to start every meeting with “What's Good?” Going around the room, every member must share something positive in their life. Members almost always respond with the formula, “What's good is. . .” thereby speaking in slang. BSL has taken a linguistic construction that serves as a marker of

ethnic identity and institutionalized it in the form of a ritual. Thus, at every meeting, Black identity is reinforced through the repetition of this ritual.

As in ALAS, language can also differentiate members of the BSL group. During the UnityFest Fight, John distinguishes himself from the Exec Board members, most of whom speak with some slang, by using standard English.<sup>9</sup> Through his speech patterns, John emphasizes his intellectual aspirations and also creates a boundary between himself and the Exec Board. He is able to do so because slang is a symbol of the group's identity. By rejecting slang, he is simultaneously rejecting the group.

Spanish and slang are used similarly within ALAS and BSL, respectively, in that both languages serve as markers of identity for the group. Spanish and slang, however, have certain significant differences. Spanish is universally respected as a language of culture and literature, whereas Black slang is a vernacular subset of English and is not considered acceptable in establishment institutions (e.g., government, places of employment). Both languages can reveal distinctions among group members. However, Spanish highlights pre-existing differences (i.e., regional variations). Although ALAS members are aware of these differences, they ultimately choose to emphasize the fact that they all speak Spanish, rather than the fact that they speak different forms of Spanish in order to form an inclusive boundary between themselves and White students. For BSL members, however, speaking slang is a choice that indicates their membership in this group.

ASA has a very different approach to creating group unity. In contrast to ALAS and BSL, who center their discussions around member experiences, ASA focuses on

---

<sup>9</sup> I believe he always uses standard English, but I have not heard him enough to be sure.

current affairs. By taking a more intellectual rather than an experiential approach, ASA avoids, for the most part, the need for cultural symbols to unite the group. Cohesion stems from an academic investment in Asian affairs, rather than from a sense of shared experience. Eileen explains, “You can be Asian in your heart and not necessarily in your skin. So I thought that having a group of people who are, you know, motivated and interested in Asian affairs, that’s for me, that’s part of what it means to be Asian.”

This approach is, perhaps, due to the fact that Asian countries have very distinct cultures. They have no shared language and few shared foods that are truly pan-Asian. Thus, in order to maintain unity, members avoid attaching significance to objects and activities that could potentially create conflict along ethnic lines.

In October, ASA held their annual barbecue. Although ASA advertises it as a barbecue, the main food is not actually grilled, but pre-prepared in kitchens or store-bought. Only a couple dishes are cooked outside on the grill. As I helped grill beef and chicken, I asked members why they sponsored a barbecue. Everyone kind of looked at me oddly, as if to say, “To cook food, of course.” Someone responded that they held it every year. Eventually Mary, a co-president, told me it was a good way for members of ASA to do something together – cook together, eat together – and bond. It was also a good way to present an element of Asian culture (i.e., Asian food) to the rest of the campus. It seems none of the members ever questioned the significance of the barbecue, nor did they put much thought into the preparations behind it. That is not to say that it was not well-organized, but rather that the group did not seem to care about what dishes were served.

As ALAS demonstrates, food has the potential to be an important unifying cultural symbol. Yet ASA held no group discussion about which dishes were to be offered. I asked Eileen how she had chosen the food, but all she said was that she had received some from the Haverford dining services and ordered some dishes from various local restaurants. The food was primarily Chinese (dumplings, chow fun, roast pork buns, egg rolls), but also included Pad Thai and a few Korean items (fish ball skewers and grilled beef). No one seemed concerned over which ethnicities were represented at the barbecue. The fact that ASA members deemphasize the significance of the particular dishes supports the idea that the focus of cohesion is on intellectual interests rather than emotional bonds.

Although I did not witness any reference to the “model minority” stereotype during meetings, this notion may have some explanatory power. Several authors, Lee (1991, 1996) in particular, demonstrate how this conception influences Asian ethnic identity. In her analysis of Asian high school students, Lee describes how, although some resisted this categorization, many Asian- identified students “attempted to live up to the standards of the model minority stereotype” (1996: 116). Their desire to fulfill this stereotype was based on their belief that through academic success they could attain some upward social mobility. The language and content of their mission statement suggests that the members of ASA are, in many ways, attempting to become (or already are) a “model minority” through intellectual pursuits. Thus, academic discussion (with a cultural tinge) becomes the focus of the group, rather than strictly cultural or political agendas.

