THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL IDENTITY SALIENCE ON ETHNICITY-RELATED

MEMORIES IN ASIAN AMERICANS

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to investigate how the salience of Asian Americans' ethnic identities (Asian American vs. American) influences the reconstruction of their ethnicity-related experiences. By using a priming procedure adapted from previous study (Hong et al., 2004), the present study manipulated the Asian Americans' ethnic identity salience. Half of the participants were randomly assigned to the Asian American identity salient condition, and the other half were randomly assigned to the American identity salient condition. Within each condition, the participants were instructed to recall the earliest event they were aware of their ethnic origin after the priming procedure in a 5-minute period. Memory theme analysis indicated that the story theme of awareness of difference was the most common theme emerged in participants' ethnicity-related memories no matter which priming condition they were assigned. Furthermore, content subcategory analysis revealed that although the memory percentages containing *connection to culture/ethnicity* themes had no significant difference, the subcategories within the same theme showed significant differences. The results were discussed within a framework of the relation between the social identity salience and the construction of ethnicity-related social reality in Asian Americans.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The goal of the present study was to investigate the effect of ethnic identity salience on the construction of ethnicity-related social reality in Asian Americans. The author has a broad background in psychology, with specific training and expertise in key research areas, which is autobiographical memory, for the study. The author earned her Bachelor of Science degree in the Physics department of Zhongshan University in 2004. In additional, the author also has a Master of Science after a 3-year study in Psychological department of Peking University. During her study in Peking University, the author took part in several projects of autobiographical memory, including her Master thesis program in self-esteem memory. The author now is attending a Master of Arts program in Human development department in Cornell University. As a research assistant in Associate Professor Dr. Qi Wang's social cognition development lab, the author obtained extensive research experience. The present study was based on the author's knowledge and her interest in both the autobiographical memory construction and the social identity issue in Asian Americans.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

"To my surprise, I learned I was not white. By birth, I was yellow."

 "I remain not only a stranger in a familiar land but sojourner through my own life."

<div align="right">--Frank H. Wu</div>

INTRODUCTION

In Frank H. Wu's book Yellow: Race in America beyond Black and White, he describes vividly how he realized for the first time that he was not a "white" as other students in his class in grade school, and also how he kept being treated differently as an Asian American in his later life.

> 'I wonder what people are thinking'…when I was told by a senior faculty
> member at one school…, 'How appropriate that we have the Asian candidate
> today'—he was referring to December 7, Pearl Harbor Day. I believe the
> questions and statements are signals, along a spectrum of invidious color
> consciousness that starts with speculation but leads to worse. To be met with it
> so quickly and so often reminds me, over and over, that I am being treated
> differently than I would be if I were White (Frank H. Wu, 2002, p. 83).

The author's ethnicity-related experiences reflect a common but less questioned or studied social reality—the differentiation of and discrimination against Asian Americans in the United States. Although the United States is considered an immigrant country with a wide range of ethnic diversity, members of ethnic minority groups still often face stereotypes and social exclusion due to physical features and historical issues (Devos & Banaji, 2005; Chao & Hong, 2007). During the past decade, an increasing literature had addressed the social reality issues of being Asian Americans from a psychological perspective (Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Chao & Hong, 2007). The evidences were rather contradictory, however. On one hand, studies on Asian Americans' stereotype of being a successful *model minority* showed the positive

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aspects of being a special ethnic group in the United State (Wong et al., 1998). On the other hand, other studies also revealed the negative effects, such as emotional distress, of upholding the expectations of being a *model minority* for Asian Americans (Lee, 1996; Oyserman & Sakamoto, 1997). Besides the two sides of being a *model minority*, there are other more negative stereotypes or derogated stigmas against Asian American (Fisher et al., 2000), which make the social reality of being Asian American even more complicated. Nevertheless, few studies have fully examined this complex ethnicity-related social reality of being an Asian American. In particular, studies have rarely examined how Asian Americans perceive and construct their ethnicity-related social reality and how their ethnic identification affects their corresponding construction. The present study thus attempts to examine Asian Americans' construction of ethnicity-related social reality and the effect of their ethnic identity on the construction.

Ethnicity-related social reality

Asian Americans are often seen as a *model minority*, who is hardworking and good at academics but not playing, and free from psychological problems and crime (Wong et al., 1998). To some extent, these stereotypes of Asian Americans may have positive effects on the related ethnic group, but also negative effects (Chao & Hong, 2007). Emphasizing the stereotypes of a *model minority* is actually emphasizing the ethnic group differences and thus reinforces the discrete group boundaries. Compare with the majority, which is usually the dominant group, the minority groups may be susceptible to being considered inferior (Oyserman & Sakamoto, 1997).

Unlike the stereotypes of a *model minority*, which are actually less negative, there are all kinds of hostile prejudice and discrimination against Asian Americans. For example, "Japanese are a very cruel race; ...Chinese are not very nice people." (Frank

2

H. Wu, 2002, p.88). Research on adolescents' personality and behavior stereotypes assert that Asians are "poor or non-English speaking", "poor communicators", "submissive", "passive", "compliant", "obedient", "stoic", "devious", "sneaky", "sly", and even "racist" (Lee, 1994; 1996). Asian Americans are also identified as "stingy" and "greedy" on attitudes about money (Lee, 1996). Physically, Asian Americans are considered to be "short", "slanted eyes", and "eyeglass wearing". These examples and stereotypes reflect how Asian Americans are being derogated in their daily life.

