

CHAPTER FOUR

Yearning for Wholeness: Asian 2SLGBTQIA+ experiences of intersectional marginalization as a gateway for systemic change

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ABSTRACT

Experiencing racism within 2SLGBTQIA+ spaces and anti-2SLGBTQIA+ bias in their own Asian communities, Asian 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals in Western countries face a compounded marginalization. This paper explores how their fight for acceptance exposes the shortcomings of siloed 2SLGBTQIA+ and racial justice movements. Drawing on feminist intersectionality theory and the works of Asian American scholars, the paper argues their unique struggles offer a chance to dismantle discriminatory systems and narratives. Fueled by a yearning for wholeness, Asian 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals push for change through solidarity, remembering cultural histories of acceptance, and working to transform the systems that exclude them. This fight for belonging offers a pathway for broader societal systemic change.

KEYWORDS: Marginalization, Intersectionality, Asian Immigrant Experience, 2SLGBTQIA+ Justice, Racism, Heteronormativity, Systemic change

The clash of cultures and the pressures of immigrant life can exacerbate the layered othering and marginalization of Asian 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals in predominantly white cisheteronormative countries. This creates an uncomfortable opportunity for systemic change and cultural reconnection, as this unique and individually varied perspective provides a pathway to broadly challenge discriminatory narratives. The complexity, difficulty, and transformative potential of the intersectional marginalization of Asian 2SLGBTQIA+ people can be understood through feminist frameworks of intersectionality, queer theory, and queer archeology, and Asian American perspectives, guided by the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa, Robin Zheng and others.

Beyond facing racism and anti-2SLGBTQIA+ discrimination generally, Asian 2SLGBTQIA+ people have to contend with what emerges from the intersections, as well as further dimensions. The simplest cases are racism within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community which can include fetishization, and anti-2SLGBTQIA+ sentiment in the Asian community. There are also additional pressures, often including traditional success in immigrant families, assimilation, the sometimes contradictory disdain for the colonizer, and the balancing of culture between the immigrant country, and homeland (both colonial and pre-colonial).

This landscape can result in the individual feeling alone and nearly universally othered. Thus a sense of fragmentation can arise for the individual, who has to sacrifice a part of themselves at any given time in order to simply exist, and making the sense of true safety just beyond reach. The fragmented self yearns for wholeness and full authenticity, and in this case may drive the 2SLGBTQIA+ person to push for change to be accepted authentic and whole by their family, communities, and society. Not every individual can or should choose a path of urging transformation, and it is not always an available trajectory, but for those who are able, it has the potential to be quite powerful. The emergent path transmutes fear into openness, through solidarity, remembering cultural histories of acceptance, uniting in transforming systems, and finally becoming whole interwoven with community.

It is also worth noting that at a time of intense larger scale societal change, this work of systemic change tied to individual identity, experience, community, and authenticity is especially important, but in some ways it becomes easier and in others it becomes harder. The divisions and polarization that have become exacerbated often make it harder to engage in necessary conversations, fear is strong and keeps people from agreeing to any risk, especially ones of uncomfortable thought and self-study. Because of the heightened risk of ostracization from one community or another, the individual is also primed to choose safety over authenticity. Conversely the need for change and the strength of the internal yearning will also be amplified, especially as the vision of a truly accepting and wholesome world begins to come into focus. This is supported and urged along by the many people and communities actively building solidarity and spaces of openness and acceptance, breaking down systems of oppression through compassion and without shame.

This look at the intersectional marginalization of Asian 2SLGBTQIA+ people is meant to understand the possibilities of what can arise due to systemic oppression and the individual and collective push for liberation. It is not going to cover all the different possible individual experiences of people who fit into these categories, and due to multiple factors, some may find they do not experience things that are discussed here whatsoever, and certainly will experience things that are not mentioned. Due to the wide range of possible individual experiences, examples used here are not meant to be representative of the whole, but rather examples of how the systemic

forces can play out. It would not be appropriate to generalize whatsoever, and examples used here are anecdotal, not even meant to represent trends. Systems give rise to many possible outcomes through predictable systemic traits, tendencies, and patterns, it is therefore reasonable to tie unique experiences back to systemic workings, but not the other way around, as every experience is, in fact, unique.