## **Experiences**

A perception of shared experiences and concerns forms an essential component of Black identity. This is not an instrumentalist approach to ethnicity because it is not necessarily a reaction to circumstances or structural inequalities, although it can be. Rather, this commonality stems from assumptions about the very nature of being Black. Gina writes in an e-mail to me, “I feel that black students who attend, attend because they feel an intrinsic obligation to go to BSL or they’re genuinely interested in what will be discussed.” The “intrinsic obligation” Gina mentions seems to refer to a deep attachment to Black issues and other Black individuals that forms a piece of Black ethnicity. This sense of common experience and concerns can be detected in the nature of the topics chosen for discussion. David, a past President of BSL, announces at the first meeting that BSL will “discuss things that affect us.”

There seems to be an understanding among members that the same issues pertain to everyone in the club by virtue of their being Black. The topics range from current events, such as Kanye West’s comments about President Bush’s Hurricane Katrina aid and the caller on Bill Bennet’s radio show who claimed Blacks were responsible for crime, to personal experiences, such as assimilation and code-switching and interracial marriage. The group assumes that all members are interested in these issues and that they are relevant for all members, that the ramifications, the underlying inequality somehow affect the lives of BSL members because they are Black. Although the specific experiences may differ, there is a shared understanding that all members have in some way encountered these issues and are working out how to respond to them.

Part of the shared experience that forms Black identity is created by interactions with the mainstream community and reactions to structural inequality. As the UnityFest Fight demonstrates, BSL members are highly aware of stereotypes. John, Ashley, Kenyon, Abebi, and Kim all comment on the stereotypes about Black people. Although they may disagree about how best to react to the existence of stereotypes and prejudice, they are united in their experience with them. They have solidarity in the perception that all members have encountered stereotypes and can therefore relate to this experience.

Although this may appear to be an instrumentalist conception of ethnic identity, in fact, I argue that BSL operates according to a primordialist paradigm. BSL members do not coalesce because they see the utility in creating a shared identity. Rather, they seem to believe a priori that they are united in their essential otherness.

Reactions to mainstream community similarly unite students in ALAS. At the extreme, ALAS members commiserate in feelings of prejudice and discrimination. After an ALAS meeting, some members stay late to make a banner for La Fiesta. As they decorate the conversation turns to prejudice at Haverford. It begins when Rose complains that her freshman writing class consists almost exclusively of minorities. She feels she is overqualified for the class and has been placed in it only because she is Latina. Her comment sets off Patricia, who states how her freshman writing class was all minorities as well and goes on to describe her Chemistry class freshman year. She was placed in the intensive section, which was a smaller class designed for people who needed extra help. It met five days a week, had a lab course and an extra tutoring session, as opposed to the regular Chemistry class which met three days a week plus a lab. She explodes,

So here's the irony. I have a friend who's White. She has never taken Chemistry before. Never. I had a whole *year* of Chemistry. OK? A whole year. Chemistry was my strongest subject. OK? And I got placed in the intensive section. And this girl, that had never taken Chemistry before, got placed in the regular class.

A less extreme response to the mainstream community is a feeling of discomfort and possibly alienation. Melissa, a freshman says, "At least the first day [at Haverford] I would get really embarrassed because I didn't know [to shake hands]. I kept [going to kiss them] and they just didn't put their cheek out. That's why I stopped. . . . I hate shaking hands." Other Latinos immediately empathize with her. They joke about how Americans are afraid of being touched ("You touched me! Oh my God, I need to go report you!") and share anecdotes about how uncomfortable they feel when they make the wrong gesture. Although it seems as though this would divide native and non-native Latinos, several American-born ALAS members join the conversation, describing how they have been taught to kiss Latinos hello and shake the hands of Americans. The group laughs about the problems they encounter because of the need to switch back and forth.

As Barth describes, Affinity Group members use their relationship with White students to create a boundary. Through interaction with the mainstream community, members develop experiences that are unique to their ethnicity.

### **Boundaries**

Although Affinity Groups unite around cultural symbols and shared experiences, members are not always able to articulate these commonalities. When I asked Abebi what she thought defined Black culture, she started to respond, but then stopped, realizing

she had no answer. She had automatically started to speak because she assumed she had an answer. David's announcement at the first meeting that one of BSL's roles is to "make the community aware of Black issues and discuss things that affect us" similarly assumes a shared identity. He never explains what those issues are, nor does anyone ask. Both sides — the speaker and the audience — assume that everyone else automatically understands.

