

QUEER (AND) CHINESE: ON BE(LONG)ING IN DIASPORA AND COMING OUT OF
QUEER LIBERALISM

By

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Abstract

Being bicultural, Chinese Canadian LGBTQ people face a double jeopardy in navigating a white heteropatriarchal society while striving for acceptance within their own Chinese Canadian communities. My project records the coming out and not-coming out stories of Chinese Canadian LGBQ women and non-binary people in order to interpret their understandings of the process of coming out/not coming out in relation to the formations of sexual, gender, racial/ethnic, and national identities in the context of diaspora. Based on interviews and a focus group conducted in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, this project examines whether home, recognition, Chinese nationalism and familial values are sites of exclusion and if so, how youth reconcile these tensions. This research expands beyond the visibility of gay, bisexual, and queer men within extant social science accounts of Asian diaspora LGBTQ people by focusing on women and non-binary members of Chinese Canadian communities. I employ a queer diasporic approach centering female subjectivity and standards of femininity and masculinity to conceptualize diaspora outside of heteronormative and patriarchal structures of family and community (Gopinath, 2005).

I examine diverse points of tension and reconciliation in the narratives of youth who have and who have not experienced “coming out”. The analysis is built from three major insights introduced by narrators to illuminate Chinese Canadian experiences of queer diaspora: the instability of queer (and) Chinese subjectivity; sense of belonging and acceptance; and logics of modernity, progress and queer liberalism as continued racialization, colonialism and imperialism in disguise. I document how tensions among Chinese Canadians regarding sexuality and embracing or resisting change articulate racial and colonial histories and the fraught locations of Chinese Canadians within a white settler state. I argue that histories of racism, colonialism, and

migration place Chinese Canadian families in tension with forms of citizenship and national belonging that are defined by historical politics of sexuality. This research is also concerned with the ways in which these histories may inform the location of Chinese communities within contemporary Canadian multiculturalism, which perpetuates whiteness through its embrace of queer liberalism (Alexander, 2005; Eng, 2010; Lowe, 2015; Manalansan, 2003; Shah, 2001).

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As a reader, if you would like to chat about this project feel free to email me at michelle.tam@queensu.ca.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
CHAPTER 1: COMING OUT AS QUEER DIASPORIC PEOPLE.....	1
Reinforcing the “Other”, the “Chineseness”	4
Queer Liberalism for Whom?	6
Modern Sexuality from “Then” to “Now”	8
Disidentifying as Queer (and) Chinese	10
Queer (Asian) Diaspora as Methodology	13
Our Narratives.....	17
CHAPTER 2: THE POLITICS OF (NOT) COMING OUT	19
Imagining Queer (and) Chinese: Navigating Racialization and Diasporic Families	22
Language Boundary.....	25
Tradition/Modernity Split	30
Familial Harmony as Survival + What Coming Out Can Mean.....	40
Interconnections of Saving Face and Fear	47
On Respectability Politics and Gossip	54
Not Coming Out as Form of Care.....	58
CHAPTER 3: ON SELF-ACCEPTANCE, EXPRESSION AND BE(LONG)ING.....	64
Kuro	68
Acceptance.....	75
Beyond Silence: Within the Absence of Speech.....	75
What Familial Acceptance Can Mean	81
Sense of Self-Acceptance as Experienced Through Others.....	84
Self-Acceptance as Multi-Dimensional and Continuous	88
Sense of Belonging.....	91
Non-belonging in the LGBTQ Community	92
Prescribed Belonging.....	97
Choosing One’s Own Community and (Re)creating a Sense of Belonging.....	103
Chris.....	106
Acceptance and Be(long)ing in Messiness	109
EPILOGUE: QUEER DIASPORIC FUTURITY.....	112
Living in Queer Diaspora.....	112
Queer Diasporic Futurity	120
REFERENCES	124
APPENDIX: ETHICS APPROVAL	128

Chapter 1

Coming Out as Queer Diasporic People

The title of this introduction can be read in two ways. It may refer to the social act of coming out about one's gender and sexuality while identifying and navigating the world as a queer diasporic person. The other way I read this phrase is as an internal process of understanding and embracing what it means to be a queer diasporic person. In turn, coming out as and embracing queer diasporic identity opens doors to modes of being and belonging that go beyond forms of "coming out of the closet" that refer only to gender and sexuality, to invoke living, surviving and thriving within diaspora despite continued racism, colonialism, and homophobia. Queer diasporic understandings of being and belonging speak to the everyday lived realities of diasporic people. Having multiple perceptions of the realms they navigate, queer diasporic people are able to formulate unique intersectional and cross-community understandings of the world and human condition not readily available to people who are queer or diasporic alone.

This thesis examines and theorizes how Chinese Canadian LGBTQ women and non-binary people navigate coming out as queer diasporic people. Being bicultural, Chinese Canadian LGBTQ people face a double jeopardy in navigating a white heteropatriarchal society while striving for acceptance within their own Chinese Canadian communities. Despite these tensions, they embody forms of agency that are not always linear or apparent. Using community-based ethnographic research methods, this project records and interprets the coming out and not-coming out stories of, specifically, Chinese Canadian LGBTQ women and non-binary people. It

examines how my narrators understand the process of coming out/not coming out in relation to their formation of diasporic sexual, gender, racial/ethnic, and national identities.

I approach my studies as a self-identified queer, pansexual, cis-gender and Chinese Canadian woman. This ethnographic work arises from community-based research with members of my own community. The strength of this research comes from being an insider to my community. Snowball sampling was conducted through existing social networks of people who trust me as a member. It allows me to be uniquely equipped to interpret their words and experiences. However, being an insider is also a weakness of this study. My sample is as narrow as the life that I happen to be living. I am more likely to encounter people who identify similarly to one or more of my own identifications (ie. queer and cis-gender). As an ethnographic researcher, I am focused on the way that the categories my narrators use as meaningful to them. In this case, my narrators used the terms queer, lesbian, gay, woman and non-binary. All of them identified to some extent with the category queer. While my narrators only talked about themselves using these terms, I know that there are many other ways to describe them or other Chinese Canadians living other kinds of lives. Although I am only using these words of my narrators, let me acknowledge that the conversation is a lot broader. The categories used here are not exhaustive and I caution against applying these terms and methodologies to people that may identify in different ways. I am careful to note that as a weakness of insider research, there were no trans identified people amongst my narrators. My narrators who identified as non-binary also identified as queer, but did not use the term trans to self-identify. However, non-binary and gender non-conforming people can be perceived as expressing gender on the trans spectrum (Stryker, 2006). I acknowledge that literature in queer theory often times minimizes the existence of trans people and in some ways folds transness into queerness to erase its difference. But, even

as I interpret the stories of my narrators who identify as non-binary, it can only relate to trans theory and trans studies to a limited extent as my narrators identify as queer. Consequently, my thesis may or may not apply to the lives of transgender Chinese Canadians. I hope that individuals, scholars and communities reading this thesis will choose for themselves whether these categories, strategies and understandings apply to them or not.

This research expands beyond the current visibility of gay, bisexual, and queer men within social science accounts of Asian diaspora LGBTQ people (Eng, 2010; Manalansan, 2003; Kojima, 2016) by focusing on women and non-binary AFAB (assigned female at birth) members of Chinese Canadian communities. It pays close attention to Gayatri Gopinath's invocation that there exists an "elision of queer female subjectivity within seemingly radical cultural and political diasporic projects that center a gay male or heterosexual feminist diasporic person" (Gopinath, 2005, p. 6). I also add that there is an elision of non-binary, gender nonconforming and transgender subjectivity within these "seemingly radical cultural and political diasporic projects". From my current knowledge, there is no work that focuses on the specific experiences of Chinese Canadian LGBQ women and non-binary people. My goal is to illustrate the diverse and unique understandings of diasporic sexual, gender, racial/ethnic and national identity that Chinese Canadian LGBQ women and non-binary people profess. By employing a queer diasporic approach centering female subjectivity and non-binary experiences of standards of femininity and masculinity, this project decenters the heteropatriarchal gaze as the origin point in imagining diaspora and conceptualizes diaspora outside of heteronormative and patriarchal structures of family and community (Gopinath, 2005).

Taken together, the narratives of Chinese Canadian LGBQ women and non-binary people decolonize notions of sexuality, gender and kinship. On first glance, their narratives may be read

as sites of departure and arrival with respect to gender and sexual subjectivity in diaspora. Instances of pain, loss and tension may be read as departure, while self-acceptance and sense of belonging may be read as arriving at acceptance. In between would be the compassion, hope and love people show themselves and their communities along the way. However, as you read their narratives of coming out and not coming out, you may begin to notice that their stories and insights decolonize and subvert the very notion of a linear path from departure to arrival. There is no straight linear path to follow and departure does not necessarily lead to arrival. At times, departure and arrival are occurring simultaneously (Manalansan, 2003; Kojima, 2016). But what is certain is that there are moments of tension, stillness and understanding all happening at the same time. The messiness of being a queer diasporic subject is in itself decolonial (Manalansan, 2015). In his ongoing work of theorizing mess, Martin Manalansan writes “queer as mess refers to material and affective conditions of impossible subjects as well as an analytical stance that negates, deflects, if not resists the ‘cleaning up’ function of the normative. Queerness, then, is not just about off-kilter sex or nonnormative desires, but is about the potentials and possibilities behind quotidian practices and struggles of peripheral lives” (Manalansan, 2015). Accordingly, the messiness of being Chinese, Canadian, LGBTQ, a woman or non-binary allows for unique perspectives on navigating and decolonizing the intersecting realms of race, gender, sexuality and citizenship.

Reinforcing the “Other”, the “Chineseness”

Chinese Canadian LGBTQ people experience fragmentation as part of inheriting the specific histories of Chinese immigration in Canada, and their sexualization. In 18th and 19th century Canada, state officials, medical doctors and popular narratives upheld anti-Chinese immigration sentiment by deeming Chinese people to be sexual degenerates (Day, 2016; Shah,

2011; Eng, 2001). Chinese masculine and feminine gender deviance and non-conforming behaviour were viewed as symptoms of pathological homosexuality. I am interested in the ways in which tensions felt among contemporary Chinese Canadians with respect to sexuality—specifically, with respect to embracing or resisting change in sexual mores—articulate racial and colonial histories and the fraught locations of Chinese Canadians within an existing white settler state (Razack, 2002). White nationalism survives when Chinese Canadian citizens are associated with imposing illiberal views on sexuality, which justify their second-class status through colonial discourses of Orientalism and Western superiority (Said, 1978). Based on these histories of racism, colonialism, and migration, Chinese Canadian families exist in tension with forms of citizenship and national belonging that are defined by historical politics of sexuality. While acknowledging that queer Asian theorists identify homophobia as a factor in family acceptance (Zhou, 2012; Liu, 1999), I am interested in considering whether or to what extent the tensions experienced between Chinese Canadian LGBTQ children and their parents are indeed, or simply ‘homophobia’, or are products of a cultural and political response to being racially, ethnically and economically marginalized.

The logic of Western queer liberalism (Eng, 2010) proposes the existence of a monolithic queer identity and experience. This logic finds its roots in white and Western political readings of the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion, which Barry Adam identifies as the emergence of “modern homosexuality,” the moment when “homosexual relations have been able to escape the structure of the dominant heterosexual kinship system” (Adam, 1995, p. 24). Referring to Adam’s work, Martin Manalansan notes that this definition sources LGBTQ identities in an “escape from the biological familial bond that affirms a broader U.S. American cultural sense of self predicated on issues of individuation, separation and leaving home” (Manalansan, 2003, p. 22). As a result,

while a normative process of coming out follows this linear trajectory, this is not a universal experience as exemplified by queer diasporic people negotiating the supposed divides between modern sexuality and family. For diasporic people, family and home may serve as sites of belonging, refuge and community within a white supremacist state and society. The putatively liberatory and prideful notion of coming out commonly imposed on queer diasporic people becomes a site of further marginalization not only for themselves but also for the wider diasporic communities to which they belong.

Queer Liberalism for Whom?

When interrogated, modern homosexuality appears as a mechanism that makes apparent the interconnected and mutually-reinforcing politics of sexuality and racialization. This form of modernity erases racialized people from history while further subjecting them to colonial and imperial rule. One form in which it does this is what David Eng calls queer liberalism (Eng, 2010). A contemporary tool of continued colonialism and imperialism, queer liberalism imposes the view that if one does not abide by the monolithic queer identity of visibility and outness, one remains in a closet defined by shame due to culture and tradition. According to Eng, queer liberalism “works to oppose a politics of intersectionality, resisting any acknowledgment of the ways in which sexuality and race are constituted in relation to one another, each often serving to articulate, subsume, and frame the other’s legibility in the social domain” (Eng, 2010, p. 4). Race and sexuality can not be imagined and analyzed as separate aspects of being, for they are created by and through the existence of one another, even as they appear to be in conflict or mutually exclusive to modern subjects. For Eng, a queer diasporic reading of intimacy responds to queer liberalism’s creation of a monolithic queer identity that intentionally forgets to talk about race. This purposeful forgetting further racializes bodies and peoples as traditional and in need of

(Western) liberation. What, then, does it mean for a queer diasporic person to exist within the intersections of race, sexuality and diaspora?

Queer liberalism's persistent exclusion of racialized bodies continually re-centers whiteness within queer politics and the state. I further argue that queer liberalism in Canada is built on ideologies of multiculturalism that advance the Canadian government's colonial, imperial and neoliberal agenda under the guise of queer and multiracial inclusion. Canadian multiculturalism embodies the embrace of racial/ethnic diversity within traditional domains of whiteness. At once, its commitments to modern sexuality—and, as argued by OmiSoore Dryden and Suzanne Lenon, its homonationalist investments in queer liberalism (Dryden and Lenon, 2015)—continue to suspect Chinese and all racialized communities of perpetuating premodern sexual mores that endanger queer diasporic people and Canadian society. The state's own investments in queer and multiracial modernity pressures queers of color to shift identity away from their racial/ethnic communities and towards the state as part of coming out into queer liberalism.

Queer liberalism claims to promote equality, freedom and progress under the monolithic umbrella of "queer". What once began in the 1980's as a protest against traditional gender identities and reclamation for non-normative sexual and gender identities has given rise to a monolithic LGBTQ movement predicated on civil rights and integration into the state and capital. This occurs even as the 1970's encompassed movements that were anti-state, anti-racist, anti-police and anti-capitalism. Eng calls us to notice that the numerous forms of identity politics and multiculturalism during the 1980's arose alongside "neoliberal practices and policies predicated on the expansion of the markets and dismantling of barriers to free trade in a globally-integrated economy," (Eng, 2001, p. 29). Realizing the economic potential of queer liberalism, neoliberal

capitalism adopted and absorbed it within its agenda (Eng, 2001; Duggan, 2004). As long as queer people assimilated into the capitalist practices of the nation-state, they would be offered a piece of the puzzle in becoming “proper” citizen-subjects, as in the cases of marriage equality, military involvement and the commodification of queer culture (Gopinath, 2005; Eng, 2001; Kumashiro, 2003; Manalansan 2003). Thus, queers and queerness become the consumers and the consumed within a “universalized heteronormative model of the liberal human, an abstract national culture and community” (Eng, 2001, p. 30). As a result, the popular consumption of “queerness” comes to be deemed “queer culture”, a mass-mediated commodity that benefits capital and the state via the assimilation and exploitation of queer bodies.

In light of this analysis, does queer freedom exist? Indeed, what part of queer liberalism could be said to be freedom—for whom, and at what cost? Who is offered a piece of this puzzle and who is left out? In recent years, Canada and the United States have taken pride in establishing policies including sexual and gender minorities. Yet colonialism and imperialism continue to use sexuality as a tool for managing populations and policing citizenship, such as when degrees of tolerance for sexual and gender diversity come to serve as a barometer for degrees of civilization and justify intervention by the liberal state (Puar, 2007). Imperialism and colonialism persist, transform and become disguised as conditions of freedom under what we term queer liberalism. This project is interested in the forms of queer life that may or may not be inflected by queer liberalism and that exist in light of queer liberalism’s relative dominance.

Modern Sexuality from “Then” to “Now”

What is often left out or forgotten within the seemingly progressive narratives of queer liberalism is the racialization embedded within the notion of modern sexuality (Alexander, 2005; Eng, 2001; Lorde, 1978; Johnson, 2005; Manalansan, 2003; Morgensen, 2010; Shah, 2011).

Historically, by marking whole populations as ‘primitive’ and ‘uncivilized’, European empires and colonial states abjected entire peoples through colonial rule, exclusion, and removal in the interest of civilizational progress and the expansion of capitalism. Upon completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway (1885), the Chinese men without whose labour it would not have been built faced accusations of their supposedly perverse nature, claims that functioned as mechanisms to sustain their alienation from the Canadian state. Simultaneously, Chinese women were excluded from even entering the country as there was a widely held view in white colonial society that all Chinese women were prostitutes. As “perverse aliens”, Chinese people were excluded from the emergent Canadian state through the complex relations of capitalism and colonialism interacting with gender, race and sexuality. My use of the term “perverse” signifies not only the colonial perception or assignment to Chinese migrants of illicit sexual desire or practice, but perceptions of all acts deemed contradictory to the normative subject of the white settler state (Day, 2016). The accused are transformed into the perverse. The state amplified and asserted the need for racialized alienation and vigilant border control through accusations of sodomy, venereal disease and an inability to form nuclear family units (Luibheid, 2002).

During the late twentieth century, when colonialism and imperialism were rebranded in the name of neoliberalism, narratives of perverse aliens and their contradictions evolved. The U.S. American and Canadian states, now in service of a neoliberal political economy, found themselves needing to absorb more sources they could exploit for their continued growth, promising rights to those who could become proper (queer) citizen-subjects. Here, M. Jacqui Alexander’s work on political economy, colonialism, and queerly racialized formations in *Pedagogies of Crossing* illuminates my invocation of perverse aliens. Speaking of the same era that Eng interpreted as conditioning queer liberalism, Alexander observes that while “citizenship

based in political rights can be forfeited, these rights do not disappear entirely. Instead, they get reconfigured and restored under the rubric of gay consumer at this moment in late capitalism” (Alexander, 2005, p.71). Perceived as queer and almost always backwards, racialized people who inherit histories of being consumed by capitalism become both consumers and bodies consumed through queer culture. As such, queer racialized people are always positioned within the logics of neoliberalism and capitalism as second-class, backwards and in need of intervention. The current status of Chinese Canadian LGBTQ people sustains historical abjection as well as the re-branding of perverse aliens through the logics of queer liberalism. Chinese Canadian LGBTQ women and non-binary people not only were not meant to be full citizens, but also were never meant to exist or survive in the white settler state of Canada. Amid queer liberalism, they are saturated by narratives of queer freedom that are built upon those violences while offering false promises of personal and collective liberation. While under the guise of queer liberalism, sexuality and “perversity” appear to be accepted or even celebrated by the state, the same practices exclude those who do not outwardly accept and follow this “new” neoliberal and colonial practice.

Disidentifying as Queer (and) Chinese

As queer diasporic people navigate modern sexuality and the racialized diasporic family, the logics of queer liberalism and its notion of coming out do not accommodate space for practices of what José Esteban Muñoz theorizes as “disidentification” (Muñoz, 1999). In

Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics Muñoz argues that

disidentification is [a] mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. Instead of buckling under the

pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this “working on and against” is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance. (Muñoz, 1999, p. 11)

Muñoz presents disidentification as a strategy of resistance and survival for minoritized subjects such as queers of color (Muñoz, 1999, p. 5). The dominant ideologies of queer liberalism and coming out do not take into consideration the racial and cultural dynamics of queer diasporic experience. In turn, queer diasporic people practice disidentification as a strategy of survival wherein they live inside Western modernity and forms of white colonial and imperial society but may resist assimilation or strategically and partially assimilate in differing ways.

Coming out is often used in popular speech to refer to both a recognition process and self-awareness of a sexual identity and/or trans identity and sharing this information with others. Historically, the term coming out was specific to sexual orientation and theories of trans identity more often described trans identity formation using the category “transition” (Stryker, 2006). However, my narrators used the term coming out to refer to both sexual orientation and gender identity disclosures that they experienced. The practice of coming out insinuates that an LGBTQ person who aims to reconcile their sense of self with the identities or roles attributed to them by others must choose between “out” and “closet”. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes in *The Epistemology of the Closet*, “the closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this century,” (Sedgwick, 2008, p. 68). The binary association of coming out with pride and the closet with shame and hiding appears in this logic to be “strategically essential for LGBT people’s negotiation of everyday life,” (McDermott et. al., 2008, p.819). This narrative assumes

that refusal or failure to disclose one's identity will result in isolation and shame, and that although coming out to the self, family or others may raise fears of loss or isolation, one should do it anyway in order to be able to live a supposed authentic life of visibility and recognition. This binary illustrates the racialization embedded within the logics of queer liberalism and modern sexuality when it does not take into account the needs of queer diasporic people for social and economic survival as members of culturally and ethnically marginalized communities.

Here, I offer the term *queer (and) Chinese* as a creative imaginary beyond ideologies of coming out, fragmentation and individuation. I offer this term as a way to navigate the tensions between conforming diasporic life to queer identity, on the one hand, and imagining queerness to be wholly separable from diasporic life on the other. I chose not to use the term "queer Chinese" so as not to suggest that I am examining people who merge these two words into a single whole; in fact, tensions within and between the terms inform many of the stories my narrators told. At once, I did not use the phrasing "queer and Chinese" because it presents the two terms as separable, a quality that queer liberalism predicts and that my narrators struggle against when narrating how they connect the terms. My narrators' diverse and active navigations of the meaning in these terms, whether experienced as distinct or linked, is captured by calling them *queer (and) Chinese*. This phrase describes the ways that my narrators do associate themselves with both terms, but not in a way that conforms to queer liberalism: by either becoming singularly queer (if culturally Chinese) or facing a chasm between queerness and Chinese life. Not only does this phrasing exceed the tenets of modern sexuality that oppress diasporic and racialized people, it also presents a form of being and belonging beyond inhabiting either a queer Chinese identity or a queer and Chinese dichotomy. If the former illustrates a singular identification, the latter signifies inhabiting two identities that appear counter to one another and

in conflict; meanwhile *queer (and) Chinese* invokes the acts of disidentification that my narrators take up to articulate a racially queer and queerly racialized form of being and belonging.