It is also worth noting the wide variety of cultural experiences within Asian immigrant communities in Western colonial countries arising from the varied countries of origin, and therefore widely varying cultural and societal customs. The grouping together of Asians happens due to the dominance of people of European descent in Western colonial nations, and the racism born of a predominantly white supremacist viewpoint, but also from lack of familiarity. This grouping, like any simplification, has detrimental and othering effects. The intention here is not to reproduce this grouping and othering, nor to reinforce it, but rather acknowledge that this grouping itself is a cause of harm, and it is that shared harm that is being explored and addressed. This cultural factor will create further varieties of individual experiences, while fundamentally we return to the systemic problems of constructed race and hierarchy.

Background

Although it can be easier to conceptualize and interpret simpler experiences, systemic oppression is not one dimensional. The tendency to separate experiences out and treat them individually or even ignore a dimension entirely in advocacy is still prevalent, even though it has been decades since the concept of intersectionality was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1989). Much work has been done too, expanding and expressing the complexity of how gender, race, class, and the like compound each other and are inseparable. Intersectionality does not refer therefore only to the concept that people who have intersectional identities have overlapping experiences due to their layered identities, but rather that their experiences will be unique and different from those who only experience one oppressive dimension. Crenshaw brought intersectionality forward within critical race studies, and in discussing the experiences of Black women in America, and along with the other pioneers challenged the status quo and intersectional feminism has paved the way for generations to be acknowledged rather than diminished. Audre Lorde was revolutionary and impactful in everything she contributed, notably for this context adding the dimension of queerness to Black feminism, expanding intersectional feminism and exploring the path to freedom from systemic oppression (Lorde, 1984). Continually compelling, the work of bell hooks was also foundational to intersectional feminist thought, challenging oppression, societal lenses, and all forms of hierarchy including class and queerness (hooks, 1984). Also necessary to this discussion is queer theory, and the social construction of gender sexuality. Gloria Anzaldúa was a key early proponent especially around the ties of colonialism to views on race, gender, and sexuality (Anzaldúa, 1987). A consistent voice critiquing the construction of gender and the societal performance of it, is Judith Butler (Butler, 1988). We look at the intersectional experience of Asian 2SLGBTQIA+ people through the lenses developed based on these foundational works, and the scholarship that has followed.

The tendency of using a white feminist approach, of simplifying or hierarchizing an approach to justice and liberation, is still unfortunately common. This can be seen as a systemic problem, as individuals carrying out the work within organizations are often not versed in theory or even connected to any community, but rather are steeped in societal norms and training that has gone unquestioned. Due to the consistent use of shame within patriarchy and white supremacy,

challenges to these ways of thinking are often taken personally, and result in conflict rather than change. The tendency to hierarchize both people and order of operation of justice is incredibly problematic and based in a scarcity and conflict mindset. So although intersectionality has a strong basis in the literature and among practitioners and advocates for racial, gender, and social justice, one may not be able to count on such an understanding when interacting with any given community or organization, posing an extra barrier for individuals experiencing intersectional oppression and hoping to create change within their own communities, or even simply have their experience understood.

There is a commonality among oppressive systems, other than their overlapping nature, in that they all depend on creating inequity, usually by a direct or indirectly stated differentiation and hierarchy. In this way patriarchy depends on definitions of gender and gender norms, white supremacy depends on the existence of race and imagined differences between them, as well as the construction of the ideal white person, and in a white patriarchy, white man. Even though these oppressive systems are based on the same ideas of illusory innate differences and hierarchy, they carry different traits due to their defining different constructs, like race, gender, or class. These get intertwined with each other as well, not just in their definitions, such as with defining ideal white people to be sex differentiated (Lugones, 2016), but also in socially developed and entrenched ways, like keeping people of colour in poverty, and keeping Black people incarcerated as a form of slavery. Colonialism has been the generator of these oppressive systems in Western countries, both directly and indirectly. The philosophical basis of colonialism, of racial superiority, gender norms, and twisted religious concepts were applied in the homelands of the colonizers, spread across the globe in many nations now free of colonial rule but not yet free of the colonial mindset, and at levels beyond compare in Australia and in North America in the creation of Canada and the United States. It is no surprise that we see some of the strongest society-wide pushback against intersectional feminism in countries that are founded on a colonial ethos, and have it woven into every structure. Colonialism is not gone, and is far from simply being the act of setting up a colony, but rather a cultural and philosophical belief system underpinning modern empires. These factors serve as the backdrop of the experience of Asian 2SLGBTQIA+ people in predominantly white cisheteronormative countries.