As the UnityFest Fight demonstrated, assuming that commonalities pertain to all members can create tensions in the group when members are confronted with the reality that differences are rife. At the same time, however, when reality is overlooked, assumptions are integral in maintaining cohesion. Actually sharing experiences or values is not necessarily essential; what holds the group together is the *belief* that these commonalities exist. The members' assumption that there are commonalities unifies the group, rather than the commonalities themselves.

This is not to say that the cultural symbols and shared experiences are irrelevant. On the contrary, these commonalities provide the boundaries for the group; they are what distinguish Affinity Group members from the mainstream students. By referring to similarities, or even the existence of similarities, members sharpen the boundaries. As boundaries around identity shift due to circumstances, members perceive themselves at different times as more or less similar. Ultimately, however, members must believe themselves to be more similar than different or else the group would dissolve.

## **Safe Space**

When I first asked BSL members if I could tape-record their meetings I was met with some resistance by a few members. Having been granted immediate consent at ALAS, I was unprepared for this reaction. I tried to explain that tape recording was actually beneficial for the members because I could more accurately represent their own words instead of misremembering them, but a couple of members, one in particular, still felt uneasy having their words recorded. Without the consent of all the members, I did not feel comfortable tape-recording. Venting my frustration to Shawn, another BSL member and an acquaintance of mine, I said I didn't see what the difference was between taking notes and tape-recording. Shawn replied that tape-recording was more formal. Then he said, "BSL meetings are a safe space where everyone can feel comfortable. Tao doesn't feel comfortable having her words analyzed."

The term "safe space" is used frequently at Haverford. Generally applied to formal group discussions, it implies a level of comfort, respect, and confidentiality. A safe space is a place where people should feel able to speak freely without fear of judgment or criticism. That is not to say that others cannot disagree, but rather that opposing views should be stated with respect and consideration. The goal of a safe space is to create an engaging dialogue that allows everyone to speak freely because they feel they are in a comfortable environment.

As Shawn demonstrates, members consider Affinity Group meetings to be a safe space. This comfort stems from perceptions of shared cultural symbols and shared experiences. In other words, a common ethnic identity creates a safe space. Matthew says in BSL, "I personally really appreciate Affinity Groups. I like knowing that every

group can have its space. Because it [Haverford] is a predominantly White community, Affinity Groups are a safety net – there are people who understand you, can relate to you.” Elena echoes the sentiment in ALAS, “There’s a lot of comfort when somebody understands. . . . As much as Michael [a White ex-boyfriend] wanted to understand and was interested, there was always a need to explain things. What I ate, why I felt a certain way, there’s a lot of comfort in mutual understanding.”

Although some degree of comfort might come from commonality, it is also actively cultivated by group members. The tradition of “What’s Good?” in BSL fosters a sense of intimacy. Every member is forced to share something personal with the group (“nothing” is not an acceptable answer). Usually responses related to seeing family, being done with work, expectations for the weekend. “What’s Good?” allows the group to get to know one another on a more personal level and allows the individual to share something important with the expectation that people are listening to and care about the speaker. The final BSL meeting of the semester reinforced this atmosphere of intimacy. Instead of a formal discussion, we spent this meeting sharing our thoughts and feelings about the semester and our goals for the next one. Ashley was excited about getting a new job. Pamela said that she had had so much fun with Ashley and her suitemates but that she needed to be careful about with whom she lived because it was interfering with her academics. Ibone, a freshman, talked about how she was concerned because everyone says that you make your best friends in college, but she didn’t feel that she had made good friends yet. After the meeting, Nat went up to Ibone to tell her that he hadn’t found some of his closest friends until sophomore or junior year and not to be discouraged. ALAS also spent one meeting asking about people’s semesters, although it

was even more informal. After spending most of the meeting discussing administrative matters, Ana and some of the other seniors asked the freshmen how they were adjusting and if they had any questions. They gave the freshmen an opportunity to discuss personal problems, to seek advice in a supportive environment.

While this sense of shared culture and shared experience creates comfort among members, it does not entirely explain why they choose this setting to express their feelings and frustration about their identity. During Patricia's rant about prejudice in the Chemistry placements, while many agreed, Isabel protested, "I don't think you should say [you are in that class] only because you are a minority. . . . There are such good schools here." Isabel disagrees with Patricia's characterization that Haverford automatically assumes all minority students are less intelligent. She suggests that perhaps the education system in Puerto Rico does not prepare students as well as American schools. Despite the dissension, Patricia and others continue to expound upon the injustice at Haverford; the knowledge that not everyone has had the same experience does not deter them. They feel comfortable with their line of conversation, not because everyone can commiserate, but because no one present could possibly be the offender. By virtue of being a minority student, or a White student who cares enough to attend meetings, one is automatically disqualified from perpetrating racism or prejudice. Because the offender is not present, the conversation is not a confrontation, but a release of emotion.