Queer (Asian) Diaspora as Methodology

Queerness and diaspora are sites at which identities have the capacity to exist in constant flux; and the diasporic condition creates new understandings of sexuality and gender. As a methodology, queer diaspora “highlights the breaks, discontinuities, and differences, rather than the origins, continuities and commonalities of diaspora,” (Eng, 2001, p. 14). Thus, a queer diasporic framework disrupts “heteronormative discourses of racial purity underwriting dominant nationalist as well as diasporic imaginaries,” (Eng, 2001, p. 14) through its refusal to become culturally pure colonial people (Manalansan, 2003). For queer diasporic people of colour “mobility,” Manalansan notes, “is not only about the actual physical traversing of national boundaries but also about the traffic of status and hierarchies within and across such boundaries,” (Manalansan, 2003, p.9). Their identities do not stop and start again as boundaries are crossed but rather they transverse boundaries and binaries. Through their mobility, queer diasporic people demonstrate resistance to “the universal translatability of (homo)sexuality as a stable category of [Western] knowledge traveling across different times and spaces,” (Eng, 2001, p. 14). Thus, there cannot exist a homogenizing narrative that globalization, transnational and queer liberalism often portray. What each and every queer diasporic person carries with them are a multitude experiences and knowledge. There is not a new modern queer person as one exists in diaspora, but rather a complex ever-changing engagement with space and time in the diaspora.

At the same time, queer Asian diaspora is a useful tool for interrogating not only the spaces and places where we reside, but also queer studies as a discipline. In a special issue titled “Queer Asia as Critique”, Howard Chiang and Alvin Wong reconsider a question asked over a

decade ago by David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz: “what’s queer about queer studies now?” In answer, Chiang and Wong indicate that “queer theory needs Asian studies in order to overcome its Euro-American metropolitanism and continual Orientalist selective inclusion of Asia and the non-West into its self-critique” (Chiang and Wong, 2017, p. 122). They also write against a quality in “diaspora and migration studies” in which “non-Western queerness oftentimes remains as merely the empirical ‘object’ of study within area studies formation severed from ‘theory’ proper” (Chiang and Wong, 2017, p. 123). Following Chiang and Wong’s critique, not only does queer theory need Asian studies, but queer liberalism as a whole needs queer Asian theory as a critique to resist its continued complicity in racist and colonial structures. This is not to say this is only possible through a queer Asian diasporic framework, but that it is one method towards decolonial work in the face of Orientalist work.

My work is limited to the understandings of queer diaspora that my narrators have presented to me. However, there is also anti-colonial ethnographic works by other queer Asian ethnographers who speak to trans Asian diaspora. Kale Bantigue Fajardo, who is a self-identified Filipino American queer, transgender, tomboy, and immigrant researcher, conducted ethnographic work on Filipino seamen and tomboys. *In Filipino Crosscurrents: Oceanographies of Seafaring, Masculinities, and Globalization*, Fajardo emphasizes the category and usage of tomboy as “a term and formation that travels and circulates in and between the Philippines, Southeast Asia, and diasporic locations, I intentionally link queer and transgender with tomboy to indicate my transnationally and diasporically situated subject-position and interpretive framework. My intention here is not to transport the terms “queer” or “transgender” to the Philippines in a Western, U.S. American, or Global North colonial or imperialist manner, but rather to emphasize the transnational, transpacific, and transport connections and cultural flows

between the Philippines, and regional and diasporic geographies and oceanographies” (Fajardo, 2011, p. 160). Thus, Fajardo writes about queer and trans diaspora but does not start with these terms. As decolonial work, Fajardo’s book centers tomboy as “an indigenous/Filipino understanding of sex/gender in unity” (Fajardo, 2011, p. 159). He also writes “I aim to push scholarly conversations toward considering tomboys as “males” or “lalaki” because as I have indicated sex and gender are not separated in the Filipino language, and we must seriously consider more deeply the implications of various sex/gender self and social identifications” (Fajardo, 2011, p. 159). The identity of tomboy is invoked through indigenous and Filipino/a roots rather than Western or U.S. American understandings of the term. Thus, Fajardo uses categories in ways that are meaningful to his narrators and himself.

Like Fajardo, I also will do my best to work from the categories that my narrators have given me. My work focuses on the meaningful categories of queer and queer diaspora as presented to me. Together with my narrators, I explore the racialized tensions with queer liberalism experienced and navigated by Chinese Canadian queer women and non-binary people. Simultaneously, I will highlight how my narrators manifest forms of agency within these tensions that are not always linear or apparent. I do this by employing queer diaspora as a methodological approach that interrogates the negligent forgetting of racialization within queer liberalism and modern sexuality.

Queer (Asian) diaspora provides a methodological approach that simultaneously disrupts queer liberalism and the interconnections of heteronormativity, nationhood and citizenship (Bailey, 2013; Gopinath, 2005; Kojima, 2015; Manalansan 2003; Wekker, 2006). Employing the concept in this way, I ask how Chinese Canadian LGBTQ women and non-binary people critically and creatively negotiate demands that they “come out” into queer liberalism. This ethnographic

work documents the heterogenous nature of queer diasporic people by tracing a variety of strategies they use to navigate the disclosure and non-disclosure of sexual and gender identities under the pressures of queer liberalism. Rather than proposing that the notion of coming out or the disclosure of sexual and gender identity is inherently problematic or detrimental, this project takes inspiration from Muñoz by allowing ethnography to trace how queer diasporic people navigate identification, counter-identification, or disidentification in their everyday lives. The heterogeneous narratives of Chinese Canadian LGBTQ women and non-binary people acknowledge the liberatory effects coming out has on some while disrupting the notion that coming out is a universal experience or that it should be conducted by all who are seeking “liberation”.

By interpreting the notion of coming out through the narrators’ diverse experiences, this project aims to decenter whiteness as the origin and basis of sexual and gender subjectivity while centering transnational relationships between queerness and race made apparent by queer diaspora analysis. It is not possible to dissect race from queerness or queerness from race; they are always intertwined and held together in tension. A queer understanding of diaspora further interconnects racially queer and queerly racialized understandings of these terms to suggest relational practices and forms of being articulating the transnational scope of diaspora. While diasporic people are positioned as and continually deemed to be the “Other” within the white nation-state, their incorporation into the nation is important to the logics of nation-building, globalization and transnationalism. The intimate connections between race, gender and sexuality are often disregarded within the paradigms of globalization and transnationalism (Eng, 2001; Gopinath, 2005; Manalansan, 2003). This takes place at the same time that acceptance of “queerness” is used increasingly as a barometer of sophistication and civilization in the “Other”.

The historical and current interventions of the West in abjecting and disavowing the “Other”—first by suppressing sexuality, only then to promote queer liberalism—requires us to pay attention to the forgetting of race within queerness. Race should not and can not come second to “queer liberalism”; it is very much embedded within it. By turning to a queer diasporic framework, the “history of racial forgetting” can be challenged (Eng, 2001). Using queer diaspora as a methodology, the relations between nation and diaspora, and heterosexuality and queerness can be simultaneously disrupted. If, as Gopinath observes, “queerness is to heterosexuality as the diaspora is to the nation” then a queer diasporic framework can illuminate the binary oppositions while simultaneously critiquing heterosexuality and the nation (Gopinath, 2005, p. 11). Queer diaspora becomes a method to interrogate the nation and heterosexuality by centering racialization within the ongoing project of modernity.

Our Narratives

This ethnographic study is based on five individual interview-based narratives and one focus group-based conversational narrative with a total of twelve group narrators. My analysis of these narratives derives major categories, concepts, and analytical frameworks from the narratives. The analysis is built from three major insights introduced by narrators to illuminate Chinese Canadian experiences of queer diaspora: the instability of queer (and) Chinese subjectivity; sense of belonging and acceptance; and logics of modernity, progress and queer liberalism as continued racialization, colonialism and imperialism in disguise. I examine the ideas of queer (and) Chinese instability and existence in relation to narrators discussing fragmented belonging. I argue that their experiences are informed by negotiating and disrupting multiple dichotomies including coming out/not coming out, tradition/modernity, verbalization/silence and individualism/familial harmony. Through my narrators’ stories of being

caught within those dichotomies, their critical thinking cracks open and reveals the contradictions within binaries, and lets them express more clearly the complexity of their own lives. Lastly, I end with my narrators speaking on the notion of futurity alongside José Esteban Muñoz's idea of a "queer futurity that is attentive to the past for the purposes of critiquing a present and attentive to the present to imagine a future" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 18). My narrators have taught me invaluable lessons on love, compassion and futurity in spite of messiness and pain.

For my narrators and for me now, queerness is about messiness and tension but also hope, healing and resilience. My narrators highlight what it means to love and live between the parentheses of queer (and) Chinese. Even then, individually they form their own definitions of queer (and) Chinese. As two stories appear to converge or have similarities, they almost always depart immediately. No monolithic story is being told within the parenthesis and I do not aim to tell one. Rather, their narratives highlight the creative potential of living and loving as queer (and) Chinese. Their immense compassion and love for us, for themselves and for their various communities can not be encompassed within these pages.

Chapter 2

The Politics of (Not) Coming Out

Our strategy is how we cope – how we measure and weigh what is to be said and when, what is to be done and how, and to whom . . . daily deciding/risking who it is we can call an ally, call a friend (whatever that person’s skin, sex, or sexuality).

– Cherrie Moraga, *This Bridge Called My Back*, 1981

I sat in a circle with twelve individuals whom I had brought together. While most did not know each others’ stories and struggles, each possessed in common a lived experience as queer diasporic people. We all came together knowing that we would be discussing our feelings about belonging in ways that would touch upon queer diasporic identity and consciousness. The evening wore on with laughter, tears, agreements and disagreements. By the end of the night, my body was trembling from not only exhaustion but also the love, pain, connection and disconnection I felt deep within. And I realized that at its core, that is the messiness of being queer and Chinese within the diaspora.

This chapter is grounded in the realities, conflicts and strategies of Chinese diasporic queer women and non-binary people, whose experiences speak back to the hegemonic narratives implicated in queer liberalism. Their narratives reveal a struggle for survival stemming beyond queer liberalism as queer Chinese diasporic people and into broader struggles of diasporic life

under a white heteropatriachal colonial state. I view their experiences as informed by negotiating the colonial discourses of queer liberalism within a white settler state. Queer liberalism as a colonial discourse operates under mechanisms of Orientalism (Said, 1978) and the West and the Rest (Hall, 1992). In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said establishes

the Orient is not an inert fact of nature. It is not merely there, just as the Occident itself is not just there either: We must take seriously Vico's great observation that men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have made, and extend it to geography: as both geographical and cultural entities-to say nothing of historical entities - such locales, regions geographical sectors as "Orient" and "Occident" are man-made. Therefore as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other. (Said, 1978, p. 12-13)

The West only exists through the construction of a false binary and an Other. Western power exerts itself onto its colonized other in order to uphold its position. The false binary of Orient (Other) and Occident (West) is then translated into colonial discourses such as tradition and modernity for the West to exert its power. Here, Stuart Hall's "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power" is useful in understanding the concept of modernity as a tool of racialization and colonialism. Hall establishes that

The West and the Rest became two sides of a single coin. What each now is, and what the terms we use to describe them mean, depend on the relations which were established between them long ago. The so-called uniqueness of the West was, in part, produced by Europe's contact and self-comparison with other, non-western, societies (the Rest), very

different in their histories, ecologies, patterns of development, and cultures from the European model. The difference of these other societies and cultures from the West was the standard against which the West's achievement was measured. It is within the context of these relationships that the idea of "the West" took on shape and meaning. (Hall, 1992, p. 187)

Queer liberalism presents itself as modern in order to uphold the false binary of “the West and the Rest.” The present realities of queer liberalism as a form of colonialism is grounded in the history and creation of this false binary. Queer liberalism becomes a colonial discourse that reinforces Orientalism by using gender and sexuality as continual mechanisms to deem certain races and cultures as traditional and backwards. As such, queer liberalism plays on the essentialized binary oppositions between the West and the rest and a tradition/modernity split to maintain colonial and imperial ruling.

I am interested in noting where my narrators allude to, touch on or recognize Orientalism as embedded within the colonial logics of queer liberalism. There are many instances in which their queer diasporic narratives of resistance disrupt the idea of queer liberalism as modern. The very notion of modernity or what constituted being modern is disrupted. This chapter answers to David Eng’s invocation of the deliberate forgetting of race within queer liberalism and the question of queer liberalism for whom (Eng, 2001). At the same time, my narrators illustrate disidentificatory strategies of navigating within and/or living outside of the logics of queer liberalism (Muñoz, 1999). These strategies are not always obvious and at times, my narrators are unaware that these are strategies at all. Rather, these are their experiences of tension, love and compassion – of being queer (and) Chinese.

Imagining Queer (and) Chinese: Navigating Racialization and Diasporic Families

Although told separately in time, two key narratives from the focus group illustrate the group's development of a larger conversation on navigating seemingly disparate identities. One of the first points that arose in discussion concerned the narrators' understandings of identifying and being within diaspora while navigating the demands of the family, the Chinese Canadian community, and the queer community. The first account addresses tensions associated with these negotiations, while the second deals with challenges to imagining the self as being constituted by conflicting identities.

Identifying as a non-binary second generation Chinese Canadian, RC talked about the challenge of negotiating belonging to disparate communities as context for their experience of a complex multiple subjectivity.

RC: There's a part of me that may feel like there's certain aspects that I fit into and I belong, but there's always going to be parts of myself that don't belong in certain groups. Whether I'm in the queer community, the Asian community or whatever community I'm in now. For me, I feel like it's like all these fragments of your own identity. I have to be able to puzzle together and piece together and come to terms with how I navigate those different pieces and when I use which parts of myself.

RC experiences the self as divided into fragments of queer and Asian as a result of their experience of attempting to belong to distinct spaces – “the queer community, the Asian community” – and realizing that there are parts “that don't belong.” Their statement did not propose any place where they felt belonging as a whole, un-fragmented self. Rather, they

experience their communities, “queer” and “Asian” as separate from one another, and their identities within these two communities as providing recognition for only a part of their sense of self. In effect, the belonging of one fragment of the self in one community (Asian) meant the suppression of another (queer) fragment of the self in that same community.

Here RC shows us that experiences of belonging are created and recreated as the subject’s spatial and temporal positioning within communities shift. The shifting positioning that RC speaks about can be understood alongside Chela Sandoval’s proposition of differential consciousness. Sandoval identifies five oppositional ideologies that encompass the political consciousness of U.S. third world feminism: the equal-rights, revolutionary, supremacist, separatist and differential (Sandoval, 2000). She privileges the differential as a site of resistance for US third world feminists. Sandoval argues that differential consciousness

enables movement “between and among” ideological positionings (the equal-rights, revolutionary, supremacist, and separatist modes of oppositional consciousness) considered as variables, in order to disclose the distinctions among them... The differential represents the variant; its presence emerges out of correlations, intensities, junctures, crises. Yet the differential depends on a form of agency that is self-consciously mobilized in order to enlist and secure influence; the differential is thus performative” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 58; quoting Anzaldua, 1981, p. 209).

When RC navigates their fragmented subjectivity using differing variables, they manifest a form of agency through their performance of “differential modes of consciousness-in-resistance,” which allow them to inhabit the spaces they encounter (Sandoval, 2000, see also Muñoz 1999). Their differential consciousness of the self and of political ideologies in relation to the self allow

them to move between and among the junctures of their communities and the work they do within them.

For queer diasporic people, differential consciousness navigates normative constructions of nationality, race, gender and sexuality as distinct modes of being, which marginalize people who embody and embrace movement amongst them and who narrate a hybrid experience. My narrators speak towards residing in a space of being a queer (and) Chinese person, rather than a queer Chinese person. Rather than queer Chinese, I offer queer *and* Chinese purposefully to emphasize their differential consciousness. I want to talk about the (in)visibility of the queer Chinese person. The *and* between the queer (and) Chinese person exists in the disjuncture of not being or inhabiting either, revealing the instability and connections of the queer and Chinese self. A queer (and) Chinese self exists through the inability to access either fully as the two are viewed to not have much room to exist simultaneously, yet they do. The differential consciousness does not exist through the shifting of strict boundaries. Here, Paula M. L. Moya's criticism of Chela Sandoval's theory of differential consciousness is useful. Moya states "if, as [Sandoval] intimates, U.S. third world feminists are perfectly self-conscious about what they are doing—if they know that their alliance with any one group is strategic and temporary— then they are working from within an ideology of flux and cannot be said to be shifting ideologies" (Moya, 2002, p. 83). The consciousness of a queer (and) Chinese person is not necessarily shifting from the ideologies of the queer self and then the Chinese self but rather are navigated and inhabited simultaneously and strategically. They become interconnected identities that inform expression and ways in which the world is experienced and navigated. The person, formation and performance for queer (and) Chinese exist simultaneously even as they are felt to

be at times conflicting, mutually exclusive and as “multiple forms of displacement” (Manalansan, 1995, p. 13).

Language Boundary

Focus group narrators talked extensively about language informing their experiences of marginalization and disconnection within their communities and contributing to their sense of queer (and) Chinese subjectivity. Many of my narrators found it difficult to imagine and speak about queerness in Chinese. They found that the translation of Westernized notions of gender and sexuality into Chinese language was difficult. I understand them not to be suggesting that accessing understanding of the self through a Western or Chinese language is better or worse. Rather, we learn that queer (and) Chinese individuals may inhabit a space of contention when they understand and explain the self in Chinese languages while using Westernized notions of gender and sexuality.

RC interprets language as a reason for their experience of non-belonging in the Chinese community that extends beyond conflicts arising from being queer.

RC: I guess another layer of belonging is not feeling like I belong within the queer community. But then navigating being Chinese has also been odd for me because I'm second gen[eration]. My parents were born here as well. They speak Cantonese, however, they speak two different dialects, apparently. I don't really know how to speak Cantonese. When I was in university, there was lot of international students and there's just a boundary for me in connecting with them. Those are individuals that I should or want to connect with but it's just

more apparent in those situations that I do not belong because of my own language barrier.

Feelings of non-belonging as a Chinese person within the queer community were shared amongst members of the focus group. However, for RC and other narrators, non-belonging in Asian communities existed not only because of a sense of exclusion of the queer self, but also as a result of feelings of disconnection from the Asian self. Limited or absent skill in Chinese languages impacted the degree to which RC and other narrators experienced a sense of belonging in Chinese or other Asian social and cultural spaces. While RC's parents are fluent in Chinese dialects, RC finds it difficult to utilize them. Thus, not being proficient in a Chinese language creates barriers to connection with one's own family as well as with the Chinese community in general.

Stephanie responded to RC in conversation by sharing her experience of utilizing Chinese language to communicate with her parents.

STEPHANIE: I think there's definitely a language barrier. Like talking to my parents about it, sometimes I don't even know what words to use. Like for example, the word queer. Like I don't know what that would be in Cantonese. And I remember trying to Google Translate all these words and it doesn't translate. And trying to explain to them is so difficult.

In conversation, my narrators illustrate the term "queer" as not universally translatable within global patterns of desire, sexuality and gender (Gopinath, 2005; Manalansan, 2003; Shah, 2011). Stephanie's words highlight the ways in which language can complicate queer diasporic experience by forming a barrier to conversations around gender or sexuality, including gender

and sexual identity, with one's family and racial/ethnic or immigrant community. Here Stephanie faces the potential failure of translation as a means for thinking gender and sexuality transnationally. Following Eng, she confronts not only that the word queer "doesn't translate" into Cantonese but also that its normative usage carries queer liberalist implications of thinking about gender and sexual identity as originating and discernable only from Western thought. Thus, when Stephanie finds it "difficult ... to explain" to her parents she may be facing not only the term itself, but also its particular meanings for her as a Chinese Canadian, which may differ from the presumption of whiteness in its typical usage, definition, and translation. Stephanie and many of the narrators found that trying to explain the self using English language concepts of gender and sexuality was not accessible to Chinese parents and Chinese and Asian communities, forming a barrier to connection and belonging. In other words, the narrators who attested to this sense of non-belonging experience not being able to access their own languages while growing up and/or residing in Canada.

At the same time, language is a powerful tool for generating feelings of belonging and integration even when one cannot access it fully. Following her narrative about disconnection from language, Stephanie discusses her experience of having the disarticulated pieces of her queer and Chinese self come together through language.

STEPHANIE: Going back to belonging. When I first came out to myself, all my friends that were queer, were white. And I was confused because I always thought it was a white person thing. It was just like weird. And then afterwards in ACAS [Asian Community AIDS Services], when I heard some people here [ACAS] speaking Cantonese it was so hard for my brain to link those two

together. To have a queer person speaking Cantonese, like it just doesn't match up. I rarely see that.

A perceived language barrier informed Stephanie's internal conflict that initially negatively impacted her sense of belonging. While she identified as queer, she also imagined queerness to be "a white person thing" in context of the white queer community in which she initially found herself. Her imaginary of the (white) queer person was disrupted when she encountered Cantonese-speaking queer individuals within a queer Asian community space in Canada. Imagining a queer (and) Chinese identity became difficult but possible for Stephanie as she witnessed the merging of queer identity and Chinese language. The queer person was initially imagined as separate and mutually exclusive from the Chinese person, but this evolved into possibility through Chinese language even when she was not able to fully access the language herself.

Eventually Stephanie's internal struggle to imagine a queer (and) Chinese identity set her on a path to Asia to fill this void in understanding. Stephanie travelled to Taiwan in order to find queer communities. In the city of Taipei, she found one of the earliest feminist bookstores in Taiwan that was opened in the '90s. Within the bookstore she encountered many queer folks and she described the site as bizarre in the moment. Shortly after, she realized she had found what was perceived as a queer community and thought "this community exists, it's not invisible and it exists outside Canada too." In Taiwan, Stephanie was able to imagine a queer and Chinese identity through a connection in Asia, in spaces that are coded as Chinese (due to mainland Chinese occupation of Indigenous Formosan territories), rather than the normatively white Canadian contexts (themselves, formed by occupying Indigenous territories) in which she had understood her queerness to originate. This experience had happened after her initial encounter

with a Cantonese-speaking individual at ACAS, in Canada. Coupled together, her two experiences locate a queer (and) Chinese identity as existing and available both within Asia and Canada. The freedom of identity and identification of queer (and) Chinese is seen to exist across transnational boundaries beyond being coded as “a white person thing.” For Stephanie, the queer (and) Chinese identity became available across geographical and political boundaries.