The rise of discriminatory hate may not be so surprising in this context. Underlying beliefs in gender and racial superiority create an environment ripe to produce hatred and violence when these systems are challenged. Especially when these systems have been hidden and the push for equity and justice can be spun to look like an attack. The rise in hatred is also often looked at unidimensionally, with the news covering specific types of hate such as with anti-Asian racism during the Covid-19 pandemic, the rise in anti-trans sentiment and legislation over the past few years, the surge of homophobia in political discourse, direct white supremacist pushback against the BLM movement, and the roll back of reproductive rights in the United States, among others. These of course are all related to each other as the systems of oppression are deeply connected and entrenched, but the narratives serve to separate and disempower those working for liberation. On an individual level this also erases intersectional experiences and exacerbates the severity of those experiences, as well as the challenge for anyone trying to bridge distances between communities.

The importance and power of the perspective of intersectionally marginalized individuals has been recognized in many contexts (Collins, 2019). This was a key challenge to white feminism and the continuation of keeping those liberation and abolition movements distinct. Systemically the separation disempowers everyone, and sets them up as easy targets to pit against one another.

In this era of connectedness and transformation there are many opportunities for solidarity, for cross-community changemaking, and for stories to be both found and lost among all the others. Every type of intersectional oppression therefore has its own world of myriad and varying individual experiences, all playing out the possible combinations that the intersection provides. For Asian 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals in predominantly white cisheteronormative countries, this means handling the layered complexities of heteronormativity, culture, racism, etc. This is not so simple as a collection of disparate experiences but an amplified and often interwoven experience appearing from every direction, but this perspective also carries transformative power. People who experience only one dimension of oppression will often have a community of safety, beyond a small group, within which they can comfortably expect to escape discrimination and oppression. This is not guaranteed for intersectionally marginalized people who do not have access to a community of many people like them or with adequately similar experiences, often because the intersection is small, or because of geographical access. Even within fully safe communities issues of internalized racism, homophobia and the like may arise due to societal normalization and colonialism.

Oppressive Landscape

The landscape of oppression faced by Asian 2SLGBTQIA+ people in predominantly white cisheteronormative countries has numerous contributing systems and factors, including patriarchy and white supremacy, which give rise to sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and racism. There are also struggles of the immigrant experience which may include language barrier, economic hardship, and pressure to assimilate and succeed. These are also contributed to by religious beliefs, whether directly or due to the fact that religion played a major role in the development of these oppressive systems. Colonialism is also a major factor, especially in colonially founded countries where the mindset is entirely inescapable, and globally was the fundamental driver of the creation of all these oppressive systems. Before covering the complex and overlapping experiences of Asian 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals it is important to remind ourselves of the discriminatory frameworks that arise from the different systems of oppression. They are of course also linked, and in addressing them individually it not just to bring attention to the multitude of concerns, but also aid to subsequently elucidate how the overlap of intersectional oppression results in a complex situation that is not merely additive.

An individual's experience of oppression begins with their relationship to these systems and hierarchies as well as structures of power. 2SLGBTQIA+ people are oppressed by the patriarchy because they challenge the constructs that the patriarchy relies on to function: gender, gender norms, and gender roles. It is important to differentiate these ideas because some people within the 2SLGBTQIA+ umbrella may conform to the gender binary and expected gender presentation, but simply by being attracted to someone of the same gender, they challenge gender expectations, or heteronormativity. Cisnormativity and heteronormativity are properties of the patriarchy. This also does not mean that members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community are not sexist or misogynist, they certainly often are. People constantly reinforce the systems that oppress them. The oppression of 2SLGBTQIA+ people by the patriarchy intersects with and exists alongside its oppression of women. Homophobia, transphobia, sexism, and misogyny are the discriminatory practices that arise from patriarchy.

Homophobia and transphobia show themselves in numerous ways, whether from a religious angle, or a family tradition angle, or a disdain for gender nonconformity, and so on. There

are also plenty of stereotypes and misconceptions, ranging from the assumption of femininity or masculinity of particular groups, to considering any member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community to be an immediate physical violent threat (especially to children). Due to the hetero- and cis-normativity there is an underlying othering to all of it, where anyone identifying outside these normative modes is seen as unusual at minimum, or many degrees worse through unnatural to abhorrent abomination. The resulting bias creates many unpleasant dynamics, ostracization, difficulty getting or keeping work, physical violence, verbal abuse, visible fear, lack of access to all spaces including healthcare and more. Of course the whole variety and methodology, as it were, of these oppressive systems is not the subject here, but a summary of the possibilities is important if we are to discuss what individuals are up against.