Furthermore, although norms of egalitarianism in the United States have become dominant during the past decades and expressed racial prejudice among white Americans has declined dramatically, there is a wealth of literature showing that whites continue to express bias against traditionally disadvantaged groups. Their bias is more likely to be expressed in terms of subtle discrimination, which is often called aversive discrimination. White participants who provided nonprejudiced response on self-report measures tend to show negative nonverbal behaviors as a function of unconscious, automatically activated racial bias (Dovidio, 2009).

Taken together, social reality of ethnic issues and racial boundaries is often salient to Asian Americans' daily interpersonal and intergroup interaction in the United States. The construction of this social reality would therefore have significant implication for Asian Americans' cognition and psychological well-being.

Dual social identities
Being an Asian American can either mean being an Asian with an American nationality or being an American with an Asian descent. How to identify themselves remains a frequent question for Asian Americans who are aware of both their national identity and their ethnic identity. Generally, assimilation was assumed to be the goal for immigrants and immigrants are expected to "melt" into American cultural and

value system. In this sense, Asian Americans' national identity, which is the identity of being an American, should be an important social identity of Asian Americans' identity structure as well as their ethnic identity of being an Asian with an American nationality. This dual identities structure of social identity has particularly significant meanings for Asian American.

One of the questions Asian Americans are often being asked is that "Where are you really from?" As an American with a face of an Asian, Asian Americans are susceptible to be misperceived as foreigners. This misperception may generate a crucial threat for Asian Americans about being denied of their national identity—the identity of being American. In Cheryan and Monin's (2005) studies, they compare Asian Americans' perception of how much they are Americans and non-Asian Americans' perception of how much Asian Americans are Americans. Results revealed although Asian Americans self-defined themselves as American, non-Asian American participants think them less Americans than other groups (Cheryan & Monin, 2005). The variance reflects an intensive conflict between being Asian and being American for Asian Americans.

Social identities and the construction of social reality

How Asian American individuals construct their social reality of being an American with an Asian descent in their autobiographical memories is the question of interest in the present study. To answer the question, first of all, we need to know how our autobiographical memories are constructed. On the one hand, Conway and Pleydell-Pearce's Self-memory System (SMS, 2000) claims that autobiographical memory is inherently related to one's self. The working self, which is temporary activated from chronic self structure, regulates the current construction of related autobiographical memories (Conway & Holmes, 2004; Wang, 2008). On the other hand, from the

definition of social identity, "part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Taifel, 1981, p. 255), we can expect that social identity have a tight relation with autobiographical memories that are highly relevant to the social identity. Thus, a temporarily activated social identity would regulate the construction of a specific autobiographical memory with a related theme. In other words, when a specific social identity is activated, autobiographical memories that have a theme consistent to the identity would be more accessible than those that do not have such a theme.

Where does our social identity come from and how do they become activated? According to self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1994), each person belongs to multiple social groups and potentially has multiple social identities. Not all these various social identities would come to one's consciousness at one time. Instead, within certain social contexts, only a few of one's multiple social identities may become salient, which means that those identities would have a high likelihood to be activated (Turner et al, 1994). For example, a Chinese individual who lives in a predominantly African American community may be more likely to be aware of his ethnic identity than in a Chinese community. This concept of identity salience fully reflects the dynamic process of people's social identification within certain situations.

According to Self-categorization theories (Turner et al., 1994) and social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981), a social identity may manifest significant effect on cognition and behavior only when it become highly accessible. Empirical studies have provided evidences for this proposition by adopting priming approaches to manipulate the salience of a specific identity (Transue, 2007; Wong & Hong, 2005).

More importantly, when different social identities have become salient, the effect of identity on cognition and behavior would be different (Hong et al., 2004; Yang et

al., 2008). According to Self-categorization theories (Turner et al, 1994), when people identify with broader groups rather than narrower groups, they would be more likely to avoid competition and conflict, and to reduce their negative evaluations among the members of subgroups within those broader groups. This effect was described by a model called Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM, Gaertner & Dovido, 2000). According to this model, decreasing one's ethnic identity salience by emphasizing an existing common ingroup identity can eliminate the intergroup boundaries. The mechanism for this process is because the common ingroup identity is related with the differences between ingroup and outgroup individual perceived. When a common ingroup identity becomes salient, the intergroup differences individual perceived would decrease, thus deemphasize the intergroup differences. In contrast, when a group identity, such an ethnic identity, becomes salient, the intergroup differences individual perceived would increase, so as to emphasizing the intergroup boundaries.