Together, RC and Stephanie’s narratives illustrate language as being simultaneously a potential barrier and powerful tool to disclosing the false promises of white sexual citizenship and modernity. In the introduction to *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism* (2002), editors Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin Manalansan argue that the

position occupied by queer sexualities and cultures in our globalized world as a mediating figure between the nation and diaspora, home and the state, the local and the global ... has not only been a site of dispossession, it has also been a creative site for queer agency and empowerment. It has also provided diasporic queers, for example, the opportunity to connect with other queers and sexuality and gender activists at “home” in order to interrogate the limits both of nationalist discourses and of modern Euro-American lesbian and gay narratives of identity. (Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan, 2002, p. 2)

In RC and Stephanie’s understanding, language potentially forms a sense of belonging even as the loss of language within diaspora creates a tension within being queer (and) Chinese: living the in-between marked by the parenthesis. However, even this loss conditions a potentially powerful manifestation of agency and self-discovery in interrogating notions of queerness as an exclusively white space and beginning to imagine queer (and) Chinese life.

Tradition/Modernity Split

Queer diasporic people navigate their sexuality through ideologies of modern sexuality (queer liberalism) and the racialized family within the temporality and spaces of diasporas. I view these tensions as a continued mechanism of Orientalism within diaspora. However, as a critique of Orientalism, Tom Hastings comments “homosexuality remains unspoken in Orientalism because he [Said] deems it unspeakable” (Hastings, 1999, p. 138). Hastings further elaborates that

Said's failure to deal with the homosexuality of many of the men cited throughout Orientalism, as well as his omission of the contributions made by various women travellers to the discourse of Orientalism, leaves subsequent discussions of Orientalism defective in that they reproduce his hetero/sexism, and supply postcolonial criticism with a foundational theory that has masculinist and homophobic implications (Hastings, 1999, p. 138).

Bringing up Hastings' critique is not to dismiss the importance of Said's theory but rather to emphasize the interconnections of race and sexuality as a mechanism of Orientalism. Here I do not privilege race or sexuality but rather read them as simultaneously implicated in the creation of an Other through a tradition/modernity split.

“Orientalism” is discussed by Said “as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said, 1978, p. 11). The qualities of teaching and authorizing presumes that the Orient or the Other is primitive and backwards in comparison

to a Western style. There exists a temporal quality within the tradition/modernity split. The dichotomies of backwards/forwards and primitive/backwards are prescribed in order to deem the Other as in need of teaching and authorizing. As such, traditions are elements of the past in need of intervention. In the context of sexuality, queer liberalism is found within ideologies of modern sexuality. The understanding is that queerness coincides with invocations of modernity within Western thought. As such, those not adopting queer liberalism are viewed as backwards, primitive and therefore traditional. This occurs even as Chinese people who were historically viewed as having non-heteronormative practices were deemed to be backwards.

A tradition/modernity split also is geographical: it maps onto space. While the West represents modernity and geographical spaces that appear to be outside the West are assigned to tradition, a more complex understanding of tradition/modernity is needed within the diaspora, in context of which it maps Orientalism onto race and bodies. Whiteness represents modernity in this split, thereby rendering racialized/non-Western people as tradition and in need of intervention.

Appearing as a split between modernity and tradition, western ideologies of queerness become modernity while non-Western languages and cultures become tradition. Simultaneously, there exists a white understanding of queerness and of queer-ness as a white phenomenon. Which side of the tradition/modernity split would a queer (and) Chinese identity fall under then? For queer (and) Chinese diasporic people, it appears that they live within and between the seemingly competing ideologies of the queer and Chinese self. Most often, queer and Chinese identities are read within the colonial discourse of a tradition/modernity split. Firstly, queer (and) Chinese people live within diaspora of what is considered the West (Canada). They are racialized people in a space deemed modern. Secondly, there queer identity is read as modernity, even as

their Chinese identity is read as tradition. For my narrators, forms of belonging and understanding of the self relies on the connection between language and culture, often labelled as tradition, and queer identity, assumed to be a function or product of modernity. My narrators experience queer (and) Chinese not as separate and mutually exclusive entities, but rather they are negotiated simultaneously and therefore disrupting the idea that there is indeed a tradition/modernity split.

In the accounts thus far, my narrators speak about an un-fragmented form of being through reflections that touch upon colonial discourses of gender and sexuality. However, the tool sets in which gender and sexuality are discussed come from Western thought that is not easily transposable to Chinese thought, and this disjuncture is represented as a language barrier. Put another way, the barrier extends beyond language and into diasporic understandings of sexuality and negotiating “multiple forms of displacement” (Manalansan, 2004, p.13). What is also alluded to but not explicitly stated yet is the racialization my narrators experience within the broader Canadian state and queer liberalism through their bicultural and language barriers.

Discussing how her sense of Chineseness informs her understanding of gender and sexuality, my interviewee Egg, reflects upon the embedding of Chineseness within a tradition/modernity split.

EGG: It’s like the concept of Chineseness is linked to un-progressiveness. But that happens, and I feel like we have to resist that impulse. It’s always like this idea of tradition as done against North America as a back-drop, as the non-traditional thing. And I think it just forgets a lot of the backwardness itself of North America when it tries to present itself as like a progressive figure.

In this excerpt, Egg recognizes Orientalism by alluding to the linkage of Chineseness to un-progressive through a lack of North American qualities. It reflects both *exclusionary* migration narratives, that exiled Chinese labour in the past, and *inclusionary immigration* narratives that embrace Chinese only if they accept that their culture has deficiencies that must be fixed by assimilation into Canadian modernity. This exists despite the fact that multiculturalism suggests that all cultures are welcome, but then holds “rule of law,” “human rights,” etc. over immigrants as a basis for positioning them as deficient and in need of assimilation. This is the context in which Egg links “un-progressiveness” to tradition and tradition to Chineseness. Thus, when colonial discourses such as queer liberalism are not followed by Chinese people in Canada, it would be read as “tradition” and, therefore, “backwards” (Eng, 2001). Egg then points out that the linkages of Chineseness with tradition and un-progressiveness take place against “a backdrop” of “North America” – read, white Canada – claiming to be progressive, beyond tradition. This particular form of the tradition/modernity split entrenches white settler colonialism in Canada as a foundation in relation to which Chineseness will always be read either as being incompatible, or as under demand for accommodation and assimilation (Day, 2016).

On this basis, Egg then warns Chinese Canadians against making these linkages when we view Chineseness only as the precursor to North American progressiveness. In her statement “we have the resist the impulse,” I understand Egg to be warning “we” Chinese Canadians against being complicit in the deeming of Chineseness as always already backwards in comparison to North America. Read another way, “we” can be inferred as invoking all those who can imagine living beyond the restrictions of colonial discourse. However, I should note here that unlike Egg, several of my narrators expressed views that indeed linked Chineseness with tradition and “un-progressiveness”. We may begin to believe in this colonial and nationalist narrative that, by

always positioning our Chineseness as tradition—with its connotations of backwardness—leaves us unable to be ‘queer enough’ within the white settler nation and its progressive logics queer liberalism.

Egg’s insight highlights the abjection of Chinese people as a continuation of colonialism and imperialism even as their North American agents try to present North America as a liberal and democratic space. Yet the mechanisms through which Canada and the United States present as modern and progressive are themselves based in continuous processes of settler colonialism, anti-Blackness, and Orientalism, which evict and regulate racialized and Indigenous populations as backwards and thus not progressive enough for queer liberalism. In this form, the supposedly liberating qualities of progressiveness and modernity function as continued colonialism and imperialism in disguise. Yet, as Said argued, this was always their purpose in the history of Western colonization and empire, and only assimilation to their rule makes them code differently to the subjects of empire.

The historical association of progress with empire also characterizes the definition of modern sexual minority politics. Manalansan (1995) explains how this takes place in stories that source modern gay and queer rights movements to the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion. In fact, a rebellion led by Black and Puerto Rican trans and gender non-conforming people was stolen to be a symbol for white gay men and LGBTQ people pursuing a rights-based movement in a white settler state (Morgensen 2011; Hanhardt, 2013). Far from the fights for rights and visibility that typically invoke it today, Stonewall was a fight for survival and existence for queer, trans, and gender non-conforming people of colour. The violence of this theft only deepens when it gets used to formalize a monolithic queer identity that disavows the survival of people of colour and further racializes bodies as existing outside the modernity of queer liberalism. In light of these

and other examples (Cohen 1997; Gopinath 2005, Reddy, 2011), I question whether associations of queerness with modernity are in actuality the continuation of whiteness disavowing and erasing racialized bodies. Colonial thinking places Western notions of queerness, gender, and sexual diversity as modern, progressive and superior. Yet queer whiteness achieves this only through the erasure of racialized bodies within its own modern domain. The appearance of a tradition/modernity split within queer liberalism in actuality re-brands traditions of colonialism and imperialism so as to relegate racialized, Indigenous, and diasporic communities and their queer members to a second-class status. This effect is achieved by presenting false promises of freedom through citizenship in the ongoing colonial life of the white settler state.

Through this disguise, the imposition of a tradition/tradition/modernity split keeps associating diasporic people with static tradition. The following account by RC illuminates how this informs conflicting diasporic understandings of sexuality:

RC: Taiwan is easier to understand because Taiwan is on the verge of legalizing same-sex marriage. So over there [in Taiwan] they are doing a lot of work, but the older generation Chinese people here [in Canada] are still kind of – like when they legalized same-sex marriage here, the group that was strongest and most vocal [against it] was the Chinese community here. But, when you look at what’s happening halfway across the world, there’s changes that are happening. So, it’s hard if you’re living with parents who have this mentality here, but not recognizing that actually halfway across the world there’s a lot of changes happening, right? Again, there’s like gaps that need to be filled.

RC brings up a gap between sexual politics in the Chinese Canadian community and the political reality in Taiwan, a prior home for many Chinese Canadians. Following the logic of a

tradition/modernity split in Canada, Taiwan would be associated with tradition and hence with distance from or opposition to queer politics. RC recognizes Taiwan as “doing a lot of work” towards legalizing same-sex marriage, a political shift that only took place in Canada after the turn of the century. In fact, there were Chinese community groups in Canada that vocally opposed the legalization of same-sex marriage at the Ottawa Parliament Hill. Yet this opposition appears differently once read in light of simultaneous and divergent politics in East Asia. For instance, Petrus Liu’s work, *Queer Marxism in Two Chinas* directs us away from viewing Taiwan’s steps towards the legalization of same-sex marriage, or the production of Chinese queer studies as conforming to a tradition/modernity split. Liu writes:

rather than assuming that anyone producing queer theory in Chinese must be working with a translated concept and hence conflating Euro-American sexual politics and Chinese “tongzhi” in the service of the cultural imperialism of the West, I argue that queer theory itself is an incomplete project with global origins, and that the particular variant of queer theory we have become accustomed to in North American academia is constantly expanded, revised, and displaced by competing sources of knowledge in the Chinas and elsewhere. (Liu, 2015, p. 31)

Together, RC and Liu point towards the critique that Egg also made regarding the dangers of characterizing Chineseness as always already backwards tradition. They do this by reimagining Chinese as a launching point for critique, political transformation, and the interrogation of queerness and queer theory. This disruption of imagining forms of queerness and queer theory through a Euro-American origin further dissolves the power of a tradition/modernity split. At once, Liu’s critical analysis exposes the “mutual entanglements between queer human rights

discourse and the quandary of two Chinas” (32). Without contradicting the previous thoughts of imagining Chinese as an origin point of queerness, Liu continues by arguing that

whereas “human rights” remain a sensitive issue in the People’s Republic of China because of the incomplete character of its independence resulting from US neo colonialism, human rights—including queer human rights—have also become a key tool by which Taiwan disciplines China in order to secure its own independence. (Liu, 2015, p. 32)

Thus, following Liu, we must not fall once again into the trap of progress narratives when we acknowledge the growth of sexual rights law in Taiwan. For, read in historical and political context, we see that the governments of Taiwan and China are negotiating their relative power precisely by playing on distinctions between tradition and modernity, including here with reference to queer human rights. We must approach sexuality in the Chinas, and in the white settler states of North America in their distinctive contexts, in order to see how in each case they articulate colonial discourse and then how we might think through and beyond its limitations.

Additionally, it is interesting to touch upon RC’s invocation of a gap between the here (Canada) and over there (Taiwan). Both its normativity, and its critical potential is illuminated by M. Jacqui Alexander in *Pedagogies of Crossing*. In her work, Alexander argues that modernization discourses and practices “collapse distance into difference” (Alexander, 2005, p. 189). The tradition/modernity binary is upheld through the conceptions of place and time as Alexander writes

implicit within this tradition/modernity opposition is a conception of time that is, paradoxically, constrictively linear and resolutely hierarchical... The West is presumably

“here and now,” while the Third World is “then and there,” apparently exclusive of the “here and now.” Both time and distance, then, are ineluctably circumscribed (Alexander, 2005, p. 189).

Modernity itself needs to be interrogated. The concepts of “here and now” and “then and there” are modernization discourses that reinforce the colonial logics of Orientalism. Alexander proposes a scrambling and mismatching of the terms “here and now” along with “then and there,” to disrupt and rethink colonial discourses of time and place. Alexander argues that

the idea of the “new” structured through the “old” scrambled, palimpsestic character of time, both jettisons the truncated distance of linear time and dislodges the impulse for incommensurability, which the ideology of distance creates. It thus rescrambles the “here and now” and the “then and there” to a “here and there” and a “then and now”.

(Alexander, 2005, p. 190)

We need to move beyond colonial understandings of time and place as linear, fixed or static and question the very existence of time and place. Relating back to RC’s comments on “Chinese people here in Canada,” the notions of time and place are further complicated by the continual abjection of people through practices of racialization and (hetero)sexualization within diaspora. The presence of Chinese people in diaspora illustrates what Alexander scrambles as “here and there”, through disrupting the idea of a fixed place. Although the pathway to migration largely varies, the continued migration, existence and survival of Chinese people in Canada (a white settler state) is a form of resistance towards colonial logics of place.

Additionally, RC’s comments illustrate two ways in which North America continues to use modernization discourses and practices of racialization and (hetero)sexualization. Here, I

illustrate Alexander's concept of "then and now" within RC's comments in order to expose colonialism's ongoing projects and disrupt the appearance of fixed place and linear time. Not only is the concept of "then and now" a resistance to colonial logic, but it can also be used to expose modernization discourses and practices. In RC's invocations, there are two instances that exemplify the "then and now." Firstly, RC points out that Taiwan's politics around legalizing same-sex marriage are similar to that of Canada and the US. However, Liu shows us that the current state of queer human rights (then) in Taiwan is largely due to its incomplete independence from the US (then). Although appearing to be a progressive alongside linear time, the political landscape of Taiwan continues to be under the colonial guidance of North America.

At the same time, RC observes that certain groups of Chinese people in Canada opposed the legalization of same sex marriage. The 2003 protest against same-sex marriage on Parliament Hill was made up of a coalition of religious groups ("Thousands demonstrate on Parliament Hill", 2003). However, reporting named Chinese Canadians as a major part of the demonstration rather than Chinese Christians or Chinese Catholics. Christianity and Catholicism were left out of the narrative. The imposed perception the entire Chinese community in Canada as against the legalization of same-sex marriage (without a racial and cultural understanding of survival within diaspora) continues to abject Chinese people as unprogressive and second-class citizens (now). This story is unlike the one that occurred historically (then) when accusations of sexual perversion were made to exclude Chinese people from becoming full citizens in Canada. Thus, sexuality is constantly used as a barometer and mechanism to place Chinese people in Canada as unprogressive and therefore second-class. There is no progression or linearity in time or place, rather "then and now" are one in the same under the guise of colonialism.

Although spoken separately in time and place, Egg's warning to Chinese Canadians is useful in understanding the "gap" RC named. For diasporic Chinese in Canada, at the same time that the "concept of Chineseness is linked to un-progressiveness" (in Egg's terms) they also appear to be ignoring "what's happening halfway across the world" (in RC's terms). Although colonialism and queer liberalism position Chinese diasporic people as unchanging and static, "halfway across the world there's a lot of changes happening" (in RC's terms). Alongside RC and Egg, I argue that the appearance of a static nature is created by the imposition of a tradition/modernity split that abjects Chinese Canadians as "un-progressive" and, as a result, as second-class citizens in a modern white settler state. Egg and RC critiqued tradition/modernity colonial thinking, exposing its norms and limits and opening the possibility of imagining beyond it. Nevertheless, their invocations of tradition and modernity are messy and reveal that these terms not only exist in relation to one another but may be deeply entangled. They show us some of the ways that the queer (and) Chinese diasporic individual navigates queer identity, language, culture and racialization in tandem with queer liberalism and its imposition of a monolithic queer identity defining who is and who is not able to be liberated. They recognize that believing in this false binary of a tradition/modernity split is believing in something that is contradictory to their lives as queer diasporic people.

Familial Harmony as Survival + What Coming Out Can Mean

When asked whether they felt attributes of familial or traditional values (whatever that meant to them) influenced their consideration or experience of "coming out", many of my narrators centred their answers around narratives of family, and specifically of negotiating familial harmony. For many of my narrators, family was the point of connection to their culture and ethnicity within diaspora. While their responses raised into discussion the value of familial

harmony, for some, family represented a space and place of pain regardless of gender and sexual diversity. One focus group member emphasized that family was not a space of warmth or shared survival, but one that was deeply violent.

Feminist and queer scholars of color name the signal, and contested place of natal family in surviving white supremacy and cis-heteropatriarchy. Speaking of the history of Black communities in the United States, bell hooks suggests that “the construction of a homeplace, however fragile and tenuous (the slave hut, the wooden shack), had a radical dimension, one’s homeplace was the one site where one could freely construct the issue of humanization, where one could resist.” (hooks, 1990, p. 42) hooks makes this argument having also written of the home as a place of patriarchal violence that she must survive (hooks, 1990), while E. Patrick Johnson (2005) and Marlon Bailey (2013) speak of queer and trans people of color surviving the violences of the home to form distinctive queer / trans family spaces and asserting close ties to Black and other diasporic meanings and practices of home. In his invocation of quare theory, E. Patrick Johnson extends hooks’ invocation of homeplace by writing, “we may seek refuge in homeplace as a marginally safe place to critique oppression outside its confines, but we must also deploy quare theory to address oppression within homeplace itself” (Johnson, 2005, p. 149) Even if we may wish to honour or protect the memory or idea of homeplace or familial harmony, this does not mean that homeplace and harmony can not also be critiqued as potentially oppressive spaces. This brings us back to hooks’ “recognition of the political value of constructing homeplace as a site of resistance,” but that heteronormativity within the homeplace also “threatens our survival as a people” (hooks, 1990, p. 48). Following these models, homeplace can be understood to be a site in constant flux, simultaneously embodying survival, resistance and struggle. This form of embodiment complicates binary separations of the

individual from the family, or of imagining individualism and familial harmony as distinct and opposed. Would it be possible to experience both simultaneously?

The following are two accounts of the intersections of culture, tradition and coming out, drawn from separate interviews. Egg and Kuro speak of the familial dynamics that they navigate and of the value of familial harmony in relation to their considerations of coming out and discussing sexual and gender diversity. Their narratives also consider the significance and value of coming out by negotiating it alongside familial and cultural considerations.

Egg continues her previous thoughts on avoiding the conflation of tradition with un-progressiveness through her considerations on coming out. She says:

EGG: While it has affected whether I come out to the family, I think it's a good traditional value to value family harmony. I don't find it as an un-progressive value to hold.

In these words, Egg states that familial harmony is important to her sense of Chinese identity. She states this despite the fact that her commitment to familial harmony affects her decision to come out to her mother and extended family. For Egg, coming out could potentially disrupt the harmony that her family had harnessed and treasured through their sense of Chinese identity. The idea of individuation through coming out was not one that Egg adopted as her life trajectory. Considerations of family and familial harmony do indeed affect her decision to come out, but this does not mean that she feels oppressed when she chooses not to come out. Rather Egg goes on to say that her "gay goal" is not to come out to her mother but rather "to share as much as I can with other people about how I arrived at this space and to disseminate gay knowledge." Coming out was not central to Egg's self and familial identifications; rather familial harmony

trumped her desire to come out. Read another way, Egg's expression of a queer identity through her "gay goal" does represent a form of individuation from the family, but one that is able to maintain familial harmony.

Egg's narrative refuses to adhere to the normative trajectory of modern homosexuality and subsequently queer liberalism, in which a queer identity is founded on individuation and departure from family. Manalansan examines this normative logic by calling attention to the broader dynamics within the U.S. American cultural landscape, which generally honour "the sense of self predicated on issues of individuation, separation and leaving home," (Manalansan, 2003, p. 22). For racialized and diasporic people, family and home serve as sites of belonging, refuge and community within a white supremacist state and society (Bailey, 2013; Fung, 1991; hooks, 1990; Johnson 2005). Read in this light, the linear framework of modern homosexuality and queer liberalism through individualism and the verbal expression of queer identity is not a universal experience. Queer diasporic people who negotiate the supposed conflicts within dichotomies of modernity vs. tradition and individualism vs. familial harmony also end up confronting a split between modern sexuality and ("traditional") family. In this context the notion and pressure of coming out, commonly imposed onto queer diasporic people as liberatory and a source of pride, becomes a site of further marginalization—not only for them personally, but also for the wider communities of racialized diaspora people in which they are situated.

Kuro deepens this discussion about negotiating sexual and gender diversity by reflecting on a common quotidian aspect of many Chinese (diasporic) families, echoed by some other focus group and interview narrators. They talk about why they believe their own and other Chinese diasporic families navigate a general practice of silence, and not only silence around topics of gender and sexual diversity.

KURO: I find that in Chinese families, it's less talking. They're raised on providing for their children or giving them the necessities to live more than about mental health and social. It's all about physical because for them it's trying to keep the family going, keep the generation and so forth, right? So, that's probably their number one thing, so that's why it's really different.

... It's like "when will I get money and will I have food on the table tomorrow? Will we be able to eat? Will my child be able to get like, pay the bills for my child to get treatment?" So, in a way I kind don't expect a lot from them.

By way of addressing familial silence around gender and sexual diversity, Kuro extended their discussion of the silence towards "less talking" around all topics within the family. They highlight the socioeconomic realities in which many Chinese diasporic families reside, and the importance of economic survival and building a familial future as key concerns. Their parents emphasize the actions that provide necessities in life rather than conversing, noting that for their parents' generation, "they literally have no time to think about it" as time and energy is allocated towards survival.

Kuro continues by noting that they believe their own generation only has the ability and time to think about mental and social issues because the "bare necessities to survive is already taken care of" by their parents. Kuro thus associates the ability to think and talk about their own or one's gender and sexuality with a luxury that their parents could not afford during their upbringing. Rather than characterizing their parents as having failed to provide, in some way, Kuro empathically perceives the silence as a consequential intergenerational gap:

it's in a way of understand[ing] their way of communication. So that's how I'm able to improve my relationship with my parents. It's like mutual understanding. Cause we're more outspoken but they're just used to action.