This functions similarly for white supremacy, or really any form of racial supremacy. Much like gender is a construct (Lindsey, 2015), race is a construct as well, and there can exist more than one definition of how the ideal person of this race appears and acts. These ideas are spun into societal expectations that everyone is supposed to follow and aspire to in some way or another, and the standard against which people of other races are judged. This gives rise to relational discrimination, where each form of racism is dependent on how each race is perceived compared to the “superior” race. This also develops into methods that the oppressor can use to neutralize what it sees as threatening characteristics.

The model minority myth (Hsu, 2017) arises for Asian people from the intersection of white supremacy and coercion and control. By convincing Asian people that they are superior to races other than white, they are separated off and this discourages solidarity, while also reinforcing hierarchical thinking and social stratification. This is limited by the dimension of colourism, where it is more likely that an Asian person benefit from colourism in a white society, but this diminishes the darker their skin tone, which is an excellent example of how different Asian nationalities are treated very differently, but it can also vary within a single family as skin tone often does. Buying into the model minority myth requires betrayal of self and community, and one has to trade a degree of authenticity for acceptance, and ultimately it is actually impossible to be seen as fully human by the oppressor, so one is choosing to be permanently lesser in their own estimation as well as society. The myth diminishes access to solidarity building in multiple ways: by separating the racial group from other oppressed peoples, but also through the self-betrayal aspect as the individual feels safer appealing to the oppressor than building communities of liberation. The model minority myth can sometimes appear to benefit individuals, such as with the stereotypes of Asians being smart and non confrontational. These are not always assumptions that will have positive outcomes, but even when they do there is always a cost. The expectation of being smart for instance may appear positive but it both often creates beliefs and ridicule when individuals do not match assumptions or are categorized in insulting ways due to their intelligence or bookishness. Being seen as harmless or passive may also seem good as one is not assumed to be a physical threat, but it can lead to bullying, fetishization, and dismissal among other things.

Fundamentally the model minority myth is a tactic for coercion and control, another form of oppression, but tactics are developed based on their applicability. The ridiculous notions of the ideal person, and particularly the ideal white man within white supremacy as built for colonialism, includes things that were then recognized within Asian cultures. There is no substantive difference among the abilities of different groups of humans regardless of their physical traits and locations, but rather European colonizers having recognized the traits is what makes the difference as they were visible to them in more familiar ways. For example, in societal structure and education. This

resulted in classifying Asians, or at least some Asians as superior to other “races” while simultaneously finding them still lesser due to other generalizations, such as physical looks. These perceived capabilities and weaknesses and associated racial and societal hierarchy have no bearing on reality, they just underpin the foundations of European colonial thought that extended into the foundation of current white cisheteronormative societies (Pon, 2000).

The treatment of, and therefore the experiences of, Asian peoples varies drastically, and is in no small part due to colourism, and other results of the uneven application of white supremacy to different Asian cultures and countries (Sissoko et al., 2024). There is of course another layer here of lateral violence and other forms of racism and colourism within Asian communities and countries, but as this paper addresses experiences within Western colonial nations it will not be discussed in depth, but certainly those nuances of discrimination are brought over with immigration. The colour of one’s skin greatly impacts how one is classed within a white society, and especially when white people repeat stereotypical racist phrases around “not being able to tell Asians apart” and related demeaning epithets. Asian immigrants are more likely to be grouped together and demeaned, and assumptions made, by the shade of their skin rather than their country of origin or cultural heritage. White supremacist systems dictate the guiding opinions, and the darker your skin and the more your facial features, and stature, diverge from what white people see as typical of themselves, the less value you will be inherently seen to possess, the more easily you will be cast aside, or your needs, boundaries, opinions, and existence will be respected.

Colonialism and its underpinning philosophies can be seen as the root of all of these systems of oppression and discriminatory practices (Hall, 2010; Glenn, 2015). It is what introduced the ideas of patriarchy and whiteness so deeply into the societal and governance structures of Western nations, and is what left deep scars across the world resulting in patriarchy and racist beliefs being introduced in countless places, and of course being the root cause of the upheaval causing much of the need based immigration to the West. The violent methodologies used by colonizers may seem like distant history in some places (or is pushed to be seen that way by those incapable of facing their guilt), but the intergenerational consequences and trauma are very real, on top of the long lasting direct consequences by disrupting ways of life and communities. All of these things are ultimately relevant in the experiences of Asian 2SLGBTQIA+ people, including the pernicious philosophies underpinning the colonialism itself, which ultimately relate to the disconnection from nature and hierarchizing, as well as the notion that individualism and greed are better than reciprocity and abundance, and that it is acceptable to force ways of being on to each other,