Meetings, then, become a refuge, a haven from the experiences of prejudice and alienation. Members themselves often use the term "refuge" to describe the groups. But the word "refuge" implies hiding as well as safety. Refuge implies a desire to be

somewhere else, but a fear of leaving the safe haven. Members seek each other out because, together, they create an environment where they will not be judged by their appearance. For that hour, they are the majority. Demo and Hughes (1990) write, “being black in American society means occupying a racially defined status” (394). Affinity Group meetings do not allow members to shed their ethnic identity – indeed, members often come to meetings to embrace it – but rather provide a space where minorities can affirm their identity without being judged by outsiders. Raul says, “I’m glad that there is a separate space for people of color. Not having people’s feelings jeopardized by people making comments.”

While members may initially seek out Affinity Groups to escape the discomfort of interacting with the mainstream community, the clubs become the desirable place for many. They become a place that many actively seek out for their positive attributes of comfort, familiarity, and pleasure. At the end of one meeting, Jaime says, “This was a good meeting. We had a good break time.” Isabel agrees, “This was good. This is de-stressing time for me.” Nat, a White student who attends BSL meetings regularly, says in an interview,

For Black students [either self-identified and/or identified by others as Black], I think that BSL is a comfortable space in which people feel that they can relax and enjoy spending time together. BSL wouldn’t work if it weren’t based on existing friendships and social bonds. It’s also a space for Black students to think about the larger societal issues of racism, classism, and other types of oppression that may be behind some of their social interactions, but they might not get to discuss often in groups. . . . But fundamentally, BSL thrives because it’s a fun space where people can relax and enjoy spending time together.

Nat highlights the social network that exists within Affinity Groups. Although I had signed up for ALAS meetings at the Activities Fair at the beginning of the year, I did not receive an e-mail about the first meeting. I happened to have class in the same room right before the first meeting began. As I was leaving, I asked my friend Patricia, who was walking in, what she was doing and she told me they were about to have an ALAS meeting. It turns out no e-mail had been sent out, but that the leaders had spread the news by “word-of-mouth.” Despite the fact that there had been no official announcement, almost 30 students were in attendance. This led me to believe that there was a social network created through ethnic identity. I attempted to gather more evidence for this assumption through a survey. I asked ALAS and BSL members to draw a diagram of their close friends and label whether they were in an Affinity Group or not (for a more complete description of methods see Appendix A). I found that in ALAS, 44 out of 108 friends (41%) are in ALAS and 62 (63%) are in any Affinity Group (including ALAS). In BSL, the numbers are even higher: 57 out of 94 close friends (61%) are in BSL. 71 (76%) are in any Affinity Group. Half the respondents from ALAS said their close friends were almost exclusively other ALAS members. In BSL, this number was 90%.

It is impossible to determine the etiology of these friendships, that is, whether they formed through the Affinity Groups themselves, or simply because students of common ethnic background were drawn to each other. The fact that so many students attended the first ALAS meeting suggests that, at least to some extent, this social network is in place independent of the actual club. It seems safe to assume, however, that Affinity Groups at minimum help solidify existing acquaintances.

The safe space, therefore, does not necessarily refer only to the physical location, but also to the people. Indeed, both BSL and ALAS do not have strong ties to the location of their meetings. BSL meets in the Ira D. Reid house, also known as the Black Cultural Center (BCC). The BCC is home to six students, purportedly interested in Black culture, who are almost always Black. Because BSL meetings are held in the living room of these students, there is a feeling of intrusion, compounded by the fact that none of the students living in the BCC attend meetings very often, if at all. ALAS meetings take place in the Multicultural Center (MCC), which provides a multi-purpose space for any cultural or ethnic activities. This space, therefore, is not specifically Latino. The comfort, then, stems mainly from the people, rather than the physical location. The setting provides the boundaries for the safety. When members gather in this location it signifies the safe space, but the actual comfort is created by the people present.