Kuro affirms the “outspoken” quality of their own generation of Chinese diasporic youth, but balances it with their efforts to “improve my relationship with my parents” through “mutual understanding.” In kind, with patience and empathy built up over the years, Kuro was able to slowly reveal their queer identities to their parents through action first, rather than through verbalization.

I interpret these narratives as suggesting the importance of collective survival and futurity in the quotidian spaces of the family, and familial negotiations of sexual and gender diversity. In the face of the cultural and economic realities of Chinese Canadians, the family becomes a unit of survival. In his essay “Looking for My Penis,” Richard Fung (1991) reflects on the repercussions of coming out for Asian diaspora people, when he states that “as is the case for many other people of color and especially immigrants, our families and our ethnic communities are a rare source of affirmation in a racist society. In coming out, we risk (or we feel that we risk) losing this support.” Egg's and Kuro's narratives of navigating familial dynamics highlight the possibility that coming out may mean losing the specific forms of support provided by the family within Chinese diaspora communities that endeavor to ensure collective survival in a racist Canadian society.

Although interviewed separately, when placed in conversation Egg and Kuro give us important insight into familial dynamics for queer (and) Chinese people by pointing towards the intersections of familial harmony and survival. In this context, they both touch upon practices of “less talking” and “silence” in the family—both generally, and specifically concerning sexual

and gender diversity. One of the ways Kuro told us about the relationship of these practices to familial harmony is by comparing “less talking” to “more action.” Thus, “less talking” about gender and sexuality was understood to be a result of needing to focus on survival; but “more action” was also what Kuro adopted, similarly to their parents, as a form of expression and revealing of themselves. The notion of “more action” was translated over from their parents’ expression of care, towards their own expression and revealing of gender. Egg also related to practices of “less talking” and “silence” around gender and sexual diversity through her decision not to come out to her mother. For Egg, choosing not to come out promotes familial harmony, which in turn leads to collective familial survival. In her case, “less talking” is a practice, and a consequence of ensuring collective familial survival through familial harmony. Far too often in queer studies, familial harmony among racialized, diasporic, and Indigenous people is comprehended only as a concession to tradition, which coincidentally appears opposed to queer liberalism’s tenet of individuation. The idea that queer people of colour are committed to family and familial harmony gets used as a weapon against them and their communities to characterize them as backwards—“un-progressive,” to evoke Egg’s words—relative to queer liberation. However, what this simplistic model misses is the aspect of surviving white supremacy. Familial harmony becomes a form of collective survival for racialized diasporic people within the white settler state, effectively disrupting both a binary of individualism/familial harmony and the colonial logic of the tradition/modernity split. For many queer diasporic people, familial harmony and collective familial survival are the current economic, cultural, political realities of diaspora.

Interconnections of Saving Face and Fear

Familial harmony and survival also may appear to be imperative to the collective survival of Chinese communities in diaspora. In other words, a more general interest in the family and in familial harmony appear within Chinese communities as part of the process of navigating the racial, economic, and political endangerments presented by diaspora. Here I aim to interpret my informant's narratives by going beyond a simplistic model of associating family and community with tradition, and rather understanding diasporic community to be a form of social survival within a white settler state. The quotidian decisions of individuals are shaped by their relationship to a diasporic community, especially for a community that seeks mutual reliance for social support in the otherwise isolating arenas of whiteness. There are reasons why Chinese communities continue to stay cohesive even as the Canadian state preaches multiculturalism and integration. At once, I argue that the Canadian state aims to assimilate Chinese communities into "Canadian society" only just enough to conform to white social standards, but not too much as to be recognized as equal citizens.

In her essay "Diasporic Citizenship and De-formations of Citizenship," Lily Cho provides a useful examination of the precarious citizenship status of Chinese immigrant communities in Canada. Cho notes "an inquiry into the formation of citizenship necessarily requires and engagement with the contradictions of citizenship's promise of equality and its failure to fulfill that promise" (Cho, 2016, p. 527). Cho explains the process of citizenship formation as dependent upon inequality, as she points to Engin Isin's observation that

citizenship and its alterity always emerged simultaneously in a dialogical manner and constituted each other. Women were not simply excluded from ancient Greek citizenship but were constituted by it. Similarly, slaves were not simply excluded from citizenship,

but made citizenship possible by their very formation. (Isin, 2002, as cited in Cho, 2016, p. 533)

Citizenship is always constructed through and in contrast to an Other; who is and who is not worthy of citizenship? (Anderson 1983; Brandzel, 2016; Murray, 2015) The precariousness of citizenship is further illustrated through what Cho calls “diasporic citizenship”:

Diaspora suggests that the connection to an “elsewhere” is ever present, even when citizenship might have seemingly been achieved. Diaspora tears away at citizenship. Achieving citizenship should be the culmination of the consolidation of national subjectivity, but diaspora puts that consolidation into question. (Cho, 2016, p. 533)

Citizenship status does not equate to identity or belonging as a citizen: the existence of the former does not denote the latter. Citizenship does not necessarily signify feelings of belonging to or acceptance within Canadian society. Chinese Canadians are assimilated enough to be provided citizenship, but not so much as to be perceived as equals to normative citizen of white supremacist, settler colonial Canada: as again, citizenship is dependent on systems of inequality (Isin, 2002). Thus, as Cho explains, in the context of Chinese Canadians

the diasporic subject comes before citizenship not because Canada is a nation of immigrants (a platitude that often serves to erase the unequal conditions of arrival) but because diasporic subjects perfectly inhabit that space between *subjectus* and *subjectum*. They are no longer formally subjected to the power of the nations from which they have departed, but they are also not yet representative of the Canadian people. The reminders of their incomplete becoming are littered everywhere in everyday forms of discrimination. (Cho, 2016, p. 533)

For diasporic people, inhabiting a space of in-between become the everyday realities of survival in Canada. Read in light of Cho's analysis, Chinese communities in Canada provide a space of belonging, acceptance and comfort in an otherwise white settler nation state. Yet while this idea of finding comfort in a sense of Chinese community may appear as a cultural tradition within the logics of Canadian state multiculturalism, it actually represents a continual adaptation to the precarious conditions of living as immigrant and diaspora communities in an often unwelcoming and hostile environment.

Some narrators reflected on their lives as queer diasporic people in relation to their understanding of geographical and social norms in Chinese Canadian communities. For instance, Katherine, one of the interview narrators, explained the history underlying the model of Chinese Canadian community as traditional:

KATHERINE: I think it roots back to towns and villages and then it got brought over here. Like we have a Chinatown, big Chinese communities in Scarborough and Markham, Richmond Hill.

Here Katherine points towards the spatial and cultural divides that exist within Chinese communities by alluding that the towns and villages that exist historically, and presently in China are reflected in the formation of Chinese communities in major Chinese population centres of the Greater Toronto Area. According to Katherine, it appears that the current state of Chinese people in Canada is just a reflection of communities that historically and presently exist within Chinese communities. However, the translation of communities within diaspora is complicated by the structures of settler colonialism and imperialism.

The story of Chinese Canadian community formation is even more complex than the relationships that Katherine intimates. Often seen as a homogenous category, within “Chinese” culture are a vast amount of subcultures and social groups that constitute different communities. Although broadly termed “Chinese”, spoken Chinese language is separated into five main dialectical groups with over 200 individual subdivided dialects (Allison, 2010). Each dialect also may represent a different social group or location within China or Chinese-speaking countries, perhaps even distinguished at the level of cities towns, and villages. It is also important to note that the different groups are not necessarily harmonious but carry classist and shadeist conflicts amongst them, which may be reproduced in the use of their various dialects, or their relative perception as “better” or “worse”, whatever that may mean. What concerns me is being thoughtful of the many potential relations between these communities both in China and when they travel through diaspora. Compared to that of the ‘homeland’ the Chinese circles in Canada are much smaller, and under the political and economic pressures of immigration and geographies of race and diaspora they are more homogenized, as different groups and dialects get placed under the umbrella of “Chinese” and are expected to live and socialize in close proximity. Within these tensions, a homogenized Chinese population took shape in Canada under institutional pressures and continues to exist in this fashion for survival, consequently coming to be labelled in diaspora as tradition.

Simultaneously, the prescribed homogeneity of a population provides one condition for the formation of a sense of community and belonging for diasporic people who historically were not meant to belong or survive. The conditions provided through a sense of community creates a space where survival and futurity can be imagined and felt. It provides comfort in knowing and seeing a physical form of being-ness and survival. Yet, this comfort of community and belonging

within diaspora also comes with tensions within the community as the multitude of dialects, different social groups and locations are falsely homogenized.

Even as diaspora may produce gestures towards commonality, social groups and families in Chinese speaking countries and in diaspora also may pride themselves on being better than others in their own or other Chinese constituencies, inciting a competitiveness amongst not only communities but also households and families. Kuro gives us some insight into the meaning of these dynamics and the consequences of abiding by them within Chinese Canadian communities.

KURO: I feel because, at least, the older generation because of like the values – the way that everyone was raised the same exact way and so everyone’s mind frame is the same. They kind of grew up off fear. It’s always about fear and conforming to rules and things being set in place. And that’s the way it is or else it’s really bad. If you’re good or follow these rules, then that’s what determines you to be a good wife or good person in society. All about reputation, right?

Having face.

Kuro explains that in their understanding of social dynamics in Chinese communities, the ultimate goal is to attain or preserve reputation, represented here through the cultural saying of “having face.” The concept of “face” is a form of social recognition in Chinese culture. In “Face, favour and positioning – a Chinese power game,” T.K.P. Leung and Ricky Yee-kwong Chan argue that “one’s mianzi [face] stands for his/her prestige: a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation (Brunner et al., 1989; Lam and Wong, 1995). A person’s possession of mianzi requires visible success in matching well-established expectations in a social hierarchy. It can be treated as his/her social asset and can be banked and exchanged for favours at times,” (Leung and Chan, 2000, p. 1577). Thus, the concept of “having face”

connotes social relations based in an economy of respect and pride, which is concerned with producing, exchanging and retaining power. To maintain status in the society, one must maintain their “face”: in other words, being better than whoever does not “have face” or who has “lost face”. A good reputation translates to having face.

According to Kuro, in order to have a good reputation as a woman, one must also be a good person or good wife. The ideology of “good” presents itself through a singular form, requiring conformity. Elizabeth Engebretson’s work on queer women in China lends us insight into Chinese cultural understandings of marriage and conformity. In *Queer Women in Urban China: An Ethnography*, Engebretson writes “because the institution of marriage was seen as key to ensure social stability and national harmony, especially by way of the feminine symbolism of wife and mother, any nonmarital sex was criticized for its moral, health-related, and nationalist deficiency (Chou 2001; Wu, 2003; Hershatter 2007; Wei, 2007)” (15). Following this logic, women who deviate from conformity are seen as bad people, bad family members and bad daughters. Casted as deviant in society and in the community, it is assumed that they make the family “lose face”.

Thus, the fear of acquiring a bad reputation and losing face results in conformity, and greater fear. As Kuro points out, this leads to “everyone [being] raised the same exact way and so everyone’s mind frame is the same,” through ideals of what is deemed “good” and as “having face”. Kuro goes on to say what they perceive as occurring when conformity is disrupted:

KURO: When they’re insecure, they get frustrated and they get aggressive.

This [gender non-conformity and diversity] is like something totally out there, right? So that kind of thing brings fear. And they feel like they are losing control ‘cause they always feel like they have to be in control.

Following Kuro's analysis, the presence of insecurity within "the older generation" of Chinese Canadian communities results from a sense of loss of control, and the fear that losing control endangers conformity. This transpires in two ways, according to Kuro. One is that they lose control first, and then fear appears. The other is to already fear a potential future loss in control of conformity. Either way, fear becomes the driving force of social or, for Kuro, familial relations, and what occurs as a result is frustration and aggression. Kuro continues,

just because we [non-binary people] are out there, we break the rules. We break the norm. We're outspoken. The way we dress and everything is just like free expression. So that kind of thing brings fear.

Kuro's statements stem from their experiences of gender non-conformity and the reactions they receive not only from their family but also from the broader Chinese community. Perceived gender non-conformity brings about fear of disrupting gender and social norms, and in turn relates to a potential loss in social status and losing face. In Kuro's case, their parents are largely accepting of their queer identities, but Kuro's analysis demonstrates that their parents reach their form of acceptance as a result of navigating the perceived expectations of a broader social context, organized around "face".

For Chinese people in Canada, the relationship to a diasporic community is complicated. For one, the precariousness of citizenship is an incomplete citizenship that does not necessarily signify belonging or acceptance within a white settler state. In turn, staying cohesive under a homogenizing umbrella provides a sense of community, stability and support in the face of racial, economical and social marginalization. On the other hand, the competitiveness amongst the myriad of dialectical groups, communities, households and families also carries over in diaspora. The specific cultural phenomenon of "having face" penetrates into everyday

interactions and how individuals and families perceive and regulate themselves, as well as each other. Whether it be to the broader Canadian society, the community or the family, there is constantly a pressure to belong and, in some instances, to conform for survival.

On Respectability Politics and Gossip

Understanding some of the social pressures that inform Chinese diaspora communities helps illuminate the inter-generational dilemmas negotiated by queer diasporic people within their families and with members of the broader Chinese community. The ways in which queer diasporic people perceive and regulate themselves are in relation to their diasporic families and communities. Other social phenomenon such as respectability politics and gossip are also navigated alongside “having face.” The everyday negotiations and actions of my narrators through these dynamics give us insight into the bigger picture of familial and community dynamics that inform queer diasporic being and belonging.

Egg illustrates some of the deeper dilemmas not often discussed between family members, but are present realities in that they impact her everyday actions:

EGG: Within the larger Lau family, even in the beginning when [Egg’s maternal grandmother] was giving birth to three daughters, [the family was like,] “what are you, useless?” kind of thing. “Why haven’t you birthed a son?” She’s been able to give them opportunities to get educated and have their children get educated as well. There is a lot of middle-class respectability politics. So, that’s why for my mother and my grandmother, there’s a particular reputation in the family that has come through a lot of the women’s hard work. And so, that’s why it’s like more complicated.

Egg's story demonstrates her awareness of a phenomenon examined in particular by feminist and queer diaspora scholars, in which diasporic communities navigate racial oppression and social marginalization by investing internally in a politics of respectability. For instance, in *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, Patricia Hill Collins writes "those who embraced a politics of respectability aimed to provide dignity for working-class African American women migrants who led hard lives, yet the actual programs targeted toward working-class women clearly advised them to emulate the respectability of middle-class female role models. Despite being embedded in racially segregated communities, the politics of respectability basically aimed for White approval" (Collins, 2005, p. 72). Respectability politics becomes a mechanism to control and regulate working-class women. This is especially true for queer women and non-binary people of color as the notions of sexual purity (heterosexuality) fall amongst the sensibility of respectability politics (Collins, 2005).

In Egg's case, firstly, she points to the strength of her grandmother residing within a heavily patriarchal family and society while birthing and raising three daughters. Her grandmother worked hard to satisfy the middle-class respectability politics within the family by proving that even with three daughters, all would benefit from higher education and hoped-for economic success. Here and throughout her interview, Egg emphasizes that the hard work put in by women rather than men brought her and her family the social and economic class advancement they experience relative to the rest of the family. Egg's story shows us that social acceptability is governed by norms that are not static but can shift. Egg later explains that in this case, by achieving reputation through middle-class respectability politics, her grandmother was able to flip the script and become the matriarch of the family: an uncommon result within her family or the broader Chinese cultural context during her era. However, Egg then invokes the

complication that each subsequent generation now will need to perform their own version of middle-class respectability politics in order to protect the achievements, and reputation of the generation before them. Their reputation has come through the hard work of women, so each generation of women feels the need to uphold, extend, and in this sense protect the hard work of the generation before them so as not to lose status or “face”.

While Egg invokes the actions of previous generations as informing the current generation, Kuro shows us how similar respectability politics transpire within the present:

KURO: It’s like almost a set thing. It’s almost like everyone is robotic, I feel.

Like even amongst other Chinese families. I feel like it’s a thing for you to show off your life or where you’re at. And you know, like this is my girlfriend and I’m at this job now... That you’re going to be judged and disgraced and those things.

Also, it’s about reputation that if you see it in that way, “Oh what will like the rest of the family think?” and they’re also full of gossip, right? Words can spread about you and they’re just caring about losing face. Cause they’re always about status.

As Kuro describes, the stages and accomplishments of life revolve around how it would be perceived by others. Everyday negotiations are penetrated by respectability politics through the action of gossip and the concept of having face. Kuro’s narrative illustrates the everyday and occasional challenges they face in terms of answering questions asked by their relatives and family friends about their life. “Showing off” ideals of conformity lead to having face and pride. When these answers do not conform to the ideals of “goodness” and “success” in their framework, comments from others turn into gossip that is meant to disrupt another’s status and “face” while doing nothing to your own.

Nevertheless, Kuro's explanation of this reality does not mean that they passively comply with its implications in their life. While these are the realities Kuro tells us about, they also tell us about their everyday acts of challenging such notions through their choice of everyday dress and gender presentation as a self-identified gender non-conforming, non-binary individual. Their form of protest does not need to be verbal, as they still attend gatherings with the people who ask these questions. Their defiance manifests in their evident confidence in their life and gender presentation, whether doing so means abiding by middle-class respectability politics or not. Kuro explains that as long as they exude confidence and comfort within themselves, their parents are also able to feel comfortable and to accept them for who they are. In this sense, in Kuro's navigation of the ever-present and unresolved pitfalls of respectability politics, there is no clear-cut position for them to take between verbalization or silence, or between out or closeted, and there does not need to be.

Placed in conversation, both Egg and Kuro highlight the power of reputation and status within their respective families and Chinese communities and possible trajectories to navigate these realities. I interpret them not to be saying that living by or against respectability politics is a better choice, but rather that to live as queer diasporic individuals they must understand the many underlying reasons for those politics as they then choose to do one or the other. For Egg, striving for education, which places her in compliance with middle-class respectability politics is a way of protecting her grandmother and mother's hard work. Kuro defies the assumptions of gender conformity as a way to disrupt the "robotic nature of Chinese communities" while understanding and navigating social expectations in a manner that results in receiving acceptance with their immediate family. In these varied accounts, queer and gender-nonconforming Chinese Canadian people present no easy solution to the dichotomies of coming out or being closeted, being silent

or verbalizing, or embracing individualism or familial harmony, but rather navigate the tensions with familial and community acceptance with distinctive strategies.

Not Coming Out as Form of Care

The everyday discursive practices of not coming out as a form of care for the family are the material realities and contradictions for queer people of colour residing in what bell hooks terms the “homeplace”. E. Patrick Johnson suggests “it is from homeplace that we people of color live out the contradictions of our lives”; despite the contradictions faced within the homeplace for Black queer and other queer diasporic people, it has been a site of survival within a white settler state (Johnson, 2000, 149). Thus, leaving or disrupting harmony within homeplace may not be ideal for queer diasporic peoples who are cognisant of the racial oppressions their communities face. That is not to say that the homeplace can not be critiqued as an oppressive space (Fung 1991; Johnson, 2000), but that for some people, choosing not to verbalize one’s sexuality and other subsequent strategies are everyday practices of living within the homeplace and caring for and protecting its members.

For each of the following three informants, whether or not they have disclosed their sexuality to their family, living a life that is “historically situated and materially conditioned” (Johnson, 2000, p. 127) by racial marginalization prompts them to choose not to come out in certain contexts in order to navigate everyday dilemmas within their family, the Chinese community and/or the Chinese Christian community. The first informant speaks about her sense of Chinese identity and the influence of familial respectability politics on her decision not to come out to her mother. The second account illustrates one navigating respectability politics in extended the family and community as a form of care, even as they have already come out to immediate family. The last is an account of navigating the tensions of family and religion in

choosing not to explicitly come out to anyone. In all three cases, informants' decisions to verbalize sexuality (come out) to immediate or extended family or to the broader Chinese community take place as a form of care directed towards the family. These accounts provide a launching point for discussing tensions and dilemmas taken by queer (and) Chinese diasporic peoples in their everyday navigations of sexuality, gender, race, class, and religion.

Egg follows her invocations of familial respectability politics by considering how they impact her decision to not come out to her mother. She suggests that her decision not to come out is not based on fear that her mother will not accept her, but rather on her perception of the conditions surrounding her family:

EGG: I don't want to tell my extended family because of that [respectability politics]. Because I feel like they would attribute it as their failure when obviously it's not.

... I think it's more about me being Chinese and me trying to be respectful and mindful of my grandmother and mother when I disclose stuff, because I know they're all strong and they'd be able to deal with stuff regardless of my actions so I might just want to make it more easier in general.

Egg attributes her respectfulness and mindfulness towards her mother and grandmother as being part of her sense of Chinese identity. The fear of failure and avoiding disclosure are what upholds this respectability politics of the family. Egg is mindful of the possibility that her own coming out could be perceived by members of the Chinese community or even by her relatives as a failure: either perceived as a failure of the family in raising her to conform to heteronormative family values; or a failure on Egg's part to conform to heteronormative ideals

for Chinese women (Engebretson, 2013). Family-based conformity and gendered hierarchies remain as ideals for traditional Chinese society as women are expected to focus on marriage and motherhood (Engebretson, 2013). Egg's aim to "make it easier" speaks to her awareness of the struggles that her mother and grandmother already face, such as raising their children alone while upholding patriarchy, and her desire to not further complicate the dynamics they navigate. Thus, her decision to not come out may be read as a form of care, in that her intention is not to add to the pressure already experienced by a single mother and the patriarch within an extended family.

Egg's narrative suggests that, for her, there is no clear break between queer and Chinese identity. Her respectfulness and mindfulness that stem from her understanding of Chinese identity inform her queer identity and her decisions about when its announcement and verbalization are necessary. Egg's inseparable identities and realities are affirmed by Cathy Cohen's critique of "queer theorizing which ... seems to ignore the ways in which some traditional social identities and communal ties can, in fact, be important to one's survival" (Cohen, 1997, p. 450). Egg and Cohen show us that communal ties within communities of colour closely interconnect with and mutually impact sexual identities. The identities are experienced simultaneously and interconnected as one identity informs the other. The Chinese self may impact how the queer self is expressed and vice versa. Rather than being understood and experienced separately, the relations among our queer and Chinese identities inform our queer diasporic selfhood as queer (and) Chinese.