Fetishization arises from the crossover of patriarchy and white supremacy, and while technically one could fetishize a culture as a whole and not have it be about gender, in this context fetishization relates to sexuality and thus includes a patriarchal element. Fetishization goes beyond appreciation and involves a power dynamic that allows for objectification, twisting superiority to “appreciate” differences and “exotic” traits but requires othering and minimizing to function. The fetishization of Asians in general is well documented (Zheng, 2016; Azhar et al., 2021), and transfers to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community as it arises systemically (Lim & Anderson, 2021). There may arise an amplifying effect from the model minority myth that contributes to fetishization, because rather than being just different and objectifiable, there is an added layer of desirability and possibly an element of the unattainable. The acceptability or normalization of fetishization may come from it being promoted as a positive thing, whether passed off as complimentary on the side of the oppressor or interpreted as positive by those used to seeking the approval of the oppressor.

The objectification necessary for fetishization comes from both the patriarchy and gender dynamics, and from white supremacy and race dynamics, both invented and imposed hierarchies where some category becomes less than, and closer to object than human.

The immigrant experience is nearly always inherently oppressive (with exceptions due to privilege and between nations with similar social and cultural makeup). Immigration by nature is usually oppressive because, even for richer families doing so by choice, it is likely to be into an environment where one is minoritized. This is compounded by language, financial, and cultural constraints among others, loss of credentials and deskilling, and simply the challenge of settling somewhere distant and new. Western colonial nations tend to have degraded levels of community and are cis and heteronormative, individualistic, and extractive capitalist. There are also cultural variations between home counties within immigrant communities tied to said home country. This is driven by numerous factors, one being that the culture in any country is not homogenous to begin with, either you get a concentration from one sub-culture, or you get a unique mixing whether that takes the form of blending or multicultural mosaic. But immigrant communities also develop their own norms and tendencies from being fractured and disconnected from the parent culture(s), the pressures of immigrant life, as well as the surrounding society and culture. This can include feelings of scarcity and emergent notions of homogeneity. Ultimately this too can be tied back to colonialism, both the symptoms directly, and as a root cause.

Looking at the intersections of this landscape, whether simply combining the layers of Asian and 2SLGBTQIA+ systemic problems and barriers, or multiple more particular experiences, it is clear the combined experience will be complex and unique, not simply additive. The general experiences of discrimination any one person might encounter from homophobia or racism, or a combination of the two, are both infinitely varied and have themes of commonality. These arise because of the systemic relationship between individual characteristics and the systemic hierarchies, and how people are trained to respond to those that are seen as lesser, less worthy, or even directly harmful, dangerous, or disgusting. A lot of the oppressive landscape tends to be direct and overt, and certainly will be experienced that way, but implicit bias is also a major issue and since the backdrop of oppressive systems is so normalized to the oppressors they often struggle to recognize the bias or even more overt discrimination. This creates an environment where poor treatment and heightened violence are also normalized and the statistics that show it are met with defensiveness (Vitriol & Moskowitz, 2021). Needless to say this contributes to the oppressive nature of the environment as well.

Individual Experience

Dissecting and understanding systems of oppression and the variety of different oppressive tactics, behaviours, and experiences is necessary to give a sense of what an individual might face in this environment, but tells us little about what any unique experience is like. Attempting to cover what different individuals experience would leave much out and would inconsistently highlight and bias what is looked at. Furthermore there are dimensions on top of what is mentioned here due to scope, including relating to family dynamics, psychological factors, class, pregnancy, etc. Therefore no attempt will be made to sketch what any individual might have to handle, but rather discuss the perspective of the individual, what pressures and barriers they might face, and the limited choices they might have. The range of experiences will always include those that are somehow lucky enough to be accepted at home, and in every community they are a part of, and of

course the complete opposite, absolute non-acceptance resulting in the full cocooning of the authentic self, persistent denial, or worse.