According to Hong and her colleague (2004), American identity could be considered a common ingroup identity for Asian Americans, and their ethnic identity could be considered a group identity. In one of their study, they manipulated the salience of Asian Americans' two different social identities (Asian American identity vs. American identity) by asking them to think about what actions they could take as "Asian Americans (Americans)" to make the United States a better country after reading a short paragraph about the problems the country faces. When participants' American identity became salient, they expressed significantly lower levels of prejudice toward other ethnic groups (Hong et al., 2004, study 2). Compare with *Asian American*, *American* is a more overarching group identity including more subgroups. And Hong and colleagues' study indicated that when a *superordinate* group identity (e.g., *American) becomes salient,* people's outgroup bias would be lower than when a subgroup identity (e.g., *Asian American*) become more salient

6

(Hong et al., 2004, study 2). Similarly, Stone and Crisp (2007) proposed that weakening the salience of intergroup distinctions can reduce intergroup bias. They tested their proposition with a sample of British participants. When participants' superordinate identity (European) became salient, their identification with European was negatively correlated to their cognitive bias towards French. When British participants considered themselves European, the intergroup distinctions between British and French became less salient. British were more inclined to perceive French as ingroup, which reduced their intergroup bias.

Given the significant effect of salience of hierarchical social identities on cognition, we expect the effect of identity salience would also be detected in Asian Americans' autobiographical memories. Compare to other cognitive processes, ethnicity-related memory entails people's construction of real-life experiences. It may have higher validity in reflecting social reality. Despite of its significance, there is not much empirical work on the topic to date. Of some relevance to the current perspective, Yang and his colleagues (2008) have conducted a study on how the salience of social identity would affect individuals' group-reference memories. They asked the Tibetans and the Hans to learn and later recognize personality trait adjectives. The results indicated that with a high ethnic identity salience, Tibetans performed better in the recognition test when the adjectives were Tibetan-relevant. And there is no significant ethnic effect on the Hans. However, the finding could be different when real life is concerned, as the memory of real life experiences is very different from the memory task in the laboratory.

The current study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how Asian Americans' construction of ethnicity-related experiences would be influenced by the salience of their different

social identities (being Asian American vs. American). The study used a priming method to manipulate the relative salience of two social identities (Asian American vs. American). First of all, young Asian Americans were asked to read a paragraph about the United States' current difficult situation. After they finished reading, half of the participants were instructed to write a short essay to give some thoughts on helping the country to succeed by thinking they are Asian Americans, while the other half of participants were write the same essay by thinking they are Americans. This procedure was adapted from a previous study (Hong et al., 2004) for the same purpose in manipulating Asian Americans' identity salience. After this priming procedure, participants were asked to recall and describe their earliest ethnicity-related memories, which were the memories when they were awareness of their ethnic origins, within a 5-minute period. The reason for choosing a time limited task is because theories of autobiographical memory have claimed that such a methodology is optimal for eliciting the most accessible memories, and furthermore, that the most accessible memories are likely to be those that are most meaningful (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000). In addition, participants were also asked to report their age when the recalled events occurred, as well as how important the event was to each participant. Finally, the participants were instructed to complete a 12-item scale in measuring people's ethnicity identification (Phinney, 1992; Robert et al., 1999).

Hypotheses

According to Common Ingroup Identity Model, when comparing with their American identity, Asian Americans' Asian identity is a subgroup identity. So when Asian Americans' different social identities became salient, it would lead to different construction of ethnicity-related memories. Specifically, when Asian American identity (subgroup identity) became salient, Asian Americans would be more inclined

to consider themselves as members of their ethnicity group, and furthermore, they would be more likely to differentiate themselves from the other ethnicity groups (Gaertner & Dovido, 2000). As a result, their memories related to intergroup differences or conflict would be more consistent with their current concern and become more accessible. Events that involved being minority or majority, being physical or culturally different from other groups, and being awareness of stereotypes upon them or even experience of prejudice would be strong triggers for them to realize their ethnic origins. In addition, events that highlighted their connection with their culture or ethnicity groups would be another kind of triggers for awareness of ethnicity, since emphasizing the connection with own ethnicity usually represents the emphasizing the differentiation from out groups. Thus, in general, we expected to see four main story themes would be dominant in Asian Americans' ethnicity-related memories, especially when participants' Asian American identity was salient. The four story themes were awareness of being minority or majority, awareness of being different physically or culturally, awareness of stereotypes or experience of prejudice, and being connected with own culture or ethnicity. When their American identity became salient, Asian American individuals would be more inclined to perceive themselves as members of their national group, instead of ethnic group, thus deemphasize the intergroup differences or conflict, making the memories contains the story themes mentioned above less accessible.

Studies also indicated that the stories of awareness of difference were inclined to occur at earlier ages than other types of stories (Syed & Azmitia, 2008; 2010). Thus we also expected to see there are differences in memory age among the different types of stories. The events of awareness of being minority or majority as well as the event of awareness of being physically or culturally different would probably occur earlier than the other two kinds of events, since they are less complicated.

The effect of identity salience would be exhibited on how personal important Asian Americans consider the ethnicity-related memories. When Asian American identity were salient, participants would not just more inclined to look for experiences to define and enhance their ethnic identities, they would also be more likely to consider those experiences are personally important to them.