Jessy argues that one's sense of queer (and) Chinese identity is not necessarily predicated on the ability to verbalize identity. Although Jessy told her mother about her sexuality and her mother is accepting, Jessy doesn't find it to be important to inform her extended family

members, apparently due to her being mindful of her mother's comfort in navigating relations with the extended family.

JESSY: No other family members know but they don't know because I don't tell them, because I respect my mom. Cause I think she's accepting of it, towards me at least, but she doesn't want other people to know. I don't feel like it's my right, if anything, to put my mom through that. So it's not my place to tell my family that I'm gay. Like I want her to do it on her terms, if she's comfortable with it then sure she can do it. It doesn't change anything for me, but it would change something for her. That's why I won't do it.

Having found acceptance in her immediate family, Jessy does not feel the need to verbalize her sexuality to the rest of the extended family because it "doesn't change anything" for her. Rather than feeling a need to "come out" and verbalize sexual identity to her entire family in order to feel accepted, for Jessy, the acceptance of her mother is enough. At once, Jessy is mindful that verbalizing her sexuality to her extended family may change the familial dynamics that her mother negotiates. The decision not to verbalize to her extended family is a form of care that respects her mother's decision to "not want other people to know" because it "would change something for her." Jessy navigates extended family dynamics and questioning while being mindful of her mother:

When you go to family dinners and outings and every relative is like "hey, where's your boyfriend? Are you dating yet and stuff?" Like I could totally just be like, "no, I don't have a boyfriend 'cause I like, cause I'm gay." To tell my family is kind of putting undue stress on my mom too. So I just rather not do it.

Cause it's not a big thing to me. Like I could just be like "no, I'm not dating anyone. I don't want to, not yet," kind of thing.

Mindful of her mother's position, Jessy's strategic navigation of extended family dynamics by declining to answer questions is a rejection of the questions, not a rejection of the self. Jessy avoids "putting undue stress" on her mother when she answers questions regarding a boyfriend by speaking to the act of dating rather than about a male partner. Muñoz's theory of disidentification is useful here in understanding the strategy Jessy takes in deflecting questions from her extended family (Muñoz, 1999). As Muñoz proposes, Jessy does not strictly assimilate to the "dominant ideology" (acting like she would have a boyfriend) nor does she explicitly oppose it (answering that she is 'gay'). Her answering can be viewed as a performance of disidentification, in that: she does neither directly answers nor corrects their heteronormative definitions of dating; instead she navigates their questioning by performing a position in between a conforming answer and a refusal to answer.

Jessy's performance emerges from the care she exhibits for the material realities experienced by her mother. Jessy's strategies bring us back to the realities, implications and manifestations of quare life. E. Patrick Johnson's invocation of "quare" takes into consideration Muñoz's theory by stating that

taken together, performance and quare theories alert us to the ways in which these disidentificatory performances serve material ends, and they do this work by accounting for the context in which these performances occur ... Ultimately, quare studies offers a more utilitarian theory of identity politics, focusing not just on performers and effects, but also on contexts and historical situatedness. (Johnson, 2005, p. 140)

By neither fully answering nor rejecting her relatives' questioning and its heteronormative implications, Jessy performs disidentification as a form of resistance to the fixity of dominant discourse and practices a sense of self that exists in flux rather than in a static mode of identification. Taking up this strategy as a form of care for her mother also grounds it in Jessy's awareness of the material contexts that her immediate family must navigate, living together and caring for one another during Jessy's growing up as a queer diasporic subject.

My narrators illustrate that understanding and negotiating a queer (and) Chinese identity takes into consideration not only of the self and self expression, but also family and community around them. As queer diasporic subjects, the self is not easily compartmentalized into labels and identities, rather they are experienced simultaneously and interconnectedly. Many of my narrators have chosen not to come out to all their families and communities as a result of care towards their immediate family in diaspora. That is not to say that my narrators are not "out", as their forms of expressions and definitions of being out differ from those of queer liberalism's tenets. Subsequently, they disrupt the dichotomies of individual/familial harmony and coming out/not coming out. There is not a clear distinction as to where my narrators may reside and there does not need to be one. They understand themselves and create their own forms of being and belonging that encompass their identities, families and communities.

Chapter 3

On Self-Acceptance, Expression and Be(long)ing

Queers of color and other minoritarians have been denied a world. Yet, these citizen subjects are not without resources – they never have been

– José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, 1999

This chapter examines the formation of queer diasporic selfhood by tracing how Chinese Canadian queer women and non-binary people perceive themselves in relation to the temporal and spatial dynamics they navigate. While demonstrating the messiness, tensions and internal conflicts of living in queer diaspora, these narrators exceed narratives of queer diasporic subjects as always displaced from the home by working both within and beyond the familial home to create alternative forms of belonging and meanings of “home.” As their narratives illustrate, they achieve these strategies by using the self as a launching point: that is, by creating an understanding of the self as an origin to view and experience the social, personal and political worlds.

In making this argument I take inspiration from the work of Jafari Sinclair Allen in his book *¡Venceremos?: The Erotics of Black Self-Making in Cuba* (Allen 2011) which provides a lens through which we can engage with queer diasporic understandings of being, belonging, and self-acceptance. Building from Black feminist theorists of Black women’s and queer sexualities,

Allen contends that for Black queer people the erotic and “erotic subjectivity” (in M. Jacqui Alexander’s terms) “goes well beyond associations with sensuality, sex and sexuality” (Allen, 2011, p. 96). Allen centrally engages with the work of Audre Lorde, who theorizes the erotic as “a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning without lives” (Lorde, 1984, p. 57). Allen argues that applying an erotic lens towards subjectivity, and subsequently membership and citizenship, allows for a “deeper understandings and compulsions of the body and soul, simultaneously embodying and invoking sex and death- works toward not only transgressing but also transcending and finally transforming hegemonies” (Allen, 2011, p. 192). Oneself becomes the launching point to critique and navigate the world using these embodied deeper understandings (Allen, 2011).

The self as a launching point does not reside in isolation. We are shaped by and through the social, temporal and spatial realities around us, even as these realities reside in the background in relation to us. In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientation, Objects, Others*, Sarah Ahmed suggests “if phenomenology is to attend to the back, it might do so by giving an account of the conditions of emergence for something, which would not necessarily be available in how that thing presents itself to consciousness” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 38). Attending to the back, as Ahmed explains, would mean attending to the social, temporal and spatial realities that are not often thought about. For example, when discussing their sense of belonging, self-acceptance and home, although not explicitly named, my narrators invoke underlying themes of citizenship, nationhood and diasporic living. These were more explicit instances of attending to the conditions that had led to their understandings of the self, belonging and home. Ahmed further elaborates on the concept of arrival as “what arrives not only depends on time, but is shaped by

the conditions of its arrival, by how it came to get here” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 40). The current realities that my narrators inhabit are shaped by their conditions of arrival through the simultaneous negotiations of sexuality, gender, race, nationhood and citizenship.

As such, this intertwining arrival of social and spatial temporality can also be understood through Jasbir Puar’s notion of homonationalism. Puar defines homonationalism as “a facet of modernity and a historical shift marked by the entrance of (some) homosexual bodies as worthy of protection by nation-states, a constitutive and fundamental reorientation of the relationship between the state, capitalism, and sexuality” (Puar, 2013, p. 337). The relationship is then upheld by inscriptions of whiteness and racialization onto people as worth citizens of the state, denoting belonging. Thus, sexual citizenship becomes a tool for modernity and continued colonialism as certain bodies are deemed queer, queer enough and/or too queer (Dryden and Lenon, 2015). In the introduction of their anthology, OmiSoore H. Dryden and Suzanne Lenon build on Jasbir Puar’s work on homonationalism as they suggest that the “contemporary articulations of sexual citizenship are not only complicit with a conservative, neoliberal Canadian nation but also predicated on foundational Canadian national mythologies that inscribe whiteness as the embodiment of legitimate citizenship and belonging” (Dryden and Lenon, 2015, p. 3). Racialized queer diasporic people are then excluded from legitimate citizenship and belonging as whiteness is inscribed into sexual citizenship. Also working with Jasbir Puar’s work, Dai Kojima’s dissertation *No Arrivals: The Cultural Politics of Mobilities In Queer Asian Diasporas* speaks towards the location that queer Asian migrants inhabit within the Canadian state. Kojima argues “the homonationalist discourse in Canada, in its totality, renders invisible the location of belonging for queer Asian migrants twice-over: First, by imagining Asia (its internal differences notwithstanding) as backward, the abject of Canadian queer modernity (Canada becomes not

only better than the US, but better than all Asian countries as well); then, secondly, by obscuring the privileges and conditions of neoliberal sexual citizenship in the white-dominant nation” (Kojima, 2015, p. 12). He terms this a process of double-displacement as “the aspiration for sexual liberation falters under the weight of histories of race and immigration, which generates an ironic story about queer migrants of colour, that is, they can no longer go back, yet they struggle to find belonging in their new homeland” (Kojima, 2015, p. 12). Spoken together, Puar, Kojima, Dryden and Lenon illustrate the precarious location that queer diasporic peoples navigate within the complicity of sexual citizenship in homonationalism and the exclusion and erasure of racialized peoples from notions of citizenship, home and belonging. Although not often brought to the forefront of consciousness, these social, spatial and temporal realities can not be separated from conscious feelings of belonging and self-acceptance as a queer diasporic person (Ahmed, 2006). I am then interested in how queer diasporic peoples negotiate and find sites and senses of belonging and self-acceptance despite these everyday (un)conscious realities.

This chapter is about the self, seeking acceptance and belonging through various avenues. There is not one singular form of acceptance or belonging, but rather these are desired, felt and impacted by many different relationships. My narrators speak about acceptance through forms of familial acceptance and self-acceptance. Even then, within self-acceptance there are multi-dimensional factors of the self, family and others that impact this relationship to the self. Next, a sense of belonging is discussed in relation to a connection to and acceptance by others. It was interesting that within the focus group, when asked to talk about what a sense of belonging meant, the topic of non-belonging was one of the first to emerge. The negotiations of non-belonging then lead to discussions of prescribed belonging and subsequently, spaces of belonging. However, within these topics there is not always a general consensus or methodology

of being. Most often, these narratives do not conform to one another, rather they speak towards the messiness of being queer (and) Chinese. I take inspiration from Martin Manalansan's essay "Queer Worldings: The Messy Art of Being Global in Manila and New York" on his usage of "mess". Manalansan contends "queer, as I conceptualize it, is about messing things up, creating disorder and disruptive commotion within the normative arrangements of bodies, things, spaces and institutions" (Manalansan, 2015, p. 567). For my narrators, these aspects of acceptance and belonging all exist within the messiness of the social, temporal and spatial realities of living in queer diaspora. The intertwining of sexual, gender, race, nationhood and citizenship are present within their relationships to the self and others.

This chapter begins and ends with two key narratives. The initial case study of Kuro and the concluding study of Chris both focus on their commitments to continuous self-growth as queer diasporic subjects. They both speak towards their own interpretations and experiences towards a sense of self, belonging and self-acceptance. But they do so by navigating their social, personal and political worlds very differently: Kuro considering themselves to be "out" but refusing to be fully known, and Chris who identifies as queer but chooses "not to practice queerness.". Rather than interpreting either of their stories as more liberating or oppressive, I present them both as uniquely witnessing and explaining the messiness, tension, healing and resilience of being a queer diasporic person in the Chinese Canadian diaspora.

Kuro

The self provides a launching point into navigating the everyday (Allen, 2011). Recognizing this point can allow one to understand and start within the self first. One of my narrators, Kuro, was able to recognize this for themselves. Kuro's story begins with exploring and understanding the self first in order to feel a sense of belonging, acceptance of the self and

acceptance from others. The self is the launching point towards experiencing the world around them. At times, the self was negotiated and understood through external social and spatial factors around them. However, these factors were mutually reflective as understanding of the self reflected their experience and their experience reflected onto a deeper understanding of the self. Through these experiences Kuro could understand for themselves what it meant to be “out” and liberated through their own terms.

Kuro identifies as a queer, genderqueer, gender fluid and non-binary individual. However, these labels are not important to them as they also see identifications as “changing all the time based on feeling.” Identifying as gender fluid, they do not feel limited by sexual orientation or terms pertaining to sexuality. Rather, embracing fluidity is how they have come to understand themselves and, in turn, feel a form of self-acceptance and a sense of belonging within various communities.

By emphasizing the significance of change, Kuro presents their sense of self in some contrast to their sense of the discourse of coming out: they refuse a process of coming out that is linear and a singular announcement.

KURO: Everybody changes and it doesn't have to be announced to the whole world, right? I feel like when you bring this whole process of coming out, it's like something forcing you have to do and you feel like everyone has to accept you. So, I feel like you just let yourself change overtime and just gradual, take your time and it's not a process, it's just growing up, accepting and knowing who you are and expressing it out on your own way.

For Kuro, the idea of having to come out is not appealing. They experience it as a process imposed on the self and those around them, one that does not necessarily warrant any immediate form of benefit or growth. Instead they chose to present themselves through expression rather than verbalization. In Kuro's experience, letting themselves grow and change without external pressure and judgement was what allowed them to accept and express themselves. Here we see that Kuro does not readily subscribe to the ideologies of coming out upheld by queer liberalism. The visibility attached to declarations of coming out in Canada does not necessarily benefit a queer diasporic person's own identity construction but rather serves the public construction of queer identities, and subsequently reinforcing queer liberalism. Kuro was able to express their gender in their own liberatory way without requiring verbalization, effectively disrupting the presumption that verbalization liberates queer people from silence. Oftentimes, refusing an announcement is read as silence. However, Kuro also illustrates that this form of silence may only be an absence of speech and not necessarily silence in expression of the self.

Through the early stages of learning about and expressing themselves, Kuro decided to come out to their parents. Initially, Kuro had identified as a lesbian and so it was the label they had told their parents.

KURO: They knew when I came out as a lesbian. They still refer me as a female, as their daughter. But that's okay to me cause for me being fluid, I embrace masculine, feminine and the in-betweens. For them [family] to just accept it and let me do my thing, I don't need to push them to anything else.

The labels prescribed onto Kuro by their parents was not the key focus. Kuro did not require an acceptance of specific identities, but rather an understanding in the refusal of dominant heteronormative ideologies. At times, the unspoken visibility and expression is able to explain

more than words can describe, as in Kuro's case of fluid gender expression. Simultaneously, this does not mean that Kuro is silent about their sense of self. Within Kuro's narrative, there is still forms visibility and expression even as they are not explicitly telling their parents the labels they use.

Initially, Kuro had come out as a lesbian, but they subsequently realized that the label did not encompass every part of themselves. They then identified as trans, but they felt that it still did not encompass their full sense of self, to the point that they felt like they were in limbo with regards to their gender. Kuro spoke to their resolution of this when they addressed their journey of coming to know themselves and their fluidity, after navigating social pressures to perceive parts of themselves as mutually exclusive or as setting a singular direction:

KURO: More like mentally getting to know every part of you. The whole feminine and the masculine thing. I know a lot of people just jump the gun. For me, I may dress like a tomboy, but I automatically jumped into "I'm trans, I'm a guy. I'm a straight guy." But then when I jumped in I felt like the more I embraced one, the more I had to give up the other. But it wasn't until I met other people that helped me see that I don't have to. I am a mix of many things.

Kuro explains here that they had initially followed scripts they perceived from the LGBTQ community rather than on their own terms. Presenting as a tomboy or being a masculine AFAB (assigned female at birth) person, they had "automatically jumped" into identifying as trans. However, identifying as a trans man made Kuro feel that they were only able to identify with masculinity and had to exclude forms of femininity in their life. Initially Kuro thought that being a trans man meant being a "straight guy," but it also felt like having to choose between being masculine and feminine. And so, they did not feel like this encompassed their gender identity.

Only when they let go of the idea of being trans and chose to identify as gender non-conforming, were they able to feel a sense of fluidity emerge.

What also emerges from Kuro's story is a view that a genderqueer, gender fluid and non-binary identity as separate from a trans identity. This is in contrast to an understanding that these identities are also perceived as being on the trans spectrum (Stryker, 2006). However, Kuro's explains that their understanding of their identity is separate from the trans identity they had previously adopted. Yet, their questioning and exploration with gender is an experience that many cis-identifying people do not go through. Although Kuro may be expressing gender on the trans spectrum, they may also be struggling to identify or not with trans.

Meeting diverse people inside and outside their usual social groups and collecting and absorbing the diverse narratives of other people helped Kuro better understand themselves. One such place was through their workplace, where Kuro felt they were able to explore their sense of self even more. While in culinary school they discovered that "this industry is actually full of queer people." They felt a sense of belonging within the culinary industry that allowed them to get to know themselves better.

Eventually, Kuro found social networks they identified with where they could feel support specifically for their experience as a Chinese Canadian navigating gender non-conformance in context of their diasporic community.

KURO: Since I've joined [Queer Asian Youth (QAY) and Asian Community AIDS Services (ACAS)], I felt that they were able to understand where I come from, because a lot of people don't understand like where our culture and that it's not easy to just say "oh, then just break from it." "Why don't you just speak

up and everything?” There’s a certain way around things that each of us learn from coming out or expressing ourselves, make it a little bit easier for other people and they’re allowed to take their time and be able to like talk to someone that’s not trying to force them. Because they don’t understand their situation, right?

Kuro’s experience and understanding of the QAY and ACAS communities demonstrates the contention of queer diasporic subject with queer liberalism’s ideologies of the closet. For Kuro, QAY and ACAS were spaces where they felt there was no obligation to speak about the self in a fashion contrary to their sense of self, and rather where they could just be and express themselves. Spaces like QAY support the various decisions about identity among their participants, whether people chose to express themselves or come out or not, because their first priority is to form a community that joins people across different ethnicities but nevertheless understands their cultural backgrounds and dilemmas. These spaces are queer without requiring verbalization of any identity or identities when they allow a space for participants to just be and belong. The existence of a group for racialized and diasporic queer people is appealing to Kuro as compared to the white queer spaces in which they and my other participants felt excluded. A space like QAY or ACAS was one where there weren’t white people asking why you aren’t out or assuming that you are oppressed if you’re not out to your family, friends and community. The spaces that Kuro encountered are ones that helped them learn and connect with every part of themselves while feeling understood and unpressured to perform coming out in the sense of verbalization.

Having taken steps towards completely understanding themselves as part of their journey to self-acceptance, Kuro felt able to express themselves to their parents and wider community:

KURO: It's kind of like I'm ready for the next step of my life. Because this [sharing with parents] is more for myself. To say "okay, that means I'm accepting of myself being queer and being free of fear and insecurities. And this is for myself to be able to express myself freely." So, doing this means I accept who I am and I'm not afraid to share that with everyone. Regardless, I'm not afraid of their reaction. It's more of me being brave enough to be open about it.

Disclosure in Kuro's case carries multiple interconnected implications for self-acceptance. For one, Kuro indicates that they would feel a sense of freedom on being able to share these parts of their life with their parents. However, rather than this sharing being for or about the parents, Kuro feels that this step would be for their own sense of bravery and self-acceptance. As Kuro says, while they thought that sharing with their parents was important, they were not concerned with their parents' reaction given that the act was more for themselves. This sense of self-acceptance is the type of freedom and liberation Kuro strives to achieve, rather than locating these qualities in making coming out announcements to the world, as queer liberalism would have it. It is not visibility that brings Kuro joy, but rather the freedom to be.

Speaking to self-connection and erotic connection, Audre Lorde reminds us that:

Once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of. Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives. (Lorde, 1984, p. 57)

The erotic involves a deep connection to the self. Once the self is understood, it can then be the launching point to negotiate the quotidian. As exemplified in Kuro's story, their joy was found within the freedom to express their gender and sexuality, rather than following the scripts of queer liberalism or perceived to be set out by the LGBTQ community. Once they were able to connect to themselves, they were able to share and express on their own terms, relative to what was meaningful in their life. It was important for Kuro to honestly evaluate what had meaning to them in terms of being able to be free of fear and insecurities. Kuro's story teaches us that understanding the self can be messy and at times contradicting with many internal conflicts. For instance, visibility and expression does not always have to come with verbalization or an announcement of the self. Kuro's journey was assisted by networks and communities that made space for or affirmed their decision. Thinking with Kuro and Lorde, connecting deeply to the self and the erotic allows us to understand ourselves and reach our own forms of self-acceptance.

Acceptance

Beyond Silence: Within the Absence of Speech

Within the Western discourse of queer liberalism, the absence of speech on topics related to sexual or gender identity would be perceived as silence and would connote hiding or being closeted. Too often the absence of speech about sexuality and gender is read as backwards and oppressive. Silence also poses a dilemma of "exclusion from national cultural life" (Lai, 2014, p. 58) for Chinese Canadians and other diasporic subjects in white supremacist states, such as the white settler societies of North America. As Larissa Lai argues in *Slanting I, Imagining We*, "it seems as though the English-speaking Chinese Canadian is perpetually stuck between the rock of needing to speak the master's tongue in order to break the silence and so enter into liberated Canadian subjectivity and the hard place of telling "the secrets of Chinatown" and so betraying

her ancestors” (Lai, 2014, p. 11). There exists pressure to break the silence and explain themselves in order to be knowable by the white mainstream (Lai, 2014, p. 58). For Chinese Canadian queer and gender nonconforming women, as represented in this study, and for queer diasporic subjects more broadly, the personal desire to speak about sexual desire or identity can not easily be differentiated from the social pressure to “come out” into queer liberalism. In turn, while a reading of silence based on the logics of queer liberalism only marks the absence of speech and does not explore beyond the boundaries of verbalization and visibility, a queer diasporic understanding of silence takes stock of this absence of speech by exemplifying the possibilities within and beyond silence. Queer diaspora scholars demonstrate that silence often attaches to queer diasporic narratives of identity and relationship to family and community (Allen, 2011; Manalansan, 2004; Snorton, 2014; Wekker, 2006). Based on the following ethnographic analysis, I infer that perceived silence is neither an agreement to conform to Western civic and sexual mores nor is it an absolute refusal of them. Silence for queer diasporic subjects is a form of disidentification. And in order to take note of this implication, I also read for the ways in which silence is full of communicated meaning, and thus must not be read simply or in binary terms as the opposite to or the absence of speech (counter-identification). Often imagined or imposed, silence in my analysis is a diasporic mode of being and communication that entails much more than speech and that we must carefully attend to in order to hear. Taken together, these narrators enable us to interrogate assumptions about the meaning of the absence of speech and illustrate that its absence is silence only if we imagine silence itself as an act that communicates beyond the simplicity of speech. Most specifically, my analysis highlights the ways in which these narrators think and act “beyond silence,” when they talk through the forms

of acceptance they perceive within silences that they experienced or wished to experience as part of their journey to freedom as Chinese Canadian queer subjects.