The current social tendencies regarding racism and anti-2SLGBTQIA+ discrimination in Western colonial nations are somewhat contradictory. The systemic backdrop remains, while at the same time it is considered correct to accept 2SLGBTQIA+ people and a multicultural society. There is also of course the backlash going both ways, against the progress, and against the regressive systemic mindsets. An individual and their communities, though, will be pulled in both directions, and within the immigrant or child-of-immigrant perspective the push for conformity can be stronger. This can work in one's favour but can also create a situation of exceptionalism, where there is agreement to accept the societal norms around, but as an individual one may not take part. This could take the form of having the pressures of starting a family, making a good living, not being the odd one out, or being urged to succeed and blend into the average experience of the new home society. Combining the acceptance of 2SLGBTQIA+ people with still being considered unusual or even disgusting means essentially: yes it's fine for the white people to be gay, but that's their thing and you're not allowed to join in.

There is an inconsistency in when it is preferable to follow local customs versus those from home countries. Cultural practices such as foodways and cuisine, holidays, are celebrated, and can create othering of immigrant children, meanwhile clothing of the new country is usually adopted except for special occasions. Looking at the allowance or disallowance of 2SLGBTQIA+ identities in this context, an individual might not know what to expect from their family. There is likely going to be a wide range of possibilities, but the risk aversion to possible ostracization and hatred will likely take precedence, as with the narrowing of priorities within the pressures of immigration and settlement. The probability of an individual enduring a dichotomous experience of discrimination is largely due to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community being predominantly white and having inherited the systemic dynamics relating to race outlined above, and the Asian community being predominantly cisgender and heterosexual. The extra reasons to want conformity encourages the adoption of conservative values and acquired or enforced colonial mindsets, entrenching the disconnection from historical acceptance of queerness in many cultures globally including in Asia.

Due to the nature of society, systemic issues are inescapable in every direction, especially with the expectation that individuals can fit into simple and exclusive binary definitions (Espiritu, 1997). Therefore the intersectional experience is highly applicable because of layering, combination, and how an individual will always experience differently than a collective, or from what we find looking at these issues from a systemic perspective. The situation is rendered more complex and difficult by the inescapable existence of internalized racism and anti-2SLGBTQIA+ bigotry. This too will be highly individualized and variable, both in the degree to which these discriminatory mindsets are internalized, but also in how they exhibit themselves.

Squeezed in these likely-to-be difficult circumstances, the individual dilemma becomes a choice between living with the unfortunate circumstances and denying themselves one way or another, or choosing a treacherous but transformative path of seeking understanding and acceptance in both communities. Dealing with oppression as an individual or as a community, many do not even consider change due to the need for cervical or an imposed survivalist, scarcity mindset. This individual dilemma will not always present itself, as it requires a degree of safety to even be considered.

It is not and should not be the responsibility of oppressed people to make the changes in society they require to exist fully authentically and in safety, but the perspective brought by those

experiencing these intersections can inform the movements, transformative practices, and communal efforts. Without bringing together the different streams of anti-oppression work, there is often a lasting gulf between distinct groups working for seemingly different liberatory objectives, when in fact they are “unraveling the same cloth” and would be more effective with proper solidarity. The individuals at the intersections have the potential to be bridges between communities if they are adequately supported and listened to.

Gateway to Change

People who experience systemic oppression and discrimination are in a tough position as it makes life far more difficult, and given the basic needs of life and any additional pressures and expectations, people are often forced to diminish themselves, accept the poor treatment, and struggle to get by. Depending on a person’s situation, this may be the only choice, but even then the call for authenticity and acceptance are there waiting for the opportunity to be heard. This call is particularly loud for those who experience intersectional oppression in a way that pulls them in multiple directions. Ultimately this can lead these people to seek to transform their communities and help them grow. Though it will always be a risk, the fundamental driver is the need for authenticity and safety and when this is not fully available anywhere or the spaces where it is rare, the incentive can become impossible to ignore.

The visible existence of Asian 2SLGBTQIA+ people can urge others to question their biases, but they can also be dismissed as outliers or that they lost their culture. The path to acceptance within all relevant communities takes more than just the individual but the community showing up as well. Addressing the prejudices requires recognizing the roots of these beliefs, which are fears, and sometimes simply misinformation. These could be fear of further discrimination, poverty, loss of assumed identity, and so forth. The key to transformation is dissolving these fears and that can be done through love, compassion, and gentleness toward everyone involved. Love is also key because otherwise the perspective brought by Asian 2SLGBTQIA+ people is just a perspective, it does not lead to action without some other pull.