Previous studies (Syed & Azmitia, 2008, 2010) showed that people's ethnicity identification significantly related to their memories of ethnicity-related experiences. For those who maintained a high identification of their ethnicity, they were more likely to report experiences of being social excluded by other groups. To detect whether the effect of social identity salience on ethnicity-related memories would be regulated by individuals' ethnicity identification, a measure of ethnicity identification was included in present study. We predicted that the effect of identification would interact with the effect of identity salience on memory recalling. A high identification of own ethnicity would be related to strong effect of identity salience on memory recalling, while a lower identification would relate to weak effect of identity salience on memory recalling.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 20 university students from the Cornell University (7 males and 12 females, one of the participants did not provide gender information) have taken part and completed the whole experiment. An additional 2 participants were removed because of incomplete data. The sample ranged in age from 19 to 23 (mean = 20.9; SD = 1.36). All the participants are American citizens of Asian descent. Specifically, 12 participants were Chinese Americans, 5 were Korean Americans, and 2 were

Japanese Americans (one of the participants did not provide this piece of information).

Ten participants were born in the United States, while 9 immigrated to the United

States when they were children (one participant failed to report this piece of

information). Except 2 participants received $5, other 18 participants earned credits

for classes they were taking as a compensation for their participation.

Procedures

Apparatus. All materials were displayed by Firefox browser 3.6 on computer. A total

of 3 desk computers have been employed in this study. The whole experiment was

completely computer guided, with the experimenter nearby only to answer any

questions that arose.

Step 1: Identity manipulation. Participants met with the experimenter in a quiet lab

room in small groups of one to three. They were given a brief description of the study

and assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of the study. They were then

randomly assigned to one of the two identity salience manipulation conditions (ethnic

identity salient V.S. national identity salient).   In the ethnic identity salient condition,

the "Asian American" identity, which is the ethnic identity for Asian American, was

made salient, while in the national identity salient condition, the "American" identity

was made salient. The manipulation procedure was adopted from Hong and her

colleagues' study (Hong et al., 2004). In this procedure, the participants in both

conditions were instructed to read a short paragraph, which was displayed on a

computer screen, about some problems that the United States faces as a nation:

> *American society is facing a lot of problems nowadays. Domestically,*
>
> *America faces problems of unemployment, crimes in the inner cities, and*
>
> *terrorism on the American soil. Internationally, America faces problems of*

negotiating with the Islamic countries and economic commitment to various

nations.

After the participants finished reading, they were asked to think about actions that could be taken to make the United States a better country and to write a short essay about their ideas.

In the ethnic identity salient condition, the participants were asked to think specifically about what "we as Asian Americans" could do to make the United States better. In the ethnic identity un-salient condition, the participants were asked to think about what "we as Americans" could do to make the United States better. Previous study indicates that this manipulation should temporarily alter participants' current social identity, rendering either ethnic identity, which is the Asian American identity, or common ingroup identity, which is the American identity, salient (Hong et al., 2004).

Step 2: Earliest ethnicity-related memory task. After the identity salience manipulation procedure, participants were asked to think of the earliest event they remember in which they realized their ethnic origin. The event has to be a specific event occurring at a particular time and place in the past. The participants were also informed by the instruction that they had 5 minutes to describe the memory in detail.

Following the task, participants were instructed to answer two questions about the memory they just reported: Memory age ("What was your age when the event happened?), and personal importance ("How personally important the recalled experience is to you?" rating from 1 to 7, in which 1 represent "not important at all", 7 represent "extremely important").

Step 3: Ethnicity identifcation. In this part, participant's ethnic identity was assessed by using the revised 12-item version of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM, Phinney, 1992; Roberts et al., 1999). The scale has been used in dozens of studies and age groups and has shown strong reliability and validity (Roberts et al., 1999). The development of this MEIM was originally grounded in Erikson's theories of identity formation and modeled on the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (Adam et al., 1987; Phinney, 1992). The ethnic identity is conceptualized as a continuous variable and the measure is designed to be used across different ethnic groups. Participants responded on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*), to 4 (*strongly agree*). This 12-item version MEIM has two factors: *ethnic identity search*, items 1, 2, 4, 8, and 10; *affirmation, belonging, and commitment*, items 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12. A sample item from the *search* subscale is "I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership." While a sample item from the *affirmation, belonging, and commitment* is "I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group." Items were averaged for each subscale so that higher scores represent greater *search* or *affirmation, belonging, and commitment.* In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha for the *search* subscale was .32 and for the *affirmation, belonging, and commitment* was .87. Although the alpha for the *search* subscale was much lower than previous studies, which could be due to the small sample size, the alpha for the *affirmation* subscale was similar to previous studies (Phinney, 1992; Robert et al., 1999).

Step 4: Background information. The last part of the experiment required the participants to provide background information of their age, gender, ethnicity, birth place, and parents' ethnicities et al.

Coding

The coding scheme was adapted from previous studies on narrative of ethnicity-related experiences (Syed & Azmitia, 2008; 2010). All the memories were coded by the author without knowing which identity salience manipulation the participants received.