I start by examining an excerpt from B, who as a focus group participant reflects on her traumatic experience of coming out four years earlier, after which she was estranged from her parents for two years. She reflects on what may have transpired in her case:

B: I feel that no one should feel pressured to [come out] because it doesn't work for everyone and every family. Silence is a big part of acceptance and a big part of family.

... I really regret coming out because I feel like if I didn't, they would have slowly accepted it. But in a way I kind of forced it down their throats. I wished I didn't because I feel like there is this unspoken truth between our family that still goes on. I feel like if I didn't make them admit it and talk about it then it probably would have been okay. For me, coming out is not important anymore.

B believes that in her case, familial acceptance and silence go hand in hand. Similar to Kuro's invocation in the previous chapter of a general silence around all topics within the family, B feels that "silence is a big part of acceptance and a big part of family." She explains later that she feels acceptance of her sense of self or life as a queer person would have slowly transpired had she not decided to verbalize her silence in a way that contradicted the typical practices of her family. Acceptance through unspoken affirmation is the form of silence that she came to realize would have occurred within her family and that she sees as a possibility within other families as well. She stresses that "no one should feel pressured to [come out]" within her narrative and later conversations. Through these statements, B refuses queer liberalist logics of verbalization and

visibility that she implies she followed only to find that they destroyed the relationship she had with her parents. Read in this fashion, B's narrative suggests the failure of queer liberalism to take into account the racial and cultural dynamics experienced by queer diasporic subjects. Instead, queer liberalism selfishly imposes its own cultural norms while disguising itself under the mantle of liberation and freedom.

Like B, other narrators invoke a form of being within silence that connotes acceptance while providing comfort and reassurance without requiring verbalization. For Chewy, another focus group participant, the existence of a partner represented a form of being and knowing that existed beyond any dichotomy of verbalization/silence.

CHEWY: I never really came out to my parents. It was just one day I brought my girlfriend home and then they just kind of realized that was my girlfriend. They didn't say anything and basically that was it for many years. It's something that is silent in the family. Like they know about it, but we don't talk about it. So, it's actually pretty good.

Chewy states that they never chose or strove to come out in the form of verbalization. Although there is silence around their relationship in the family, Chewy also states that "they know about it," alluding to the point that their parents acknowledge the existence of their girlfriend but see no need to speak with Chewy about it, or about sexuality or dating in general. Chewy points to the fact that silence in the family about sexuality and dating in fact kept familial relations harmonious and "pretty good." In this scenario the absence of speech should not be attributed simply to silence, however, because this absence of speech contains context, knowledge, and feelings that create a form of being-in-relationship that is not silent, and one that works for Chewy and their family. Here the work of Carlos Ulises Decena in *Tacit Subjects: Belonging and*

Same-Sex Desire Among Dominican Immigrant Men usefully illuminates Chewy's narrative. Decena presents "tacit subjects" as his term to suggest that "coming out may sometimes be redundant. In other words, coming out can be a verbal declaration of something that is already understood or assumed—tacit—in an exchange. What is tacit is neither secret nor silence" (Decena, 2011, p. 19). He uses this term to describe queer diasporic subjectivity of "the Dominican immigrant gay men with whom [he] worked, the analysis of them as "in the closet" is consistent with existing views about the way Latinos and other populations of color deal with their sexual identities" (Decena, 2011, p. 19). Specifically addressing family, Decena writes "how tacit one's sexual identity is to others is a matter of interpretation and requires that the others interacting with the informants recognize and decode the self-presentation of bodies and the information about them that circulates in families." (Decena, 2011, p. 20) It is in the everyday "decoding" of the "self-presentation" of Chewy and their partners that Chewy is able to express their sexuality within silence. Thus, not only does familial silence around queerness in diaspora denote interpretation, apart from the absence of speech there is no silencing of the self or of the presence of a partner in Chewy's life and relations with their family.

Cindy, another one of my narrators, makes these qualities explicit when she speaks of silence as a distinctive form of being and knowing that she values:

CINDY: Silence is a form of communication; no answer is still an answer. In a way I prefer this, to know through some silent or physical form of acceptance without having to actually talk about it because I think it would be a bit weird for me.

By bringing up that in fact, to "actually talk about" queer desire or gender non-conformance with her parents would "be a bit weird", Cindy highlights that the act of silence takes consideration

not only of parental feelings but also of the feelings of the queer family member who chooses it. The verbalization of sexuality would feel out of place for Cindy. Instead, she views silence as “a form of communication” that does not require uncomfortable speech. Through this form of communication, she feels a sense of acceptance. Contrary to queer liberalism’s tenet that coming out represents a freeing of the queer self, Cindy states explicitly a quality inferred by many of my other participants, that coming out would be the weird, awkward, and uncomfortable action that would displace their hoped-for or fully realized experience of familial acceptance in silence. Thus, the process of coming out and the notion of the closet are not culturally constituted by my participants in the same way as queer liberalism prescribes.

If we are able to move beyond the presumption that silence only entails the absence of speech, then we open into possibilities of being within an absence of speech that includes forms of context, feeling and knowing. Subjectivity and intersubjectivity are not dependent on being known through verbalization but exist as forms of being that are felt in multiple ways. I argue that paying attention to the absence of speech and not “knowing” within these participants’ narratives reveals an implicit form of *knowing without knowing* or *knowing without verbalization*, which in that sense exists beyond silence. Within the narratives of B, Chewy and Cindy, there is a sense of knowing without knowing that they desire rather than a verbalization that may be at times feel violent and invasive. A form of silence that entails context, feeling and knowing can provide comfort and a form of acceptance for some. For this reason, this implicit form of knowing with knowing disrupts a dichotomy of verbalization/silence. It moves transcends beyond the binary of either or.

What Familial Acceptance Can Mean

While the pressure queer liberalism places on coming out to families is often founded on the idea of a shameful closet presenting a barrier to familial acceptance, the importance of familial acceptance varies among queer diasporic people and is not necessarily experienced the same by every individual. Just as the idea of a family may mean differently to different people, their ideas of acceptance may mean differently as well. The two following excerpts' nuanced perspectives on the importance of familial acceptance are seemingly opposed, as one views familial acceptance as important and one does not. But fundamentally they both refute the notion that desire for familial acceptance is predicated on shame and the desire to overcome the closet.

Egg explains that her reasoning for wanting her mother or other family members to know about her sexuality is founded on her desire to connect their lives through "integration":

EGG: It's about integrating them fully into my life and so they feel fully integrated into mine as well. So, integration wouldn't then be about authenticity or like notions of shame or pride. It's just like acceptance and like being together, right? Because you have to interact this fact with me. I feel like the reason why I would want to come out is because I would want my mother to be integrated in this part of my life, not because I feel unauthentic by not telling her or I feel shame. But I understand that, that's not everybody's position in life to integrate that with their family.

Here, Egg names a number of qualities that Eng and other scholars highlight within queer liberalism, notably the premising of a liberated queer self on resolving a dichotomy between shame and pride, and realizing authentic queerness as the result of journeying from the one to the other (Eng, 2011; Gopinath, 2005; Manalansan, 2004). For Egg, familial acceptance disregards

these notions to form rather around a shared understanding of the self. While she emphasizes “integration” within her invocations of familial acceptance, the fact that in her view her mother is not fully integrated into her life does not then lead her to feel that her life or her sense of queerness is inauthentic. Instead, Egg values the shared interactions she experiences through her integration into her family. This sense of being together through interaction is what brings joy and love to her life, and it represents what she would want to share with her mother. As we saw in the previous chapter, Egg places her mother in high regard as a strong figure in her life. Integrating their lives may also mean, for Egg, negotiating the middle-class respectability politics in which her family is enmeshed. Yet Egg is very mindful in noting while this is her route to negotiating familial acceptance, integration is not attainable or even desired by everyone. Nevertheless, her story reminds us that familial acceptance is not always straightforward, and a desire for it need not be grounded in feelings of shame, guilt, or being in the closet.

Jessy offers a distinctive perspective when she explains that she does not view familial acceptance as the most important factor in giving her a sense of acceptance.

JESSY: I think to my mom, even mom’s generation, it’s like family first. Like family’s bond are like stronger than friends. But I don’t think that’s necessarily true anymore. Cause I feel like I’m a lot closer with my friends than I will ever be with my family. Just cause I can talk to them more and understand more.

... Friends are more important to me than like family. That sounds bad, but yeah, like if he [brother] didn’t accept me it wouldn’t have been as devastating to me as my friends not accepting me.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Jessy values familial harmony by not creating undue stress on her mother. She feels acceptance from her mother and brother. However, in this excerpt she also explains that her friends, who are mostly Chinese as well, are more important to her than family. At first, she explains this through an inter-generational gap between her and her mother. To her mother, family comes first and is central to her being, while in contrast, Jessy views her friends as more important. Jessy sees this as a generational departure in outlook. However, she also explains that her friends were more important to her than her family in general, including her brother who is from the same generation. To Jessy, communication and understanding is valuable in forming strong relationships, which she harnesses with her friends rather than her family. It was more important that she felt acceptance from her friends than from her brother. In general, familial acceptance was not as important to her than acceptance from her closest friends. That is not to say Jessy does not value familial harmony, but that a desire for familial harmony does not necessarily command importance in her life.

Taken together, Jessy and Egg disrupt a typical framework of understanding queer selfhood and coming out in relation to familial acceptance. For Jessy, while familial harmony is important to her, familial acceptance does not necessarily hold the same emphasis, and balancing familial harmony with acceptance among her friends generates the sense of acceptance she desires. On the other hand, Egg values both familial harmony and familial acceptance, but her reasonings for this are not based on queer liberalist notions of either being trapped by shameful conformity to familial heteronormativity or being freed by announcing queerness and coalescing a modern family around feelings of pride. While differing significantly in their logic for relating to the family, both narrators disrupt the tenets of queer liberalism of coming out to family and a shameful closet, just as both share a sense that their self-acceptance and sense of comfort with

their lives as Chinese Canadian queer women emerges in context of desiring and sustaining familial harmony.

Sense of Self-Acceptance as Experienced Through Others

In general, my narrators discussed self-acceptance and its meaning to them as forming in relation to other people in their lives, from Chinese families, to friends (predominantly Chinese or Asian Canadian) to even a partner's family. Thus, their senses of self developed through daily spatial and temporal interactions with intimate relations. The journey and/or arriving at an understanding or a sense of self is experienced in relation to the intimacies of relationships. This brings us back to Sarah Ahmed's writing in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientation, Objects, Others*. She reminds us that in order to understand what emerges in our lives and how we perceive the world, we must acknowledge the conditions that lead to the present even as they may not be at the forefront of consciousness (Ahmed, 2006). It is also important to pay attention to who and what is around us. She further argues that these conditions are not a matter of coincidence as "the dash in "co-incidence" must be highlighted here to avoid turning the shared arrival into a matter of chance (Ahmed, 2006, p. 39). Therefore, many times the conditions of shared arrival of others and relationships have meaning and an impact on our lives.

On these conditions of shared arrival, Ahmed writes "to "co-incide" suggests how different things happen at the same moment, a happening that bring things near to other things, whereby the nearness shapes the shape of each thing" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 39). The people who arrive in proximity are the ones that can also shape and determine what or who gets near subsequently. In my narrators' cases, they illustrate shared arrival in their relationship to others as a condition that shapes not only how they perceive themselves, but shapes who and what perceptions will arrive in their future. This is accomplished through the simultaneous arrivals and

the conditions and meanings that family, friends and potential in-laws bring into my narrators' lives. The arrival of one relationship can set a precedent for how one understands themselves and negotiates future relationships. Specifically, an arrival of a family, friend or potential in-law can affect one's sense of self acceptance, as exemplified in the next few narratives.

Kaytee highlights that her sense of self-acceptance stems from the ways in which she was socialized while a young person in her family.

KAYTEE: So, coming out for me was a little bit hard because I didn't accept myself. I grew up with a very conservative family, so I thought that [being LGBTQ] was bad. And then I had a friend told me it was okay. So, I started to come out. But then I was still worried, I didn't want my mom to know.

The absence of a sense of self-acceptance stemming from her upbringing within a conservative family made Kaytee find coming out to be difficult. Having been brought up by her family to believe that LGBTQ people were bad and that if she identified as such, she would be bad and not be accepted tied her capacity to accept herself to her familial context. She explains later that her sister was ashamed of Kaytee's sexuality and thus, refused to acknowledge Kaytee as a sister. Subsequently, Kaytee was bullied at school and her sister refused to speak to her. She then explains that through the support of a close friend helped, she was able to come out and gain more self-acceptance.

Jessy addresses her own self-acceptance by speaking to the ways in which support from friends provided a sense of empowerment:

JESSY: After my close group of friends knew, I didn't really care who found out anymore. Cause I was like "well if like some random person doesn't like me

I don't really care. I care more about my close group of friends not accepting me for it." And once I felt that, that was fine.

For Jessy, acceptance from her friends gave her the confidence to navigate her everyday interactions with other people, whether they accepted her or not. At that point, it was not important whether the rest of those around her, including her brother (as mentioned) did not accept her. Her close friends grounded her in the knowledge that she was loved and accepted. This reinforces the point Jessy made earlier that acceptance from her close friends was even more important to her than acceptance from her family. When she gains empowerment from them, the rest of the world's disapproval is no longer relevant in her life.

Yet, sometimes even on feeling acceptance from intimates, one may still not feel self-acceptance because of other factors in play, as in Katherine's case. She explains that she told her entire immediate family that she is dating a woman and they have all been supportive. Most of her close friends know that she is dating a woman as well. Following the two previous scenarios, we might presume that one who receives support from both family and friends would feel self-acceptance. Yet, when asked what self-acceptance means to her, Katherine responded:

KATHERINE: I guess being able to talk about myself without being unsure.

Yeah, cause I'm at that point now. Like when people ask me what I am most of the time I don't really know what to say. I don't know if I've reached it. But mostly, I guess. But I think it will come when we go public or whatever with our relationship. It's basically when her parents find out because we've been in the dark about it and that's been 3 years of our lives. It's almost like you can get used to being in the dark.

Katherine feels uncertainty when she is asked to talk about her relationship to sexuality or queerness partly because of the dependence of her own self-acceptance on growth and change in her relationship with her partner. Katherine explained that self-acceptance will come when she and her partner disclose their relationship to the public, which would mean her partner's parents finding out. For Katherine, her own self-acceptance is dependent on her partner and her partner's parents' acknowledgement of their relationship. Although Katherine's immediate family and close friends know about her relationship, she still feels that her relationship is "in the dark" and that not being able to be announce their relationship to everyone in proximity of her life affects her own sense of self-acceptance. While her partner may feel like she is in hiding from her own parents, Katherine in her distinctive way shares these feelings of being "in the dark" with her partner.

Katherine, Jessy and Kaytee feel varying degrees of self-acceptance from the various people in proximity to them. Kaytee feels that her family hinders her self-acceptance, while Jessy feels that her family does not impact her self-acceptance as much as her friends do. In turn, Katherine can feel acceptance from her close friends and family and still not feel self-acceptance due to not being able to receive acknowledgement and acceptance of her relationship from her partner's family. Taken together, they show that a person's level of self-acceptance is impacted by those around them. Yet self-acceptance takes many different routes and forms and is not negotiated in the same way by each individual: one person's experience may contradict that of another. There is no single, linear path to self-acceptance.

Self-Acceptance as Multi-Dimensional and Continuous

Even though all individuals in this study identify as, LGBQ and Chinese, they followed a multitude of different routes to arrive at each one's unique form of self-acceptance. The complexity of these paths are further revealed by two stories: the first concerns coming to self-acceptance as a multiplicitious subject who exists both within and beyond the identities of queer (and) Chinese, while the second connects the queer (and) Chinese subject to continued growth and change. Read together, these narratives demonstrate that the journey towards and experience of self-acceptance for Chinese Canadian LGBQ people is non-linear, multi-dimensional and continuous.

Egg speaks to these concerns by talking about negotiating relations between her sexuality, her Chinese identity, and her Christianity.

EGG: The Christian sexual ethics were a huge part of my self-acceptance. Not because of the Chinese-ness but because of my Christian-ness that I feel I took more time to figure things out. Because these ideas like one, not to have sex, but to have sex in a different way, and to enjoy sex as well. These three bits were things I eventually arrived to.

For Egg, her Christianity was harder to reconcile with her sexuality than her sense of Chinese-ness. In fact, in the previous chapter Egg explained that her Chinese identity was not a hindrance to her coming out. Here she elaborates that this "Chinese-ness" does not hinder her self-acceptance either. In this case, unlike Katherine, Jessy and Kaytee, Egg's sense of self-acceptance was not impacted solely by those around her, like her family or friends, but also by her own internal conflict in navigating sexual ethics with her faith. Practicing "Christian sexual ethics," which allowed her to "[take] more time to figure things out" was a large part of Egg

discovering herself to not only be able to have sex, “but to have sex in a different way, and to enjoy sex.”

Forms of self-acceptance also may not be static, but dynamic and subject to change, as Cindy explains in her narrative.

CINDY: The first step to anything, is acceptance, and despite that I am in the process of it and am still trying to accept myself fully, for who I am. I’ve learned that it takes a great deal of the stress and weight off your chest. To live freely without thinking about pleasing others and being so uptight about what people say has helped me become stronger and live a happier life. Obviously, there are days when I fall victim to all the criticism or negativity, but we’re only human and can only take so much. Coming out has worked for me, so far, but I will always be in this process. Some days it’ll work for me, some days it won’t.

Cindy believes that her self-acceptance comes first before anything else. Before she decides her next steps — who she will disclose to, how she navigates the world — she has to first endeavour to fully accept herself, even if this process continues as she is “still trying to accept myself fully.” By taking these steps, she feels relief from the pressures that she once felt, from those around her and from her internal thoughts, and is able “to live freely” and find happiness by embracing herself. She links this sense of self-acceptance, freedom and happiness to the process of coming out as something that “has worked for me, so far.” Cindy acknowledges the temporal aspect of “so far” in that coming out is a dynamic and constant process. It is not necessarily a singular or final act but an ongoing process. Given that Cindy reflected on her process of coming out after being prompted by a question about her self-acceptance, it can be inferred that her relationship to self-acceptance played an important role in her being able to come out and view it as a process

that works for her. That this is Cindy's story is not to say that self-acceptance will necessarily lead to coming out, nor that all individuals who choose to come out feel self-acceptance; nor does it mean that those who choose not to come out do not feel self-acceptance. But Cindy's individual experience was that she was able to come out after freeing herself from the internal and external pressures that made it difficult for her to accept herself.

Cindy is careful to note that there are times when she also "falls victim to criticism and negativity." She notes these as "human" feelings and inevitabilities. This may or may not in turn affect her own sense of self-acceptance when she is impacted by criticism and negativity towards her. But she views these interactions as part of her everyday growth and being, similar to her thoughts on coming out: "some days it'll work for me, some days it won't." She views and embraces both processes of coming out and self-acceptance as unstable and everchanging. Yet she is not disheartened by this, rather she feels a sense of self-acceptance, freedom and happiness through acknowledging every part of the process. It is an ongoing process weighted by questions, fear, or a sense that an issue may remain unresolved. The path to self-acceptance is not always clear or straightforward.

Both Cindy and Egg exemplify the complexities and dynamics of navigating self-acceptance. They negotiated different aspects of themselves in relation to their social and personal worlds in order to arrive at the space in these narratives. However, this does not mean that this is their conclusion either. Their stories emphasize the multiple challenges that arise and/or resurface on the path of self-acceptance. They are acknowledging that self-acceptance takes different forms and paths and that it does not have to be an end goal.

Although self-acceptance is about the self, it is predicated by the many contributing factors that are not always at "the forefront of consciousness" (Ahmed, 2006). The everyday

interactions of family, community and friends, however small or large, may have an impact on one's path of self-acceptance. Fear, questioning and a sense that issues are unresolved are all part of the process. That being said, a person who is seeking self-acceptance actually may not yet fully accept themselves but that doesn't mean they are not committed to being on a path to self-acceptance. It is a continuous journey that encompasses ups and downs, arrivals and departures.

Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging through connection and acceptance by others is intricately linked to the perception and understanding of the self and the world one navigates. It is related to how and where one views oneself as constructed through community. In the second chapter, belonging was discussed through the family. Here, a sense of belonging is discussed through several communities my narrators navigate. They detail what a sense of belonging means, how it is created, deconstructed and re-created in queer diasporic life. I had introduced the idea of a sense of belonging to my narrators, but they explained what community meant to them and what various communities they perceived were and were not their own. Their queer diasporic identity provided a source of belonging but also non-belonging in the broader white Canadian state and within communities of (white) queer liberalism. Race and racialization permeate the ideologies behind the formation of what community means for Chinese Canadian LGBTQ women and non-binary people. Here, Dai Kojima's invocation on racialization in queer Asian diaspora is an important note for thinking through the following narratives. He writes, "despite multiple and often competing subjectivities and epistemologies among queer Asian subjects, the physicality of race is squarely lodged in the pervasive logics and meanings of visibility, belonging, and homing" (Kojima, 2015, p. 228-229). As Chinese Canadian LGBTQ women and non-binary people, there is no escaping the physicality of race when navigating white Canadian society, the

broader (white) queer community and even one's own Chinese community. In the sections to follow, the themes of non-belonging in the LGBTQ community, prescribed belonging of the Chinese diaspora, choosing and (re)creating community are explored through my narrators' experiences.

Non-belonging in the LGBTQ Community

In order to think about where one feels one does belong, one might also need to note where feelings of belonging are lacking. In the focus group, when I first proposed the question of what belonging meant to my participants, a common thread emerges and was echoed among many participants who felt for various reasons like they did not belong in a gay, queer, or LGBTQ community. Yet, many of them felt forms of belonging within a queer Asian community. They all point towards forms of queerness and racial normativity present within the communities they describe. This is a reminder of the precarious positions diasporic queer people occupy while navigating sexual citizenship within the neoliberal Canadian state. OmiSoore H. Dryden and Suzanne Lennon contend that a

range of cultural and political processes occurring in contemporary lesbian-gay-queer-trans politics ... interpellate a normatively raced, gendered, sexed, and classed Canadian (homo)sexual subjectivity to uphold the modernity of the white settler nation-state.