The opposite seems to be true for ASA. ASA has its own lounge in the basement of the dining center. The group meets here for official meetings, but members also use the lounge to hang out, do homework, take a nap. Although there is less social connection among ASA members, there is a stronger tie to the physical location. Although I did not have the opportunity to conduct a formal survey, I asked Eileen about the social situation in ASA. She replied that everyone was friendly, but each had their own group of friends with little overlap. Occasionally, she would combine her group of friends with another ASA member's group of friends in certain social settings.

The relaxation and comfort of Affinity Groups stem from the perception of commonalities and the space away from the majority. But even if attending meetings is, in some way, a reaction to interaction with and judgments of Whites, members embrace

their identity, embrace the meetings, embrace the friends they make there. They hold the group together because they enjoy spending time together. When strife or dissension outweighs pleasure at meetings, they stop attending, which was the case in BSL after the UnityFest Fight. After that meeting, many of the men walked out and never returned. One told me he would attend meetings next year when things had calmed down, but right now he did not want to deal with the drama.

## **CONCLUSION**

Because divisions continually emerge or manifest themselves in different forms, creating cohesion within a group is a constant, active process. Unity is not a final product, but an on-going creation. As such, forming a common identity needs conscious, deliberate attention in order to be sustained.

Each group has a different approach to maintaining a common ethnicity. Thus, it seems describing ethnic identity in terms of one theoretical approach is invalid. We should perhaps, discuss “ethnicities” rather than “ethnicity,” taking into consideration a group’s history, socioeconomic context, and the central issues they face when we formulate a theoretical approach. I will discuss this critique of existing theories of ethnicity more fully in my concluding chapter.

This critique of ethnicity theory, it is important to remember, arises in the context of the United States, a country of immigrants. Broadly speaking, each ethnic group discussed here arrived under very different circumstances and the pattern of their immigration began at different times in American history. And of course within each ethnic group, there are differences in circumstances (e.g., educational, economic, legal).

Undoubtedly, ethnicity in other regions of the world would look quite different. These historical components of the ethnic experience in America strongly suggest that context should be more closely examined.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

### **SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS**

Student ethnic organizations have their roots in larger movements in America, beginning with Civil Rights. In the late '60s and early '70s Affinity Groups reflected and indeed were part of the struggle for social equality, an effort that was dominated by the Black community. The Affinity Groups, therefore, were characterized by a strong and overt political action agenda. By the '80s and '90s, with the success of these initiatives, activism became more quiescent. The idea of equal treatment under the law became the norm in society in general and a reality that was reflected in the assumptions and attitudes that obtained at institutions of higher learning. Accordingly, the *raison d'être* for Affinity Groups began to change. They turned away from political action. However, notions of “otherness” – awareness that certain ethnic groups remained distinct from the mainstream – continued to exist. Affinity Groups came to serve both as a social haven and an affirmation of ethnic identity.

Throughout the history of student ethnic organizations at Haverford, members have had disagreements stemming from different worldviews, ideals, experiences, and objectives. Despite tensions and arguments, however, these organizations have existed for almost 40 years. In this study, I have explored how members are able to negotiate their differences in order to create cohesion through a common identity.

I framed my investigation of ethnic identity through the UnityFest Fight, according to Moore's diagnostic event method. Her ethnographic approach emphasizes the use of specific events to illuminate the creation, contestation, or continuation of social

structures, while framing them in historical and cultural context. Moore's event-centered model allows us to evaluate other theories.

Instrumentalist and primordialist theories, although helpful in framing how groups create a common identity, are not universally applicable. A further drawback is that they allow ethnic identity to be framed as a static rather than dynamic phenomenon. Using the Fight as a lens into Affinity Group cohesion exposed the creation of a common identity as a continuous process. Members were constantly renegotiating their identity according to different circumstances.

Although Barth's theory is termed circumstantial, he continues to be influenced by structural theory in his reliance on boundaries. Focusing on boundaries forces the anthropologist to narrow his/her investigation to the behaviors and oral communications of the informants. As I have attempted to demonstrate, however, the position of the ethnic group within the United States influences the way in which the group forms a common identity. Through an event-centered approach, I was able to incorporate the broader context.