Story theme. Each memory was coded into at least one of the following five categories that reflect distinct story themes: (1) *Awareness of underrepresentation* was associated with events that involved awareness of being a member of a different group in a particular setting or situation. For example, when one is surround by his or her own ethnic group members or when one is surrounded by other ethnic group members instead of his or her own; (2) *Awareness of difference* was associated with events that involved awareness of being different from members in other ethnic groups or different from other members in their own ethnic group in terms of ethnicity, race, skin color, language, and cultural practices. (3) *Connection to culture/ ethnicity* was associated with events that involved recognition or appreciation of one's own cultural heritage or ethnic origin, such as feeling proud about speaking ethnic language; (4) *Awareness of stereotype or experience of prejudice* was associated with events that involved awareness of stereotypes or experiences of prejudice, racism, discrimination, or oppression (Syed & Azmitia, 2008; 2010). Code each memory for presence and/or absence of the above four story themes; presence of one theme does not necessarily preclude the presence of the other themes. The judgments were made based on the primary content of the memory, not rely only on the amount written related to each theme. When more than one theme was reflected in a memory, all the themes involved were coded. (5) Finally, if none of the four story themes were detected, the memory was coded as "other". Two of the participants failed to provide any memory; these participants were removed due to incomplete data.

Table 1 Ethnicity-related Story Themes and Memory Content Subcategories

Story theme	Subcategory
Awareness of Underrepresentation	Was in a minority
	Was in a majority
Awareness of difference	Awareness of difference in terms of race/ethnicity
	Awareness of difference in terms of cultural practices
	Awareness of difference in terms of language
Awareness of stereotype or experience of prejudice	Awareness of ethnic stereotype
	Racist, derogatory remarks
	Behavioral discrimination
Positive connection to culture/ethnicity	Appreciating culture or ethnic group
	Involvement in cultural practices
	Feeling accepted

Memory content. For each story themes, a certain number of subcategories have been assorted to analyze the content of each memory, and thus to detect the content differences of ethnicity-related memories. The subcategories for each story theme have been organized in table 1 (for details see Syed & Azmitia, 2008). Most of the subcategories were adopted directly from Syed and Azmitia (2008). Some of the subcategories did not show in the memories of the present study, such as "ethnicity is more than skin color". They were thus excluded. Some new subcategories, such as "awareness of ethnic stereotype", were added to the original list as they showed repeatedly in the present study. One memory, which reflected only one story theme, might contain more than one content subcategory.

RESULT

There were no significant differences between the participants in two different priming conditions in the volume of story memory as indexed by the number of words participants used ($M = 105.7$, $SD = 32.0$ for the group in American salient condition, and $M = 92.1$, $SD = 43.8$ for the group in the Asian American salient condition) $T(18) = 0.80$, ns. Gender, ethnicity and birth place had no significant effects in preliminary analyses and were therefore not considered further.

Story theme and content subcategory

The distribution of story themes had been shown in table 2. The number in each cell is the percentage of presence of the particular story theme within a particular priming condition. For instance, the number 35 represents the percentage of memories contains the story theme *awareness of difference* within the American identity salient condition. From table 2, we can see the most frequently occurring theme was *awareness of difference* (35% for American identity salient condition, 30% for Asian American identity salient condition) , followed by *connection to culture/ethnicity* (15% for American identity salient condition, 20% for Asian American identity salient condition), awareness of underrepresentation (15% for American identity salient condition, 10% for Asian American identity salient condition), and awareness of stereotype or experience of prejudice (10% for American identity salient condition, 15% for Asian American identity salient condition). In view of the hypotheses, planned contrast analysis was performed with each main story theme variable. Because the story themes were not exclusive to each other, when a story was coded as one theme, it could also include other themes. A 2 (priming) x4(story theme) chi-square test of the pattern difference between two group of participants was thus not possible in this case. Four chi-square two way tests were therefore conducted

16

separately to test the different distribution of different story themes. None of the two way chi-square tests showed that the difference was significant (χ^2 $_{(1, N=20)}$ = .07, *ns*, for *awareness of underpresentation*; χ^2 $_{(1, N=20)}$ = .02, *ns*, for *awareness of difference*; χ^2 $_{(1, N=20)}$ = .61, *ns*, for *awareness of stereotype or experience of prejudice*; χ^2 $_{(1, N=20)}$ = 1.65, *ns*, for *connection to culture/ethnicity*).

To detect the differences of memory content between the two different saliency conditions at a deeper level, the memories were further analyzed by using subcategories of memory themes. This was an important analysis because although participants in Asian American identity salient condition recalled only 1% more memories with a theme of *connection to culture/ethnicity* than participants in American identity salient condition, all the *connection to culture/ethnicity* events recalled by participants with a salient Asian American identity were specifically *involvement of cultural practices*, while all the events reported by participants with a salient American identity were either with a subcategory theme of appreciating-culture or with a subcategory of feeling-accepted (see table 2). Table 2 also contains a summary of the subcategory analysis of memory content in two different identity salient conditions.

Since the subcategories themselves were not exclusive to each other, eleven chi-square two way tests were conducted separately on content subcategory variables. Except the difference of involvement in cultural practice between two priming condition were significant χ^2 $_{(1, N=20)}$ = 8.15, *p* = .004, other contrasts were not significant.