(Dryden and Lenon, 2015, p. 5)

Queer (and) Chinese people's felt exclusion from these politics and communities need to be thought of in relation to dominant discourses of normativity that uphold continual forms of racialization and colonialism. As such, there exists feelings of non-belonging from communities as they adhere to the practices of a "raced, gendered, sexed and classed Canadian (homo)sexual

subjectivity”. My narrators are not strangers to these feelings as they discuss feelings of non-belonging almost immediately when I asked them where they felt belonging.

In a conversation that emerged in the focus group, Emily and Kaytee speak together about their feelings of non-belonging within the gay community.

EMILY: One of the places I feel like I least belong in is the gay community, just because I always feel like I have a pressure to perform a certain way. And if I don’t then I’m not gay enough. So, it’s like I thought I was supposed to find acceptance here.

KAYTEE: Belonging to me is more of acceptance. I totally agree with Emily. And the fact that I feel like there’s always a standard. So, not only having your own identity as coming out as queer, but it’s always a label. You always need to know a label for yourself in order to be in this community.

Together, Emily and Kaytee invoke a gay community that they both feeling non-belonging in. I infer that the “gay community” that both Emily and Kaytee allude to is the white gay community as both of them suggest they were part of or had a queer Asian community or group they felt that they belonged to. These feelings of exclusion within a white gay community are not uncommon as similar claims are seen in the works of queer Asian scholars and ethnographies (Fung, 1991; Kojima, 2015; Manalansan, 2003). In “Looking for My Penis”, Richard Fung writes “in my own experience, the existence of a gay Asian community broke down the cultural schizophrenia in which I related on the one hand to a heterosexual family that affirmed my ethnic culture and, on the other; to a gay community that was predominantly white” (Fung, 1991). Additionally, in Dai Kojima’s ethnography, one of his narrators, Micky states “the status quo is the white body. It’s

the centre of desirability in terms of, I guess, mate selection. It is based on a white norm, an unquestioned white norm, unless people pursue what they think is exotic or whatever” (Kojima, 2015, p. 87). The similarities within my narrators, Richard Fung and Mickey (Dai Kojima’s narrator) are feelings of a predominantly white gay community that encompasses a standard or status quo. For my narrators, this was not an uncommon experience as many of them nodded in unison to Emily and Kaytee’s statements during the focus group.

For Emily, the “gay community” is a space that demands a performance from her to be “gay enough.” The pressure to perform “a certain way” deters her away from the community. This could be read as both an inability and/or refusal to perform in a way that conforms within the confines of the community. As such, Emily relates this sense of non-belonging from the pressure of conformity, to that of her feelings of non-acceptance within the community. To Emily, the “gay community” should be a space of acceptance and diversity, rather than the feelings of pressure and conformity that exists for her. Feelings of belonging and acceptance go hand-in-hand in this specific scenario of the (white) gay community. They either exist together or not at all.

Feelings of belonging and acceptance also go hand-in-hand for Kaytee. For Kaytee, to feel belonging, is to feel acceptance. She further elaborates on the feelings of conformity as “there’s always a standard.” The standard is one of identity and the expression of it. Beyond this expression, she feels that a label needs to be adapted and worn. One is unable to belong within this community unless there is a clear label that one identifies with and maintains. Kaytee explains that it is not enough to “have your own identity as coming out as queer.” A possession of one’s own identity is not enough, neither is the acknowledgement to the self. A “queer” identity or label is also not enough. Kaytee feels that it is a specific label and identity that allows

for belonging and space within the broader “community.” Thus, according to Kaytee, if one does not adhere to the standard of adopting a label, they will not feel belonging nor acceptance by that community.

In this next vignette, Rei talks about their feelings towards identities and a broader phenomenon they perceive within the queer community that speaks to the non-belonging of themselves and others around them.

REI: For me, belonging in the queer community was always sort of awkward to some degree because identities can change. But then sort of stopped using that label and went with “I’m queer.” But then there’s a lot of hypersexuality or emphasis on sexuality in queer spaces. And that always did not fit with me. And then later on, I found the asexual identity. There was one individual I heard say “oh, like I feel anxious or I’m not really into the sexual things of relationships.” And I said “well, you can be asexual.” And this other person said “no, they’re gay.” And I’m like “you can be gay and asexual.” There’s just a lot of divide that is perpetuated by society, media, etc.

... And my own little self-fish thing is more POC representation in the Ace (asexual and/or aromatic) community cause its mostly white people.

Rei mentions two points of non-belonging and departure from the “queer community.” The first point they make is one similar to Kaytee and Emily’s. Rei also feels that identities and labels are an inherent part of being part of the queer community. Rather than viewing identities changing as part of the queer community, Rei feels that belonging is “awkward” for them because identities shift and change. They view these changes as a reason for feeling awkward within the queer

community. Subsequently they stopped using the labels they previously used and went with “I’m queer.” In this sense, the term queer is used as a broader political term to signify their sexual and/or gender non-conformity. The second point they make is on the “hypersexuality or emphasis on sexuality in queer spaces.” Finding their asexual identity, Rei feels that the implicit hypersexualization within queer spaces makes them uncomfortable. There is a presumption that if one belongs within the queer community or identifies as gay then they are not able to be asexual. Rei points out the perceived mutual exclusivity of an asexual identity and identification from the queer community. They see this as being incorrectly portrayed and perpetuated by society and media. Rei is adamant on bringing awareness to the asexual, aromantic or “ace” community. They remind us that a queer identity does not necessarily exclude someone from also identifying as asexual.

Along with other participants in the focus group, Rei, Kaytee and Emily agreed that most of them did not find belonging within the broader queer community outside of their own communities. The first two excerpts specifically mention the ideas of conformity and standards within feelings of acceptance and belonging. A sense of non-belonging within the queer community is followed by a sense of non-acceptance as well. This is due to pressures to perform, as explain by Emily, and pressures to conform to a standard, as Kaytee shares. Simultaneously, the performance and standards point towards the identities and labels that many participants felt they needed to adopt and maintain in order to belong to the queer community. Both Rei and Kaytee mentions the specific label of being “queer.” Kaytee mentioned that being “queer” was not enough, but that one had adopt another label and identification on top of the term queer in order to conform to a “standard” within the community. On the other hand, for Rei, after they stopped using other labels, they settled on “I’m queer.” Ironically, the term “queer” exemplified

here almost reads as a mechanism of departure from the queer community itself. Identifying with possibly an all-encompassing label is not enough to feel a sense of belonging within that community. One needs to adopt more specific terms within in order to fully belong.

Prescribed Belonging

Some focus group participants addressed their relationship to belonging by speaking first about their experience of being Chinese within Chinese communities and societies. Their comments focused on experiences of belonging that are not chosen or adopted, but presumed – a phenomenon I will refer to as *prescribed belonging*. The prescribed attachment of a label or identity appears to connote belonging, and it may or may not always result in a sense of belonging. Gaby and RC in the focus group specifically discuss this in relation to their transnational experiences of a Chinese identity.

Gaby's experience of Chinese identity stems from having spent her childhood years in China and then immigrating to Canada during her teenage years. Her comments on the idea of belonging relate it to her understanding of "Chinese culture":

GABY: I think the idea of belonging sometimes does not speak with me because like in Chinese culture, I can not generalize it. It's pretty much you're part of the community. Belonging becomes something that does not matter that much ... The idea of belonging sometimes makes me think whether I fit in.

... This concept [of a sense of belonging] is still kind of a North American concept.

Gaby's comment suggests that she normally would not consider the idea of belonging while she is located within her experience of Chinese culture. She explains that in such a context,

belonging is already presumed: being “part of the community” means it does not need to be thought about. This is a community that has already *prescribed belonging* by virtue of being Chinese or residing in a Chinese location. Gaby reveals that when identity within community is already prescribed, “the idea of belonging” may not need to be thought about. This realization then leads her to state that raising belonging into thought or discussion “sometimes makes me think whether I fit in.” In other words, until belonging is raised as a question, rather than being presumed, Gaby might not have cause to think about it; but once put in question, she feels drawn to consider whether or not she fits in.

She goes on later to explain that she views the idea of belonging as a North American concept that was and still is at times unfamiliar to her. For queer (and) Chinese people, as queer diasporic peoples, the issue of fitting in is raised by the many different realms we may step into, whether they be the Chinese community, the queer community, or any other social locations we may find ourselves within the white heteropatriarchal social contexts of Canada. Fitting in, or at least attempting to do so, requires constant negotiation of the differing spaces that we may find ourselves in. The physicality of race can not be forgotten when navigating belonging with North America, as Gaby views it as a North American concept.

RC expands on the idea of belonging as being a spatial concept, linked to geopolitics and to geographies of race, which shift in meaning as they shift locations and take up differing statuses within those locations.

RC: Hong Kong-ese and Mainlanders and Taiwanese, all have their own labels already. But within that community, this concept of belonging is different. Cause supposedly you are already belonging over there [in Asia] whereas here [in Canada] it’s like your skin colour already shows where – we’re read first and

foremost by our skin colour right? I'm supposed to be Chinese. I'm supposed to be yellow skin. I'm supposed to fit into this community. But do I? Like you're already part of a community.

Here RC showcases *prescribed belonging* in two ways. Firstly, they point towards a presumption of national or cultural belonging, for a Chinese person born and raised in a Chinese country. This perspective may potentially dismiss the internal divides that stem from dialects, regions, colourism and even internal racializations, such as for people who are perceived as of non-Han Chinese descent. The homogenization of "Chinese" erases the differences and conflicts among Chinese people. Secondly, RC brings up the diasporic Chinese Canadian experience of being "read first and foremost by our skin colour." Through the white supremacist assignment of race, once Chinese people arrive in a white supremacist state, such as Canada, they are assigned categorization to a "Chinese" race, and "community". This occurs without checking to see or asking if people do belong or feel like they belong to any such community. White racism and the racialization of immigrants as "Chinese" is imposed uniformly across everyone, while erasing the internal differences within Chinese Canadian communities, such as dialect and area of origin. This form of *prescribed belonging* is distinct from the first point of a Chinese context, as this second form stems from white racism. However, in both instances *prescribed belonging* exists as a social construct of homogeneity and uniformity. RC explains that even when one is already part of a community, feelings of fitting in and belonging do not necessarily follow. In diasporic contexts, the existence of non-belonging to certain groups makes the concept and feeling of belonging more precarious. The feeling of non-belonging becomes hypervisible. Thus, feelings of not belonging within white, (white) queer spaces, may make one start to question whether one belongs in the very community they were prescribed to belong in, the Chinese community. It

does not mean that someone who resides in China, Taiwan or Hong Kong may necessarily fit in with their location, but that at least for these narrators and presumably many others, the matter is typically not brought up or made visible. They are less likely to think about whether they fit in or not when they live and appear to fit into a seemingly universal Chinese community, and it isn't apparent that there are other social groups to which they would not belong. Rather, for these narrators, it appears that only when they feel non-belonging in other contexts they encounter in diaspora, such as the broader white (queer) and heteronormative Canadian social contexts, do they start to question the very beginning locations where they were already prescribed to belong. I read RC's implications of *prescribed belonging* as a critique towards notions of nationhood, belonging and citizenship through Gayatri Gopinath's invocation of a "queer diasporic framework" of analysis (Gopinath, 2005, p.11). Gopinath contends that "diaspora as a concept has its potential to foreground notions of impurity and inauthenticity that resoundingly reject the ethnic and religious absolutism at the center of nationalist projects" (Gopinath, 2005, p.7) while a queer diasporic framework includes how "a consideration of queerness, in other words, becomes a way to challenge nationalist ideologies by restoring the impure, inauthentic, nonreproductive potential of the notion of diaspora" (Gopinath, 2005, p. 11). Queer diaspora provides a critical position or location to analyze the social construct of homogeneity and uniformity within *prescribed belonging*.

The precarious feelings these narrators describe of prescribed belonging without actually feeling a sense of belonging or fitting in, also come with their own intersectional dilemmas. One is the prevalence of assumed heteronormativity

RC: Which is why I mention that heteronormativity is so much harder to like crack, because the assumptions are actually so much strongly routed because,

“you’re part of us, you’re not white skin, you’re not darker skin, so you’re yellow skin, so you’re part of us. And if you are read as feminine then you must be getting married at a certain point, you must be having kids.” So, heteronormativity is even more prevalent and harder to pinpoint.

RC names their experience of continuously reinforced heteronormativity prescribed as part of their diasporic belonging within Chinese community. RC provides an intersectional account of the Chinese diaspora and of their own experience of queer diaspora by revealing that proponents of Chinese community advocate appearing as a unified group by using heteronormativity as a mechanism to denote uniformity. Through narratives of Chinese-ness and implicit heteronormativity, it is assumed that everyone is the same. Again, as a form of *prescribed belonging*, the social construct of homogeneity, uniformity and now also normativity, shields one from being able to see the existence of its social construction. When one conforms to it all, one might not see it. The dangers of needing to be the same, being uniform and unified, within a diasporic context creates a universal caricature that places queer diasporic people in precarious positions with respect to belonging. These exact feelings of presumably unified heteronormativity are what make queer (and) Chinese question their belonging and degree of fitting in within Chinese-ness. The questioning queer diasporic people then may face within such spaces may then get read as homophobia coming from within the Chinese community, when it turns on more complex negotiations of feelings of sameness and differences both in Asian contexts and in diaspora. Yet all along the way, the felt need to be a uniform and unified group actually creates further divisions within diasporic communities like the Chinese Canadian community.

Coming to an awareness of the inner workings of *prescribed belonging* within this heteronormative framework, as a queer (and) Chinese individual, involves adopting a critical point of having a queer diasporic critical perspective. This awareness and critique can benefit one's sexual agency. This idea is in relation to Jacqui M. Alexander's use of erotic autonomy (Alexander, 2005). Alexander contends that "erotic autonomy signals danger to the heterosexual family and to the nation. And because loyalty to the nation as citizen is perennially colonized within reproduction and heterosexuality, erotic autonomy brings with it the potential of undoing the nation entirely, a possible charge of irresponsible citizenship, or no responsibility at all" (Alexander, 2005, p. 23). Being aware and critiquing the *prescribed belonging* of a uniformly heteronormative Chinese community is a form of erotic autonomy that disrupts the nation's processes of heterosexualization and racialization.

Importantly, in both cases, Gaby and RC spoke about belonging at the intersection of Chinese identity and culture without being prompted to do so by my questions. When I asked about whether they experienced a sense of belonging, they related the question to Chinese identity and culture. They both also mentioned the labour of fitting in as lying at the core of their feelings of belonging. Together, Gaby and RC exemplify how belonging for queer diasporic people can be a spatial and geographical experience. They speculate that if one is queer in China, Hong Kong or Taiwan, belonging is not thought about because belonging in those geographic regions seems inherent — even though we know that along terms of nationality, ethnicity, religion, and race, differences within Chinese Asian contexts are constantly being silenced by states and civil society promoters of social uniformity. And queer Chinese in these countries also confront narratives of presumed or inherent belonging by stepping into identities and social lives that, as Engebretsen and others have documented, both try to be compatible with social norms

and assert differences that will not be erased (Engebretsen, 2013; Fung, 1991; Manalansan, 2003; Miaojin, 1994; Thom, 2017). However, they both show us that this differs within a diasporic context. Belonging becomes precarious within many of the social locations they find themselves, even in their prescribed location in the Chinese diasporic community in Canada — prescribed both by diasporic norms *and* by the white settler state. The feelings of non-belonging in one realm or more than one realm (ie. white, white and queer spaces) may also make one start to question the initial point of *prescribed belonging*. The awareness and critique of *prescribed belonging* presented through Gaby and RC illustrate a queer diasporic critical sensibility that utilizes erotic autonomy to critique the interconnections of nationhood, citizenship, racialization and heteronormativity. It is a perspective *on prescribed belonging* that differs from the one in China, the one in the diasporic Chinese community, and the one in the white settler state.

Choosing One's Own Community and (Re)creating a Sense of Belonging

As queer diasporic subjects, once one understands which spaces and communities offer potential belonging, one may be better able to choose our own communities, which may involve creating those spaces themselves. Feelings of non-belonging may help one begin to understand what one needs and wants to be within spaces where one does belong. Deeply understanding and feeling oneself makes one able to enact the change one would like to see. As Audre Lorde contends erotic knowledge empowers one to connect deeply to oneself and empowers one to evaluate other aspects of life that bring meaning (Lorde, 1984, p. 57). After one evaluates whether or not a space is meaningful or not, this autonomy empowers and energizes one to take up the space that one wants and that one deserves to have. In this final section on belonging, Rei, within the focus group, and Egg, within an individual interview, share with their decisions and desires on chosen families, chosen communities and creating their own spaces of belonging.

Rei speaks to their interest in thinking critically about belonging in the spaces they navigate when speaking to their experience of differences between birth and chosen family:

REI: I was talking to my co-worker the other day and I brought up the concept of emotional abuse. I brought up my dad. And it was just like a reminder from my Indian co-worker who was like “oh, you should just be civil with them. He’s your only dad. You only have one. You shouldn’t be so whatever with him.” And I’m just like “I don’t know.” It’s just a constant reminder, also from my mom, that like family is very important. Yes, that might be the case but also what some others mentioned about chosen family is where I feel I belong more.

Here Rei talks about the multiple tensions they carry in navigating the idea of belonging to one’s family. As a queer diasporic person, Rei recognizes value in the importance of family, which they affirm in a remembered exchange about family with a diasporic co-worker. Yet Rei simultaneously speaks to their experience negotiating home and family as spaces of tension and emotional abuse. Unlike many other spaces and communities, the home and family are so prescribed that departure or distance become points of continuous tension and guilt. Reminders of this tensions and guilt recur daily in societal interactions like the comments Rei relates from their co-worker. Without necessarily knowing the breadth of tension that Rei negotiates, their co-worker’s immediate response was that Rei should be able to disregard their experiences in order to sustain the value in family. At the same time, Rei shows us that when the climate in the spaces where one is prescribed to belong are potentially damaging, one may decide to take a step back and choose alternative forms of belonging. Rei is inclined to feel belonging with their “chosen family.” Choosing such spaces of belonging does not necessarily resolve tensions and guilt, but one is nevertheless still able to choose a path towards a space of belonging of one’s own.

Similar to Rei's decision to choose spaces of belonging, Egg feels liberated by being able to create a sense of belonging by building her own communities.

EGG: My sense of belonging – I guess once I realized that there were certain groups that I may or may not be an outsider in, it just gave me the freedom to make my own groups. Once I left my fellowship, because they were kind of weird when I talked about my sexuality, I decided to build my own community and host teas or just like make events so other queer POC [people of colour] could join and talk about their own experiences. It was freeing for me to build that community. I think the intent of building a community founded on hope, love and to understand each other, was an intention I had.

Egg describes her effort to differentiate the spaces in which she feels she “may or may not be an outsider” and address them with independent action. She found that her Christian fellowship was not a space where she could fully share herself. Rather than feeling disheartened by this experience, Egg applied her energy towards building her own space and community where she envisioned she would experience belonging. By creating a space for intentional relationships and conversations founded on hope, love and understanding, not only did she create the community she wanted, but she also provided the space for other queer people of colour to share their experiences. Coming to critical awareness of the spaces where she did not feel she belonged gave her the freedom to create ones where she imagines belonging could take form.

Although each of these excerpts mention difficulties and tensions within spaces of (non)-belonging, they all ultimately present a sense of hope and futurity. Rei and Egg were inclined to choose or create the spaces they where hoped to feel a sense of belonging after they became critically aware of the social spaces and climates where they did not want to reside. Taken

together, these two narrators suggest that queer (and) Chinese people living in diaspora do not have to seek belonging in every space where we find ourselves, even those that are prescribed to us such as the natal family. While there may be residual feelings of pain, guilt, or rejection as part of the process of separating from familial spaces of non-belonging, they may also empower us to interrogate these very spaces or to envision and create new spaces and communities where we can live life intentionally and to the fullest.

Chris

Sometimes we may still choose to stay within communities even if we do not fully feel integrated or like we belong. Among the many possible reasons for this continuation are feelings of internal conflict towards the self and with the community. This is the reality for my next narrator Chris. During her individual interview, she explains how she navigates her identities at the intersections being Christian, queer, Chinese (and) Canadian. Chris' story concludes this chapter because it exemplifies the messiness, tensions and internal conflict with belonging and acceptance that mean there are no easy solutions, but that there also does not have to be.

Chris tells us about tensions of holding multiple identities together while navigating her communities.

CHRIS: As a Christian, I do identify as queer, but then I choose not to practice it. Like I choose not to get a girlfriend. And that's by choice. But I feel like if I told them [Christian community] that I was queer, that they would just jump to "you're going to hell." So, I guess I've settled that within myself that I can still be gay and Christian, but then I don't know if they would ever come to that conclusion.

Here, she points to her Christianity as the reason she does not “practice” queer identity even as she understands herself as being queer. Chris also emphasizes her autonomy in choosing to not start a relationship with a girlfriend while still being able to identify as queer. Her sense of identity and self-understanding do not necessarily have to align with her social expression of them. Nevertheless, she still worries about disclosing her queer identity to her Christian community, even as she understands her queerness to be a fundamental part of her identity.

In our conversation, I subsequently asked Chris if her decision to not “practice” queerness is a resolution she has arrived at on her own. She explains that her decision resulted from the fact that she felt guilty in her past relationship. After Chris had been dating for one month, she told her ex-partner that “as a Christian, I can’t be a Christian and be in a relationship with you.” It was Chris’ sense of guilt for acting on her desire to be in a sexual relationship with a woman – an act that her Christian belief system disallowed – that led her to ultimately choose to bring her “practice” of queerness to an end. In her narrative, Chris acknowledges the internal tensions of guilt she continues to work through when navigating her queer and Christian identity, which she is not certain she will ever resolve but that she continues to work on by herself. By holding the two identities, queer and Christian together, she is not letting go of either one but rather seeking a compromise that will encompass her Christian beliefs and queer identity.

Afterwards, Chris explains that to her, self-acceptance means being comfortable with whatever decision she makes in the future to connect and care for all of her sense of self.

CHRIS: I wouldn’t say I’ve reached it [self-acceptance]. Like me just accepting that I was queer back in grade 12 was one step of self-acceptance. And then like going through going through one of my break ups, like accepting myself even more, and becoming just more comfortable in my own skin.

Chris exemplifies the various steps one might take towards self-acceptance, which may occur at varying stages of life and arrive in different forms or even appear conflicting. For example, Chris illustrates her steps towards self-acceptance by acknowledging one of her break-ups. She was able to accept herself more as a result of her break up as she was able to understand her position in being queer but choosing to not be in a relationship for now, even as this break up occurred as a result of feelings of guilt grounded in her moral beliefs. This could also mean that Chris acknowledges her guilt as being productive towards her journey of self-acceptance.

