Kinship & Belonging in Asian America
Asian American Studies 164 / Women’s Studies 139
Professor Christine Balance || em: cbalance@uci.edu
Questions for today:

• How do Asian American studies and queer studies/theory work to inform each other? What kinds of conversations can we have across these two interdisciplinary fields? What types of concepts connect the two fields and political projects?

• Can naming itself be a political act (i.e. queer, Asian American, etc.)?

• What does queer studies/queerness bring to bear upon the scholarly field and political project of Asian America? What work does a “queer diaspora” do?
What are some of Dana Takagi’s arguments and/or more salient points in her article?

fail to focus on sexuality in Asian American studies; really focus on examining sexuality in Asian America -- we do it in a routine way, uphold certain categories; how is being gay different from Asian American? -- race is something we wear, more visible; sexuality is an identity that we have the ability to deny; necessary to recognize different histories of Asian America/racialization, of queerness necessity of intersectionality -- understanding cultural differences of ‘coming out’ as a queer Asian American identity politics: struggles, pros + cons, all differences should not be treated equal not “additive”
Have things changed since the time that Takagi wrote this article (in the 1990s)? Or have things stayed the same? In either case, list specific examples.

today, scholars in Asian American studies doing intersectional work
representation: queer Vietnamese councilmember in O.C., media representations (Oliver, HTGAWM; Alec Mapa)
race as something you wear -- mixed-race; multiracial;
ability to hide homosexuality -- visibility and normalizing of queerness, queer culture;
heteronormative; homonormative;
limits of media representation -- F.O.B. (nuclear family);
YouTube videos;
discrimination, tendencies in various communities;
normalized but not accepted;
Politics of naming:
Terms like lesbian, gay, woman, Asian American are (according to Takagi) “political categories that serve as rallying calls and personal affirmations” (Takagi, 245)

These terms both call into question:
a) how identity is deployed (or used in different settings) and
b) if we can (perhaps) imagine identity as “incomplete.”
Name the various ways you identify yourself in everyday life.

Is there a moment in the past week when you have been made to identify with a certain term, category, group?

Which of these identities are you not afraid to belong to?

Which might you not publicly identify with?
“There are numerous ways that being ‘gay’ is not like being ‘Asian.’ Two broad distinctions are worth noting. The first…is the relative invisibility of sexual identity compared with racial identity. While both can be said to be socially constructed, the former are performed, acted out, and produced, often in individual routines, whereas the latter tends to be more obviously ‘written’ on the body and negotiated by political groups. Put another way, there is a quality of voluntarism in being gay/lesbian that is usually not possible as an Asian American. One has the option to present oneself as ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian,’ or alternatively, to attempt to ‘pass,’ or, to stay in the ‘closet,’ that is, to hide one’s sexual preference. However, these same options are not available to most racial minorities in face-to-face interactions with others.” (Takagi, 247)
Agree
racial identities are negotiated by groups;

Disagree
Orientalism
racial identities not necessarily easily read;
sexual identities can be read, but often stereotypical or lead to stereotype;
performative cues and markers -- not just gendered, sexualized, racialized;
closet as a social construction, automatically “Other’s” people;
**What is Asian American studies?**
Field of study and political project—created and instituted by the joint political/organizing efforts of students and community members in the late 1960s and early 1970s—that focuses on the “shared” histories (of immigration, exclusion, and media representations) of a heterogeneous population of individuals from a diverse set of ethnicities/nationalities, speaking any number of languages, from any number of religious backgrounds, classes, and political/cultural affiliations.
According to Eng, the emerging Asian American studies movement (of the late 1960s/early 1970s) “focused much of its political energy and theoretical attention on domestically based race relations within the geographical boundaries of the U.S. nation-state. Modeled on the cultural nationalism of the Black Power movement, the Yellow Power movement during this period largely endorsed a political platform of identity-based politics, racial separatism, and a Marxist-inspired class critique of American capitalism.” (Eng, 208)
“Diasporas” any group migration or flight from a country or region; any group that has been dispersed outside its traditional homeland. **Synonyms**: dispersion, dissemination, migration, displacement, scattering.

Diasporas “are sometimes the source of ideological, financial, and political support for national movements that aim at a renewal of the homeland” (Tololyan as quoted in Eng, 207)

**Queer/queerness**: “not only in the sense of sexual identity and sexual practices” but also “in the sense of a critical methodology for evaluating Asian American racial formation across multiple axes of difference as well as in numerous local and global manifestations” (Eng, 215); “a critical methodology based not only on content but on style and form” (Eng, 216)
“How might a queer diaspora provide new methods of contesting traditional kinship structures, of reorganizing communities based not on filiation and biology but on affiliation and the assumption of a common set of social practices or political commitments such as economic and social justice?” (Eng, 207)
Shared political concerns/central concepts (of queer/feminist and Asian Americans):

1) Silence
2) Home
3) Kinship & Belonging
**Kinship:**

(in a broader sense): “a set of practices that institutes relationships of various kinds which negotiate the reproduction of life and the demands of death, (then) **kinship practices** will be those that emerge to address fundamental forms of human dependency, which may include birth, child-rearing, relations of emotional dependency and support, generational ties, illness, dying and death (to name a few).” (Judith Butler, 14-15)

(in an anthropological/structuralist sense) relationship between any entities that share a genealogical origin (through either biological, cultural, or historical descent) or marriage. Challenges: historical events like slavery, immigration, or the fact that certain people cannot marry.