Moore's theoretical paradigm also allows us to further develop general theories of culture. Geertz (2000) claims that a culture is a complex web of symbols, the meanings of which are determined and passed down by society. Symbols, in this case, signify "any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception – the conception is the symbols' meaning" (2000: 91). Symbols are the tangible form of an abstract idea. Therefore, symbols can be used to communicate and transmit ideas; in a sense, they guide action (2000). Geertz suggests that to understand a culture, an anthropologist must analyze specific symbols, rather than looking for large patterns. Yet

Geertz's understanding of cultural symbols relies on the assumption that symbols will have the same meaning for all members of the same culture. I have argued, however, that members of the same panethnic group have differing relationships with cultural symbols. The contestation of these symbols creates tension among members. Yet these same symbols can also serve to unify members under a common ethnic identity. Moore's approach highlights the dynamic position of cultural symbols.

### **FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

This examination of ethnic groups also reveals directions for future research. While I focused on the creation of cohesion, many other interesting aspects of ethnicity and Affinity Groups arose from my fieldwork that I was not able to pursue. I would like to mention two points in particular.

Although I touched on gender in my discussion of BSL, I believe there is a lot more to be understood in this area. During the UnityFest Fight, members acknowledged that the group seemed to split mainly along gender lines, although they could offer no explanation for this. Older members are aware that male-female tensions have caused divisions in BSL for many years. Even the faculty is cognizant of this problem; one year the administration brought in a facilitator to help BSL work through these difficulties. Although ALAS manifests no fracture between men and women, Silvia made an interesting comment to me about gender as we were walking home one night after a meeting. Telling me about past divisions in ALAS, she said, "The Puerto Rican girls were yelling that they had to organize La Fiesta all by themselves and the other girls – it was all girls, for some reason girls always run the organizations – the other girls were

saying that they were never allowed to help.” She continued to describe the arguments and I never got a chance to question her about her own interjection about girl leaders. But her comment is worth exploring. Why do women seem to make up the majority of the membership and hold more offices in the clubs? And why does gender continually create such tensions in BSL?

Another topic worthy of further investigation is students who choose not join Affinity Groups. Exploring this group of students may help illuminate certain questions that have arisen throughout this study. In my discussion of social networks, for instance, I hypothesized about the origins of friendships among minority students. I was unable to determine, however, whether friendships were formed primarily because of a shared ethnicity or because of interaction within the Affinity Group setting. Understanding the position of minority non-Affinity Group members within the social network may help answer this question. Another question I raised was that of imperative ethnic identity: is ethnic identity self-ascribed or assigned? Examining the ethnic identity of minority students who choose to associate themselves with White students offers a different perspective to this question. Are minority students able to shed their ethnic identity by integrating themselves in White social circles and committing to White cultural symbols? This leads to another question: which markers are most influential in defining ethnic identity (i.e., physical attributes versus musical tastes or food preferences)? Earlier, I described Celine’s frustration at not being perceived as Latino by White students. Although she lived in La Casa and was involved in Latino events, she was still considered White because of her appearance. How closely intertwined are race and ethnicity? Finally, the question of why students choose not to join Affinity Groups is

itself worth exploring. In an interview, Eileen, the current co-President of ASA, told me, “My first year here, I didn’t want to go to, to give people the impression that I was scared to venture out on my own and that I was conforming to a group, because I was feeling insecure.” Eileen’s comment touches on two points. One, she seemed to feel a stigma is placed on joining Affinity Groups because it implies the need for a safety net.

Ultimately, she feared how mainstream students would perceive her. Two, Eileen believes that a possible result of joining an ethnic organization is the loss of individual identity. Indeed, according to Kibria (1999), many students who choose not to join ethnic organizations do so because they believe the groups stifle individual identity. Exploring the reasons the students choose not to join ethnic groups offers a different perspective on how Affinity Groups influence ethnic identity.

Finally, I chose to focus my study on Affinity Groups that are dedicated to one panethnic identity. Many students, however, are biracial or multiracial. In fact, Haverford has an Affinity Group, Under One Sky, which caters to multiracial students. How does having multiple ethnicities affect individual ethnic identity and how does it affect a shared group identity? Is it more difficult to create cohesion among members given even more diverse backgrounds? Do members focus their commonality on interactions with mainstream students rather than shared cultural symbols?

\* \* \*

Affinity Groups inherently create tension for members. Students are drawn to these organizations by a sense of commonality stemming from their ethnic identity. By joining, they tacitly agree to identify with the shared identity of the group. However, while they draw comfort and support from their affiliation, they also desire to be

recognized as individuals with disparate backgrounds, experiences, and cultural symbols.

This inherent tension between group and individual identity is the source of constant dialogue and negotiation as the groups struggle to find commonality in diversity.