Acknowledging the guilt and taking action through the break up, made her “more comfortable in her own skin,” and take her a step further towards self-acceptance. Her departure from relationship, which could be misread as an act of giving up a part of herself, actually gave her the ability to grow and understand herself more deeply.

There are many steps towards self-acceptance and these routes are not always clear or linear, nor do they always have to make sense. With this in mind, Chris’ narrative ends with parting words towards queer diasporic understandings of futurity.

CHRIS: It’s just me trying to figure out what is going to happen in the future.

And that can change. And I guess that’s where self-compassion is involved. But

I think as well, you’re constantly changing. So self-acceptance will always be.

It’s a continual process. I don’t think it’s like a stage you reach and you’re like

“I got it. And there’s no going back.” Or “nothing will shake you.”

Chris emphasizes that compassion directed towards the self is important to the journey of personal growth and development. Also of importance is understanding that there are many forms of self-acceptance and that the path towards it is not always clear. In fact, self-acceptance can continuously change and evolve, meaning it may signify a process rather than a final

destination. Chris' queer diasporic understanding of self means acknowledging continued change of the self and of our thoughts and feelings towards the self, without necessarily growing towards any kind of final stage apart from experiencing life as a process of coming to being.

I understand that there are no clear resolutions to the tensions brought forth in Chris' case nor does there have to be. If Chris never fully resolves these tensions, this is not an issue: it is part of queer diasporic life. Chris herself may choose to never resolve the tensions she feels. As she expressed, many tensions can be held simultaneously, in a balancing act that does not require resolution or even full balance. This relates back Martin Manalansan's invocations of the "messiness" of queer life. Focusing on the lives of two queer Filipino people living in New York and Manila, Manalansan writes "their lives embody a queer and wayward art of being global. The tangled and untidy nature of their lives and experiences precisely positions them in a queer location outside the realm of the normative, the possible, the desirable and the orderly" (Manalansan, 2015, p. 577). The messiness that Chris and the other narrators negotiate are a part of queer (diasporic) life that disrupts notions of normativity. There needs to be space in queer diasporic understanding for the messiness of the tension and internal conflict that follows queer diasporic life. It is part of what makes queer diasporic life unique and beautiful.

Acceptance and Be(long)ing in Messiness

Taken together, the queer diasporic narrators of this chapter exemplify the many different forms of messiness, tensions and internal conflicts towards a sense of self-acceptance and belonging that queer diasporic people often times encounter. There is not always a clear route or destination. A deep connection to the self, through the erotic, can empower one to escape from or find ways around the scripts of normativity such as gender, sexuality, race, nationhood and citizenship. As shown through Kuro and others, the self is a launching point to navigate the

social, spatial and temporal realities, but also these same factors can influence one's own sense of self, acceptance and belonging. Several of my narrators emphasize that acceptance in regard to gender and sexuality goes beyond verbalized acceptance for them. It goes beyond the dichotomies of coming out/not coming out and verbalization/silence. When silence can be imagined beyond the absence of speech, it opens up possibilities of being that include context, feeling and knowing that go beyond what only verbalization can show. They understood silence as a form of acceptance from their family members. And while familial acceptance may be important for some, two of my narrators emphasized the desiring and sustaining of familial harmony in choosing to disclose their sexuality to their family. This can be read as disruptions to the tenets of queer liberalism of coming out to family and a shameful closet. In turn, what is discussed was the impact that other relationships have towards their sense of self-acceptance. The relationships' impact and importance is negotiated differently among my narrators. Alas, self-acceptance is negotiated multi-dimensionally predicated by many contributing factors that differed for everyone. Acceptance can be viewed as a continuous commitment to the self as my narrators negotiate their everchanging relationships and social, temporal and spatial realities.

My narrators also discuss a sense of acceptance intricately linked to a sense of belonging constructed through community. Although identifying as queer (and) Chinese, my narrators did not necessarily feel belonging within what they called an LGBTQ or gay community. Their feelings of non-belonging stemmed from a sense of normativity existing within the (white) gay community that included conforming to identity labels, expression and/or being sexual. Simultaneously many of them also felt communities that they felt prescribed belonging but did not necessarily feel like they belonged to. Within a diasporic context, white racism and the racialization of immigrants imposes a uniform label across that erases internal differences

amongst Chinese Canadian communities. Within their prescribed belonging of Chinese Canadian identity, my narrators also felt that heteronormativity was uniformly expected. Thus, prescribed belonging exists as a social construct of homogeneity, uniformity and normativity. Yet, for my narrators, being aware and the ability to critique these various forms of non-belonging and prescribed belonging can empower one to choose and/or (re)create what a sense of belonging would mean to oneself. Their lives disrupt normative notions of sexuality, gender, race, nationhood and citizenship.

It is important to note the tensions, departures and contradictions within each narrator's story and between different narrators. This parallels the messiness of their everyday routines and tactics used (Manalansan, 2015). I feel a sense of freedom in seeing that Chris' narrative was so open ended in that there does not need to be a clear definitive decision for them to feel at ease. It is also exciting to see the various ideas of critically challenging family and creating chosen families for self-belonging and acceptance. Simultaneously, it is uplifting to see Kuro be able to find freedom in expression and what is meaningful in their life. In some ways, these narratives are in tension or conflict with one another. However, this is not a bad conflict, but a good one; it's a contradiction. As there is one conclusion for one narrator, it does not necessarily apply for another narrator. That is not to say that those conclusions may or may not apply later on. If we follow the idea of continuous growth and change, suggested by Cindy and Chris here, then it is great to have many perspectives and models out there to handle many changing situations.

Epilogue

Queer Diasporic Futurity

Indeed, to live inside straight time and ask for desire and imagine another time and place is to represent and perform a desire that is both utopia and queer. To participate in such an endeavor is not to imagine an isolated future for the individual instead to participate in a hermeneutic that wishes to describe a collective futurity, a notion of futurity that functions as a historical materialist critique

– José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 2009

Living in Queer Diaspora

As queer (and) Chinese persons, my narrators reside within a space seemingly fraught with tensions. Often read as mutually exclusive identities, a queer (and) Chinese person may negotiate their communities in various forms through time and space. However, this does not mean they discard one of their identities to inhabit another, rather they embody disidentification through a queer (and) Chinese identity. The queer (and) Chinese subject, may experience instability and inability to access either queerness or Chinese-ness completely due to simultaneous and re-affirming interconnections of continued colonialism, racialization and heteropatriarchy. Across the many narratives presented, there were many similar and differing strategies that each narrator used to navigate these everyday dilemmas.

Many of my narrators allude to and recognize Orientalism as embedded within the colonial logics of queer liberalism. The tenets of queer liberalism posit a linear framework of individualism and coming out, characterized by verbal expression of queer identity (Manalasan, 2003). For one, the continued racialization of Chinese people as unable to follow the tenets put out by queer liberalism places queer (and) Chinese people as seeming to inhabit two disparate communities. My narrators describe a queer (and) Chinese identity that signifies a differential consciousness that may occur to uphold agency while navigating communities that may feel fragmented (Sandoval, 2000). Living in the in-between marked by the parenthesis, my narrators face the challenge of language as diasporic peoples. For RC and Stephanie, being unable to access their own Chinese language or dialect has been a barrier to explaining and connecting to the self, family and community. This discloses the false promises of white sexual citizenship and modernity as queerness becomes an exclusively white space and poses a barrier to those who do not understand queerness within a Euro-American context.

Racialized by both mainstream and queer communities, my queer (and) Chinese narrators illustrate that the tradition/modernity split is not as clear cut as the West and Orientalism would have us imagine. The West situates itself as progressive and blurring its continual colonialism and imperialism through and by positioning Chinese-ness as always traditional and unprogressive. Egg argues that the idea of Chineseness as linked to un-progressiveness and tradition is done to posit North America as a back-drop and as the non-traditional and progressive counterpart. The lack of North American qualities is emphasized in order to racialize and include only those immigrants who accept that their culture has deficiencies and is in need of fixing by assimilating into Canadian modernity. Subsequently, the idea that gender and sexuality as unimaginable are imposed onto Chinese Canadians. Queer whiteness achieves the erasure of

racialized bodies within its invocations of modernity. This demonstrates a racially queer understanding of gender and sexuality that is continuously used as a mechanism of the state to disguise their own traditions and practices of colonialism and imperialism as modernity and progressiveness.

My narrators navigate the impositions of colonialism and imperialism, disguised as queer liberalism, in ways that makes sense for their queer diasporic lives. One way this is illustrated by Egg and Kuro is through the idea that familial harmony can become a form of survival for the Chinese Canadian family within the white heteropatriarchal state. As a familial unit, collectively surviving the everyday socially and economically is a form of futurity. Kuro explains that “less talking” and “silence” may be by-products of the need to survive when all physical and psychological energy is placed into collective survival. This is not to say that the “homeplace” is not fraught with tension and violence, but that it may be a form of survival within diaspora that provides us with a safe place and reference point to critique other forms of oppression (Johnson, 2005). Kuro and Egg both explain that “less talking” and “silence” around considerations of coming out and discussing sexual and gender diversity are also strategies to uphold familial harmony. These practices help secure collective familial survival of white supremacy through familial harmony. However, it is also important to note that familial harmony is not and does not need to be experienced by all my narrators. Still, the ideologies of family and familial harmony are often used to further racialize diasporic families while failing to analyze and acknowledge why familial harmony may be important to surviving a white heteropatriarchal state. Thus, the decision for queer diasporic peoples to come out or to not come out may also rest upon surviving the messy interconnections of queerness, racialization, citizenship and colonialism.

On the other hand, this does not mean that there aren't also Chinese cultural and social implications that impact the negotiations of whether or not to come out. My narrators also spoke about the interconnections of saving face, fear and shame that permeate Chinese households, families and communities. Kuro explains that preserving reputation or saving face becomes a self-policing mechanism due to fear of non-conformity and losing control. The ideology of "good" is manifested through being a good person or good daughter in a singular form, requiring conformity. These dynamics become a self-governing system that most individuals, families and communities participate within and uphold. In the case of gender diversity, Kuro argues that the fear of gender non-conformity manifests as frustration and aggression. The strategies in which my narrators perceive and regulate themselves are in relation to these dynamics that their diasporic families reside in.

Subsequently, upholding respectability politics and gossip are also manifestations within the interconnections of saving face, fear and shame. Although respectability politics was a mechanism to control and regulate working-class women (Collins, 2005), my narrators do not illustrate that living by or against respectability politics is a better choice. Rather, there are many underlying reasons for them to choose to do one or the other in certain situations. In the narratives of Egg and Kuro, they both use distinctive strategies to navigate respectability politics and coming out. For Egg, she complies to forms of respectability politics in order to protect her mother and grandmother's hard work. On the other hand, Kuro defies the assumptions of gender conformity while navigating social expectations that lead to acceptance from their immediate family. These differing strategies argue that there is not one choice that is necessarily better than the other as the many underlying reasons produce a myriad of decisions. What results are differing strategies that work for some but not others.

These negotiations also make apparent the decision to not come out as a form of care towards the self, parent and family. Again, this is not to say that either the choice to come out or not come out is inherently bad, but that there are complex reasonings behind each decision. The “historically situated and materially conditioned” (Johnson, 2000, p. 127) realities are dynamics that queer diasporic people continuously navigate through decisions within and beyond the considerations of sexual and gender diversity. A sense of respect and mindfulness towards the lived realities of the self, parent and family are also considerations that impact the decision to come out and the everyday performance and expression of identity. In the case of Jessy, what transpires is a performance of disidentification that resists dominant discourse and practices of neither agreement or denial when faced with questioning and heteronormative implications. These tensions, internal conflicts and decisions are messy and at times manifest into expressions that are read as conformity and heteronormativity, but read a different way, taking into consideration all that has been discussed so far, are in turn messy forms of resistance and survival.

As such, silence is one form of being and expression that is not always an obvious form of resistance and survival. Beyond the boundaries of verbalization and visibility, an absence of speech can entail alternative forms of being, belonging and neither agreement or refusal. There is much to be read within the absence of speech, beyond silence. B, Chewy and Cindy illustrate silence as encompassing forms of expression and acceptance that are not always obvious to Western and queer liberal logics of visibility, verbalization, individuation and departure from the family. *Knowing without knowing* can exist as a state of being and belonging within familial harmony, expression and comfort. Silence exists as a form of knowing, being and belonging

within diaspora that also transcends beyond understandings of a verbalization/silence dichotomy and illuminates sexual and gender diversity into everyday discursive practices.

A sense of acceptance is contributed by and is experienced through different forms. For one, familial acceptance may hold differing levels of importance for different people, as exemplified through Egg and Jessy. In Jessy's narrative, a desire for familial harmony does not necessarily denote a desire for familial acceptance. For Egg a desire for familial acceptance is not founded upon notions of liberation or authenticity, but rather being able to love and share together in harmony. In both cases, a sense of self-acceptance and comfort emerges in context of desiring and sustaining familial harmony. Although differing in strategy, both Egg and Jessy disrupt the tenets of queer liberalism of coming out to family.

In addition to familial acceptance, factors such as friends, community and those in close proximity can contribute towards a sense of self-acceptance. The combination of these interactions is felt and desired uniquely by each individual. While one person may value acceptance from friends more than family, such as Jessy, another person may value the acceptance from potential in-laws as more important to their own sense of self-acceptance, as in the case for Katherine. Self-acceptance is negotiated uniquely and multi-dimensionally through the many differing contributing factors. However, Cindy adds that not only is self-acceptance experienced multi-dimensionally, it is also a continuous and everchanging process. It is a process that may not always an end goal but instead continuous journey that changes alongside an individual.

The destinations, check-points or detours on this journey are impacted by those in proximity and the spaces and places that connections and belonging are felt. Yet, my narrators discuss a sense of belonging as also predicated and felt against the back-drop of spaces and

places of non-belonging. This sense of non-belonging can also go hand in hand with feelings of non-acceptance. For some of my narrators the mainstream queer community is a space where they feel non-belonging. Emily, Kaytee and Rei attribute these feelings of non-belonging to the felt pressures and standards within the mainstream (white) gay community as upheld by logics of queer liberalism through labels, identities and the requirements of visibility, expression and being sexual.

However, feelings of non-belonging can be felt even in spaces that queer diasporic peoples experience prescribed belonging. For my narrators, being racialized and being read as racialized within diaspora can also incite feelings of precarity and non-belonging when one has to begin questioning the very notion of belonging and how their queer self fits while navigating a white heteropatriarchal state. Gaby illustrates fitting in as a constant negotiation even in spaces and communities that one already experiences prescribed belonging by virtue of race and/or space. The idea of belonging is also a spatial concept, linked to shifting geopolitics and geographies of race. This is invoked by RC through prescribed belonging existing as a social construct of homogeneity and uniformity within a Chinese context and white racism in diaspora. Feelings of non-belonging become hypervisible in diaspora. Together Gaby and RC suggest feelings of non-belonging in other contexts may make them reflect on the very beginning locations where they were already prescribed to belong. An awareness and critique of prescribed belonging provides a queer diasporic sensibility that utilizes the erotic autonomy to critique the interconnections of nationhood, citizenship, racialization and heteronormativity.

In turn, once these spaces, places and communities of non-belonging are felt, it becomes a launching point of empowerment and interrogation towards envisioning, imagining and (re)creating spaces and communities of belonging. Erotic autonomy can be a resource both for

self-making and community making (Lorde, 1984). When one realizes where they do not belong, it may provide a launching point towards where one does feel belonging. For Rei, this was belonging to their chosen family. However, this does not necessarily resolve tensions and guilt, but allows one to choose a path towards a space of belonging. Similarly, Egg chose to create her own community and space in order to feel hope, love and understanding that she felt was previously missing. Both Rei and Egg created spaces they felt belonging within after initially feeling non-belong in other communities. Thus, initial feelings of non-belonging may subsequently allow one to choose and create for themselves, the futurity, hope and love they would like to see.

As I have learned from my narrators, a sense of belonging and a sense of self-acceptance are both continuous processes that do not always have an end goal or destination. As one learns, and situations change, so too may the needs and ideas of belonging and acceptance. My narrators have shown me that not only are the routes taken toward self-acceptance multi-dimensional and non-linear, but there are unique, differing and continuous forms of belonging and self-acceptance. They may mean different destinations for everyone. Some of these destinations may just be a check-point or detour in life. As they develop and diverge, so too may their path. It does not necessarily mean tensions are or will be resolved. Some of their tensions may never fully be resolved, but that is not necessarily an issue. Lastly, Chris reminds us that many tensions can be held together, in a balancing act that does not require resolution or even full balance. The open ended-ness and messiness are characteristics of being a queer diasporic person (Manalansan, 2015). As such, there is no simple or uniform solution that fits every situation all the time. These solutions are influenced by the differing social, spatial and temporal aspects of the situation, even if the situation appeared similar. Thus, for my narrators, a queer diasporic understanding of

being, belonging and acceptance allows for and acknowledges the spatial and temporal aspects that impact continued change and development.

Queer Diasporic Futurity

There is not one story or even a few variations of stories. There is no story, no path, no guide. Rather, each of their narratives are unique in their own ways. They are all unique in the forms of pain, tension, love and hope that are experienced. Thus, these stories may or may not apply to others within the Chinese Canadian community and the broader queer Asian diaspora and trans Asian diaspora. It is for the individuals, scholars and communities themselves to decide what parts of my thesis do apply and do not apply. I hope that this creates an ongoing dialogue as the conversation is much broader.

The aim of this project was not to create any thing close to a unifying narrative. Many times, their narratives contradicted each other. The idea is that there is not one way to come out, it isn't more wrong or more right to come out, but to understand where the desire to come out or not come out may arise from for each individual. There is not one path to self-acceptance. There is not one space where everyone should or will feel belonging. Together, they resist the homogenizing narrative that is often placed onto queer diasporic communities. They are anything but "culturally pure colonial subjects" (Manalansan, 2003). They teach us that being a queer (and) Chinese for them includes the simultaneous tensions, messiness, love, hope and resilience that each of them bring within their narratives and to the community. One, two or even three narratives does not do this abundantly resilient, loving and powerful community any justice.

The binaries of queer liberalism, coming out/not coming out oversimplify lived experiences into dichotomies of individualism/familial harmony, verbalization/silence and

tradition/modernity. My narrators disrupt each of the binaries and dichotomies in their own unique ways, refusing to belong and adopt a simplistic model. As queer (and) Chinese people, they navigate, resist and thrive through and despite continual racism, colonialism and homophobia from the white heteropatriarchal state. At times their forms of resistance are not obvious and there is not a linear path towards healing, strength and love. But at the core and soul of their lives is strength compassion and healing from not just themselves but whole communities, past and future generations of queer diasporic peoples. It is about being able to collectively and individually imagine and create unique forms of resistance, strength and futurity that makes into reality the world they would like to live in.

My narrators have unique and common ideas and strategies in negotiating their everyday dilemmas. Across the many instances of pain, tension and internal conflict presented by my narrators, at the core of their narratives are stories and acts of resistance, resilience and hope. Their practices and beliefs move beyond queer liberalism's tenets of coming out and individualism. They involve an understanding of being, belonging and acceptance that encompasses the open ended-ness and messiness of queerness. Collectively, they point towards a futurity of not merely surviving the difficulties faced by queer diasporic people, but desiring, imagining and understanding the self and each other beyond the strictures of straight and colonial time (Muñoz, 2009). As José Esteban Muñoz writes in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, "queer futurity does not underplay desire. In fact, it is all about desire, desire for both larger semi-abstractions such as a better world or freedom but also, more immediately, better relations within the social that include better sex and more pleasure. Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 30). The mechanism of being able to "reject a

here and now” and creating a “possibility for another world” can be achieved through erotic autonomy. As my narrators have illustrated, erotic autonomy can be a tool for critiquing, self-making and community making. Thus, erotic autonomy can allow one to launch into what queer futurity may look like for themselves and their community within the tension, open ended-ness and messiness of being queer (and) Chinese.

The ability to resist, thrive, desire, imagine and understand is what makes queer diaspora a unique space. The strategies to being and belonging in diaspora are multiple and unique. What I have learned from my participants is that although their strategies may differ, their strength and resiliency does not. One person’s form of resiliency may not look apparent or agree with the next person’s, but they are strategies that work uniquely for them. A uniforming narrative can not be told by me or by anyone else because it does not exist. For these reasons, I finish this thesis with an excerpt RC speaking to the strength and resilience they have felt within their queer Asian community.

RC: I feel like the quality of people that I come across within the community is so unique. I think it’s because of the journey we’ve had to go through in terms of accepting ourselves, forgiving ourselves, having compassion for ourselves. Our ability to go deep inside ourselves, understand ourselves, accept ourselves and then accept other people, be understanding and accepting of other people’s shortcomings, is so much larger, encompassing and inclusive. And the resilience within this community is so strong that I’ve reached a point where I will not have any other way. Like being queer is probably the best things that’s ever happened to me in my life. The people I’ve met in this community and the

resilience and healing that have gone on and the compassion we have and hope for each other, is something that I have not seen in any other communities.

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mainland Chinese immigrants in Canada. *Culture, health & sexuality*, 14(1), 87-100.

Appendix
Ethics Approval



May 17, 2017

Ms. Michelle Tam
Master's Student
Department of Gender Studies
Queen's University
Kingston, ON, K7L 3N6

GREB Ref #: GGEN-026-17; TRAQ # 6020756

Title: "GGEN-026-17 Not here/Not there: Conceptualizing the (non)belonging of Chinese Canadian Sexuality"

Dear Ms. Tam:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "GGEN-026-17 Not here/Not there: Conceptualizing the (non)belonging of Chinese Canadian Sexuality" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS 2 (2014)) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (Article 6.14) and Standard Operating Procedures (405.001), your project has been cleared for one year. You are reminded of your obligation to submit an annual renewal form prior to the annual renewal due date (access this form at <http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html>; click on "Events"; under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Annual Renewal/Closure Form for Cleared Studies"). Please note that when your research project is completed, you need to submit an Annual Renewal/Closure Form in Romeo/traq indicating that the project is 'completed' so that the file can be closed. This should be submitted at the time of completion; there is no need to wait until the annual renewal due date.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access this form at <http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html>; click on "Events"; under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Adverse Event Form"). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example, you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To submit an amendment form, access the application by at <http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html>; click on "Events"; under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Request for the Amendment of Approved Studies". Once submitted, these changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Ms. Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John D. Freeman".

John Freeman, Ph.D.
Chair
General Research Ethics Board

c: Dr. Scott Morgensen, Supervisor
Dr. Margaret Little, Chair, Unit REB