There is also an internal component that has to be faced, which is no longer accepting discriminatory beliefs about oneself and others. This is a freedom, but it is often painful to realize that we have perpetuated these things on ourselves and others so we deny it more easily. We may judge others for holding discriminatory beliefs but when we see they do so by no choice of their own, and they are people we care for, this holds responsibility. Anyone can turn away, can shed relationships that don’t serve them, but they cannot deny family is important, both in the common sense and in the chosen way that we see so often in queer communities. Asian immigrants especially often have a cultural clash to deal with in that family is far more fundamental, and not something that can be left behind as so many westerners do. But that love, through whatever familial and friendship ties, pulls us to help. It is not only for the sake of the individual that these changes in thinking and belief and acceptance are sought, but for the benefit of the ones who still hold discriminatory beliefs. It is not good for anyone to continue to do harm or believe harmful things.

It is also the love the individual receives that can open up the pathway for change. This can be because this love creates a true safety, but it can also be because this love may be unconditional and can withstand challenges and supersede any fear and prejudices. In these cases the fear and resulting attempts at control or refusal may actually be worries for the wellbeing of the person. In such situations these fears need to be addressed, and that process is likely to look different from

broader or impersonal fears. A sense of hope, bravery, and the understanding of the need for authenticity and freedom will overcome these fears.

Doing this work remains a choice throughout the process, anyone is free to find a small community where they have to do no work, and sometimes the situation is impossible and it is not always about choice. Conversely, existing and existing brightly, kindly and lovingly, while understanding differences and holding our own space and boundaries, is more powerful than we imagine. The personal work of seeking understanding and acceptance through love and community is part of larger systemically transformative work. The work may often be individual, but breaking down misconceptions, disconnection, and hierarchy are all transformative beyond the individuals involved. It becomes a form of collective action when many do this work within their circles and the whole coalesces, and even more directly when those affected by it get together and hone their methods for creating the needed change. The individual who yearns for their wholeness and finds it helps the collective on its path to unity and wholeness as well.

A further dimension is taking what is learned from the personal experience and work to create solidarity with others at intersections or suffering under the same systems. Sometimes it is just too much to create change for oneself in one's small sphere, because it risks too much, especially foregoing safety, but the person could push in the broader community to support others. No one will have the same experience, and personal knowledge in one experience does not tell us what it's like to live through the lives of others' with matching identities let alone very different ones, but it gives empathy and can give an understanding of the systems that oppress. The broader transformative work and solidarity building can take on many forms, for instance challenging the model minority myth knowing it is used to compound discrimination against other non-white people. Experiences of intersectional marginalization can provide an understanding of societal systems, and this can be a source of power because understanding them can create opportunities for dismantling them.

Author's Experience

As a queer and trans mixed-race person, who appears entirely Asian in a society of normative whiteness, I have experienced this landscape of oppression and the individual tension of yearning for my own wholeness and acceptance in every part of my life. My mother and her family immigrated to Canada from Hong Kong when she was a teenager, where she later met and married my white father. Though my parents were very supportive of me being whoever I turned out to be, the communities I was a part of left me with the sense that I would not be accepted for who I was, so I hid it from myself for a very long time. Eventually though, it surfaced, I could not deny my need for authenticity and self-knowledge. At this point, already in my late twenties, I found myself quite afraid as I assumed that most of the people I knew would not accept me. I was also well aware that though I would find acceptance of my queerness and transness in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, I would likely meet a familiar racism there, and the fetishization that I had noticed while presenting as an Asian woman would probably continue.

I was entirely unsure what to expect from my mother's family, and though they had (somewhat surprisingly) previously accepted a cis queer member of the family I thought it very likely that they would not understand and misgender me indefinitely. The reasons I worried about this are some of the ones enumerated in the previous sections, though I have not experienced all of the things discussed. To my surprise and great relief my mother's side of the family were some of the most accepting people of everyone I knew, and it allowed me to deepen my relationship

with them. I found that their love and the bonds of family overcame everything else that might have stood in the way, and they were simply open and ready to do their best to respect me for who I am. This was a stark contrast from the fear based responses I got from white friends, and some white family. On the whole I was accepted more than I expected, but I did receive a whole host of microaggressions along the way.