## References

- Astin, Alexander  
1982. *Minorities in American Higher Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Barrios, René  
1999. *Involvement of Hispanics of Mexican Origin in Community College Hispanic Student Organizations*. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Education, Arizona State University.
- Barth, Fredrik  
1969. Introduction. In *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*. Fredrik Barth, ed. Pp. 9-38 Boston: Little Brown & Co.
- Bennett, Sybril M.  
1999. Self-Segregation: An Oxymoron in Black and White. In *African American Culture and Heritage in Higher Education Research and Practice*. K. Freeman, ed. Pp. 121-131. Westport: Praeger.
- Brass, Paul  
1991. *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Calderón, Jose  
1992. "Hispanic" and "Latino": The Viability of Categories for Panethnic Unity. *Latin American Perspectives* 19(4): 37-44.
- Chan, Sucheng  
1998 [1996]. Asian American Historiography. In *Asians in America: History and Immigration of Asian Americans*. Franklin Ng, ed. Pp. 1-37. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Cox, Oliver C.  
1948. *Caste, Class and Race*. Garden City: Doubleday.
- Davis, M. A.  
1997. Latino Leadership Development. *National Civic Review* 86(3): 227-233.
- De Genova, Nicholas & Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas  
2003. Latino Racial Formations in the United States: An Introduction. *The Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 8(2): 2-17.
- Demo, David H. & Michael Hughes  
1990. Socialization and Racial Identity among Black Americans. *Social Psychology Quarterly* 53(4): 364:374.
- Editorial  
1972. *Bi-College News* 5(4): 1
- Espiritu, Yen Le  
1992. *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Esterhuyse, P. & Nel, C.J.  
1992. Experiences of Some Black Students on a Multicultural Campus. *South African Journal of Ethnology* 22(2):39-44.
- Fleming, Jacqueline

1984. *Blacks in College*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Geertz, Clifford.  
2000 [1973]. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Glazer, Nathan & Daniel P. Moynihan.  
1963. *Beyond the Melting Pot*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Gonzalez, Juan  
2000. *Harvest of an Empire: A History of Latinos in America*. New York: Penguin Putnam Inc.
- Hayes-Bautista, David and Jorge Chapa  
1987. Latino Terminology: Conceptual Bias for Standardized Terminology. *American Journal of Public Health* 77: 61-68.
- Jones, Yvonne V.  
1953. African-American Cultural Nationalism. In *Cultural Portrayals of African Americans*. Janis Faye Hutchinson, ed. Pp. 114-137. Westport: Bergin and Garvey.
- Lee, Stacey J.  
1991. *Ethnic Identification and Social Interaction: A Study of Asian-American Students at a Philadelphia High School*. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Education, University of Pennsylvania.  
1996. *Unraveling the "Model Minority" Stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Lopez, David & Yen Espiritu  
1990. Panethnicity in the United States: A Theoretical Framework. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 13(2): 199-224.
- Melville, Margarita B.  
1988. Hispanics: Race, Class, or Ethnicity? *The Journal of Ethnic Studies* 16(1): 67-83.
- Min, Pyong Gap, ed.  
2006a. Asian Immigration: History and Contemporary Trends. In *Asian Americans: Contemporary Trends and Issues. 2nd edition*. Pyong Gap Min, ed. Pp. 7-31. London: Pine Forge Press.  
2006b. Major Issues Related to Asian American Experiences. In *Asian Americans: Contemporary Trends and Issues. 2nd edition*. Pyong Gap Min, ed. Pp. 38-57. London: Pine Forge Press.
- Moore, Sally Falk  
1987. Explaining the Present: Theoretical Dilemmas in Processual Ethnography. *American Ethnologist* 14(4): 727-736.
- Montelongo, Ricardo  
2003. *Chicana/o and Puerto Rican Experiences with Latina/o and Minority College Student Organizations at Predominantly White Institutions and the Potential Effects of These Experiences on Student Outcomes*. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Indiana University.
- Oboler, Suzanne  
1995. *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re)Presentation in the United States*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Padilla, Felix M  
 1985. *Latino Ethnic Consciousness: The Case of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Sedlacek, William  
 1987. Black Students on White Campuses: 20 Years of Research. *Journal of College Student Personnel*: 28(6): 484-495.
- Sokolovskii, Sergey & Valery Tishkov  
 1996. Ethnicity. In *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*. Alan Barnard & Jonathan Spencer, eds. London: Routledge.
- Sommers, Laurie Kay  
 1991. Inventing Latinismo: The Creation of "Hispanic" Panethnicity in the United States. *The Journal of American Folklore* 104:32-53.
- Swarthmore College  
 Clubs and Organizations. Electronic document,  
[http://www.swarthmore.edu/students/activities/clubs\\_cultural.htm](http://www.swarthmore.edu/students/activities/clubs_cultural.htm), accessed December 5, 2005.
- Tatum, Beverly Daniel  
 1992. African-American Identity, Academic Achievement, and Missing History. In *Social Education* 56: 331-334.  
 1997. *Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations about Race*. New York: Basic Books.
- Treviño, Jesús G.  
 1992. *Participation in Ethnic/Racial Student Organizations*. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Education, University of California.
- Trosper, Ronald  
 1981. American Indian Nationalism and Frontier Expansion. In *Ethnic Changes*. C. Keyes, ed. Seattle: University of Washington.
- University of Pennsylvania  
 Korean Students Association. Electronic document,  
<http://dolphin.upenn.edu/%7Eksagroup/indexnew.html>, accessed December 5, 2005.
- Urciuoli, Bonnie  
 2003. Boundaries, Language, and the Self: Issues Faced by Puerto Ricans and Other Latina/o College Students. *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 8(2):152-173.
- Van den Berghe, Pierre  
 1981. *The Ethnic Phenomenon*. New York: Elsevier.
- Weber, Max  
 1996 [1922]. Ethnic Groups. In *Theories of Ethnicity: A Classical Reader*. Werner Sollors, ed. New York: New York University Press.
- Wolf, Eric R.  
 1994. Perilous Ideas: Race, Culture, People. *Current Anthropology* 35(1):1-12.
- Wong, Morrison G.  
 1998 [1986]. Post-1965 Asian Immigrants: Where Do They Come From, Where Are They Now, and Where Are They Going? In *Asians in America: History*