Ethnicity identification

The distributions of the two subscales of MEIM were near normal ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.35$, skewness = -.24 for the *ethnic identity search* subscale, and $M = 3.30$, $SD = 0.41$, skewness = .41 for the *affirmation, belonging, and commitment* subscale).

Table 2 Story theme and content subcategory distribution

Story theme and memory content	American identity salient （%）	Asian American identity salient （%）
Awareness of underrepresentation	15	10
Was in the minority	5	5
Was in the majority	10	5
Awareness of difference	35	30
In terms of race/ethnicity	20	10
In terms of cultural practices	10	10
In terms of language	10	10
Awareness of stereotype or experience of prejudice	10	15
Awareness of stereotype	5	5
Racist, derogatory remarks	5	5
Behavioral discrimination	0	5
Connection to culture/ethnicity	15	20
Appreciating culture	10	0
Involvement in cultural practice	0	20
Feeling accepted	5	0

To determine whether Asian Americans' identification with their ethnic group had an effect on the memories of ethnicity-related experiences, a logistic regression was

performed for each story theme variable. The reason for applying logistic regression analyses was because the story theme variables, which were the dependent variables in the present model, were dichotomy variables. Table 3 summarizes the results.   There was no significant effect in all models.

Table 3 Logistic regression predicting story theme from priming condition and ethnicity identification

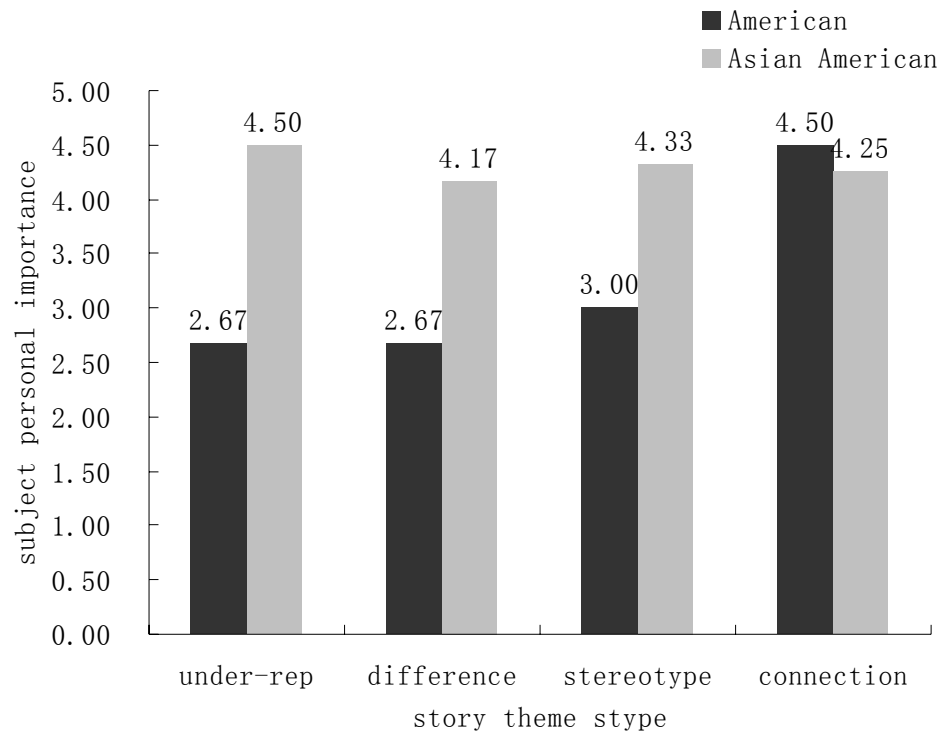| Outcome	Predictor	B	Wald χ2	P
Awareness of underrepresentation	Priming	-0.03	0.001	0.98
	Affirmation, belonging, and commitment	0.49	0.11	0.74
	Identity search	0.21	0.01	0.91
Awareness of difference	Priming	0.16	0.02	0.89
	Affirmation, belonging, and commitment	-1.42	1.16	0.28
	Identity search	1.10	0.45	0.85
Awareness of stereotype or experience of prejudice	Priming	-0.90	0.60	0.44
	Affirmation, belonging, and commitment	-0.65	0.21	0.65
	Identity search	-0.45	0.02	0.76

Table 3 Logistic regression predicting story theme from priming condition and ethnicity identification (Continued)

Outcome	Predictor	B	Wald χ2	P
Connection to culture/ethnicity	Priming	-1.16	0.97	0.33
	Affirmation, belonging, and commitment	2.40	2.12	0.15
	Identity search	1.22	0.26	0.61

Personal importance

Although the effect of identity salience on the story themes was not significant, the effect may be shown on the strength of personal importance of each event, which means the individuals' subject personal importance upon each event may be different according to the story theme of that event. To investigate identity salience's effect on individuals' subject personal importance and how the effects were different in different priming conditions, the averaged personal importance for each type of story theme for each priming group was calculated and a 2(priming) x 4(story theme) ANOVA was performed (see figure 1). Both the main effect of story theme and the interaction between priming and story theme were not significant ($F_{(1, 19)}$ = 1.0, *ns* for main effect of story theme, and $F_{(1, 19)}$ = 0.35, *ns* for interaction). The main effect of priming was marginally significant $F_{(1, 19)}$ = 5.26, *p* = .07. From figure 1, we can see that except for story theme of "connection", the personal importance for other three types of story theme had big gaps between two priming groups. When the story theme of "connection" was excluded from the data, a 2(priming) x 3(story theme) ANOVA

showed that main effect of priming was strikingly significant $F_{(1, 19)} = 35.24$, $p < .0001$.