On the 2SLGBTQIA+ side I was fortunate enough to already know many non-white members of the community, and a number of allies as well. I think knowing these people helped me feel safe enough to come out to myself and eventually to the world. The prevalence of racism within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community has been very obvious to me though, and I found numerous people who I thought were safe held their own prejudices and bias, which became clearer once all the intersections of my identity were clear and public. I think it is important to note that being queer and trans, due to cis heteronormativity, are usually hidden traits that one eventually (if they are fortunate enough) shares with others, but race is very rarely something people can hide. I have always been Asian and would be seen that way no matter how I felt, whereas I had to come out as queer and trans for anyone to know. I very much had an easier experience with my Asian family than with finding a safe 2SLGBTQIA+ community, but more broadly I have had an easier time being welcomed by 2SLGBTQIA+ people than by Asian communities beyond my family.

My experience has not been without tribulations, but on the whole it has been easy, and I see in that an immense amount of privilege. Certainly my education and the financial stability of my family allowed for it to be an easier change to manage, and there is also simply the fortune of knowing lots of accepting and understanding people. Being a second generation immigrant may have also made my journey easier, but I think it bears repeating that I did not receive acceptance readily across the board. I think it is particularly telling that the more privileged white people were actually the least accepting, and the more wealth of one kind or another that they had to defend, the more prejudiced they were. Ultimately in a systemic context this makes sense. They are the ones for whom the constructs of race, gender, and sexuality provide the most benefit whether they are aware of it or not, so they are likely trained into it and primed to respond to any perceived threat to their social structures.

Given how smooth my experience was when it comes to acceptance within the communities discussed here, I was reluctant to include my experience thinking it too positive and not representative of an average experience. I realized though that it shows that it can be easy, the acceptance can be there and available even when we do not think it will be, that love does overcome other barriers. I know that individual experiences will be so varied there is no way to really find an average, and we can only hope that as society progresses it gets easier for everyone. I also got to discover for myself the immense power that comes with being boldly and wholly authentic. It is not the sort of power that people usually speak of that comes with authority, control, or wealth, but rather the quiet power of representation and freedom. By existing as myself fearlessly I have had the honour of being shared with how much my doing so has helped others find acceptance or believe in themselves. That to me is worth a great deal, and certainly makes sweeter the already joyous experience of personal freedom and authenticity.

Parting Thoughts

Both the problem and the power of the experience of Asian 2SLGBTQIA+ people stems from the difficulty presented by the irreducibility of the situation. A person's experience and identity are too complex to be simplified, and this will immediately challenge how people approach

(and are trained to approach) the world by grouping people together. This tendency can be looked at as a psychological trait for practicality for humans, but applied in society can be dangerous. Those who challenge the predetermined notions and bins are often met with antagonism drawn from fear. When this is done from a place of power and privilege, even if limited, it can be a powerful choice for transformation and allyship, but also can be experienced as relatively easy, though sometimes scary because giving up privilege is made to feel that way. Doing this from an underprivileged position is often risky but can be just as, if not more, transformational. But when it is not a choice it can be profoundly terrifying, causing self-denial, depression, and other unpleasant effects. Since authenticity is a fundamental psychological driver (Deci & Ryan, 2020), denying oneself or feeling trapped in one situation or another and lacking agency can result in many internal struggles.

The systemic landscape of oppression and discrimination provides the basis for many conflicting and uncomfortable intersections. For Asian 2SLGBTQIA+ people this means contenting with hetero and cisnormativity, anti-Asian racism, and likely also the extra pressures faced by immigrants and their families. These are deeply tied to colonialism as well as patriarchy and white-supremacy. All of these are fundamentally built on disconnecting people from each other and their natural world and creating false hierarchies as a strategy for division and control. Counteracting these systems requires doing the opposite, humanizing all people and equalizing them, and creating strong and interlinked communities.

An individual facing these oppressive landscapes has little choice but to be subjected to it. The personal experience will vary, and it is impossible to cover all the different possibilities of what one person or group might face. The existence of individuals who experience oppression from multiple and seemingly conflicting angles creates an opportunity for change. The tension experienced by being pulled in multiple directions, and each option being at odds with full authenticity, expression, and acceptance, creates this opportunity. Discussing this experience and the possibilities it offers for transformation is not a push for individuals to do the work, though they may, but an acknowledgement of power and the responses it may elicit. I offered my experience with both its privileges and its disadvantages in the hope that it can show what is possible, though every person must walk their own path in their own time. When we are ready, we will do the work because liberation, freedom, along with authenticity, are fundamental to a just and peaceful existence. It takes a community to have the tools and strength to do it, and we are strengthened by any individual or collective effort. In healing ourselves we heal our communities, we heal the world, and we honour our ancestors. In healing our families, communities, and the world, we heal and free ourselves and open up a brighter future for future generations.

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