*and Immigration of Asian Americans*. Franklin Ng, ed. Pp. 202-220. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.

Zenner, Walter P.

1996. Ethnicity. In *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*. David Levinson & Melvin Ember, eds. New York: Henry Holt & Company.

## Appendix A

Several authors have indicated that students join ethnic organizations for social support (Barrios 1999, Bennett 1999, Montelongo 2003). Through Affinity Groups, members are able to create a network of friends. In my own fieldwork, I noticed that several members seemed to have formed close bonds with other members in the Affinity Group. Furthermore, the first ALAS meeting, which was announced by word-of-mouth, suggested that a Latino social network was in place. In order to pursue the idea of a social network stemming from Affinity Groups, I conducted a survey in ALAS and BSL. Unfortunately, because ASA does not meet on a regular basis, I did not have the opportunity to investigate this group.

I contacted the Presidents of both groups ahead of time, asking permission to conduct the survey. The Presidents were unopposed and even made an announcement at to their respective groups, requesting that members help me with my thesis. I then explained that I wanted to have a better understanding of the social network that might be created by Affinity Groups. I asked that each member diagram their close friends, placing themselves at the center and drawing their friends closer or farther depending on the strength of their relationship. I also requested that members label which Affinity Group(s) their friends belonged to, if any, and what sort of activities members did with each friend (i.e., eat, go to movies, party). I thought the last question might be useful in understanding the type of bond Affinity Groups formed. Unfortunately, I had to eliminate this aspect from my results because not enough students remembered to include this information.

To assess the surveys, I wrote out possible categories: 1) same Affinity Group (i.e., responder is in BSL, friend is in BSL), 2) other Affinity Group, 3) not in an Affinity Group. Separating the ALAS and BSL responses, I then tallied the number of friends in each category. If a friend was in the same Affinity Group, but also another Affinity Group, I counted them as “same Affinity Group.”

The weakness of this method is that it inflated the number of friends within the same Affinity Group because friendships within the same group were often counted twice. For instance, because Gina, Deandra, Ashley, Amina and Pamela all listed each other as friends, I tallied 24 friends in the same Affinity Group. Therefore, I was actually tallying “friendships” rather than “friends” and I was counting the friendship from both friends’ perspectives. This was necessary in case one member listed a friendship with a member who did not list the friendship.

I also counted the number of members whose entire friendship network consisted of students in the same Affinity Group, consisted of students not affiliated with an Affinity Group, consisted of half Affinity Group, half non-Affinity Group.

Although this method is far from perfect, it still provides the sense that many friendships are formed through Affinity Groups. This result is supported by anecdotal evidence from my fieldwork.