Note   under-rep: awareness of underrepresentation

        difference: awareness of difference

        stereotype: awareness of stereotype or experience of prejudice

        connection: connection to culture/ethnicity

Figure 1 Personal importance of ethnicity-related experience

Memory age

The mean memory ages, which are the age at which event occurred, were calculated separately for each priming group. The averaged memory age for American identity salient condition was 7.43 ($SD = 0.95$); and the averaged memory age for Asian

American identity salient condition was 6.47 ($SD = 0.65$). An independent-sample T test indicated that the group difference was not significant $T(19) = 0.85$, *ns*.

Studies also indicated that the stories of *awareness of difference* were inclined to occur at earlier ages than other types of stories (Syed & Azmitia, 2008; 2010). Thus, the relation between ages at which recalled events occurred and the story types has been analyzed. What's the mean memory age by priming group? To detect this relationship, the averaged age when events happened for each type of story theme was calculated ($M = 6.6$, $SD = 1.82$ for *awareness of underrepresentation*; $M = 6.5$, $SD = 3.26$ for *awareness of difference; M = 8.8, SD = 4.32* for *awareness of stereotype or experience of prejudice; M = 6.3, SD = 2.50* for *connection to culture/ethnicity*). A one-way ANOVA showed that the memory age differences between the four story themes were not significant $F(3) = 0.76$, *ns*. Although one-way ANOVA showed that the age differences between the four story themes were not significant, this result may be different between the two priming groups. Therefore, a 2(priming) x 4(story theme) were performed on age. Results indicated that neither the main effect of priming, $F_{(1, 3)} = 1.33$, *ns*, nor the interaction between the priming and story theme was significant $F_{(1, 3)} = 0.77$, *ns*.

DISCUSSION

The social reality in ethnicity-related memories

The purpose in this study was to explore how Asian Americans construct their ethnicity-related social reality as well as how ethnic identify salience affects their memories of ethnicity-related experiences by using an experimental paradigm, in which participants' temporary ethnic identity saliency were manipulated. Instead of simply correlating the ethnic identity with ethnicity-related experiences (Syed &

Azmitia, 2008, 2010), the present study seeks to identify specific mechanisms underlying the two. In addition, the present study also investigate the underlying mechanisms with a special population—Asian Americans, which has a particularly interesting dual identity issues. Taken together, the findings not just extend previous work (Syed & Azmitia, 2008, 2010) by establishing a causal relation between the construction of ethnic identity and the construction of ethnicity-related experiences, but also shed light on Asian Americans' ethnic identity and their construction of ethnicity-related social reality.

From the results, we can see that the distribution of story themes in ethnicity-related experience reflects the social reality to some extent. Although the chi-square test of the distribution of story theme was not significant, we still can learn from the pattern of the distribution that among the four story themes, awareness of difference was the most common experiences in Asian Americans' ethnicity-related experiences. And the second common ethnicity-related experience was the experience about connection to culture or ethnicity. These directions were consistent with previous studies to some extent. Specifically, in Syed and Azmitia's (2008) study, they found that those young adults who were in the achieved status were more likely to report more connection to culture/ethnicity, while young adults who were in the moratorium and unexamined statuses more inclined to provide *awareness of difference* stories. As we can see, *connection to culture/ethnicity* stories and *awareness of difference* stories were also two of the most common stories appeared in ethnicity-related memories in their study.

The expected differences of story theme distribution between two priming manipulations did not emerge. A deeper examination of subcategories of story themes, however, indicated that although the two priming groups have the same numbers of connection to culture/ethnicity stories, the events recalled by participants in the Asian

American identity salience condition were all about involvement of cultural practice, when none of the events provided by participants in the American identity salience condition were about involvement of cultural practice (see table 2). The significant difference may be not able to tell how the effect of identity salience works. However, the significant difference did demonstrate the necessity of analyzing the subcategories of story theme in detecting the effect of identity salience and the possible direction of that effect. Future study will need to explore the effect in a deeper level by developing the content subcategory more systematically and more exhaustively.

The effect on personal importance

Interestingly, although in general the identity salience manipulation did not exert a significant effect on the story themes or content categories, the personal importance was strikingly higher for Asian American priming participants than for American priming participants when the recalled events were about awareness of underrepretation, awareness of difference, or awareness of stereotype experiences. Personal importance of a specific event may reflect the extent to which individuals used the specific event to define themselves. According to those participants in the Asian American identity priming condition, their ethnic identity was salient by the time they were recalling the memories. For these participants, they were more likely to use those ethnicity-related event they recalled to define themselves in terms of their ethnic identity. In this sense, these participants would be more likely to consider the events more personal important. Based on such a small sample, however, it is difficult to draw any conclusive inference.

Limitation of the present study

Sample size. There was only 20 participants took part in the present study. With such a small sample, it is hard to detect the story themes' distribution by asking each participant only one memory, especially when the participants need to be assigned into two different priming manipulation. In addition, due to small number of memories provided by the small group of participants, the themes identified in the present study were far away from an exhaustive set of all possible ethnicity-related experiences. Without an exhaustive set of all possible ethnicity-related experiences, it is impossible to claim a fully examination of Asian Americans' ethnicity-related social reality, which may undermine the detection of the effect of social identity salience.

Efficiency of priming manipulation. Another limitation of present study is that it did not conduct any priming check to evaluate the efficiency of priming manipulation. Although in the original study, in which the priming was developed, the manipulation of social identity salience did generate a significant effect on participants' intergroup bias (Hong et al., 2004), its effect could be not strong enough when the following task come to memory of ethnicity-related experience, in which ask the participants to recall specific event when they were awareness of their ethnic origin. The memory task itself may have strong effect in making participants' ethnic identity become salient. If this is the case, then the manipulation of identity salience would totally lose its influence.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study support our contention that more developed ethnic identities are associated with a more sophisticated ethnic lens that is sensitive to a greater array of ethnicity-related experiences. The effect to ethnic identity salience on memories of

ethnicity-related experiences highlights how Asian Americans identify themselves strongly influence their construction of ethnicity-related experiences. In sum, the present experimental study provides support for a causal relation between ethnic identity salience and ethnicity-related memories and emphasizes the utility of an autobiographical memory approach for studying ethnic identity which had been partially demonstrated by previous studies.

Experiment material

Please read the following paragraph carefully:

American society is facing a lot of problems nowadays. Domestically, America faces problems of unemployment, crime in the inner cities and terrorism on American soil. Internationally, America faces problems of economic negotiation with various nations and peace-keeping with Islamic countries.

When you finish reading, you can click on "NEXT".

NEXT

Please think specifically about what we as Asian Americans could do to make the United States better. You have 3 minutes to think and write your thoughts below. Click on "START" when you are ready.

START

[00:03:00]

The following is a task about your personal memories. Please read the instructions carefully before you start the task.

Please describe the earliest event you remember in which you were aware of your ethnic origin. It has to be a specific event occurring at a particular time and place in the past. Please describe the memory in detail within 5 minutes. Click on "START" when you are ready.

START

[00:05:00]

What was your age when the event happened? ____

How personally important the recalled experience is to you?

1○   2○   3○   4○   5○   6○   7○

not important at all   extremely important

The following is a questionnaire about your ethnicity identification, please read the statements carefully according to your feelings or behaviors.

In terms of ethnic group, do you consider yourself to be Asian? Yes○ No○

1- I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as
    its history, traditions, and customs.

    ○**Strongly disagree** ○**Disagree**   ○**Agree**   ○**Strongly agree**

2- I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members
    of my own ethnic group.

    ○**Strongly disagree** ○**Disagree**   ○**Agree**   ○**Strongly agree**

3- I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.

    ○**Strongly disagree** ○**Disagree**   ○**Agree**   ○**Strongly agree**

4- I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.

    ○**Strongly disagree** ○**Disagree**   ○**Agree**   ○**Strongly agree**

5- I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.

    ○**Strongly disagree** ○**Disagree**   ○**Agree**   ○**Strongly agree**

6- I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.

    ○**Strongly disagree** ○**Disagree**   ○**Agree**   ○**Strongly agree**

7- I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.

    ○**Strongly disagree** ○**Disagree**   ○**Agree**   ○**Strongly agree**

8- In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked
    to other people about my ethnic group.

    ○**Strongly disagree** ○**Disagree**   ○**Agree**   ○**Strongly agree**

9- I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group.

       ○**Strongly disagree** ○**Disagree**   ○**Agree**   ○**Strongly agree**

10- I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food,

     music, or customs.

       ○**Strongly disagree** ○**Disagree**   ○**Agree**   ○**Strongly agree**

11- I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.

       ○**Strongly disagree** ○**Disagree**   ○**Agree**   ○**Strongly agree**

12- I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.

       ○**Strongly disagree** ○**Disagree**   ○**Agree**   ○**Strongly agree**

Background Information

b1) Gender: Male○ Female○

b2) Age: ____year _____month

b3) Year: freshman○ sophomore○ junior○ senior○

b4) Were you born in the United States? Yes○ No○

   If yes, where were you born?   city_____   State

b5) Ethnicity: _____e.g. Japanese, Chinese, Korean

b6) Father's ethnicity: _____e.g. Japanese, Chinese, Korean

b7) Father education: grade school○ middle school○ high school○

               college/university○ graduate school○

b8) Mother's ethnicity: _____e.g. Japanese, Chinese, Korean

b9) Mother education: grade school○ middle school○ high school○

               college/university○ graduate school○

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