Autoethnography: Chinese Conflict Management of Prejudice in Intercultural Interactions

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Abstract

An autoethnography of a Chinese American who shares four narratives of intercultural conflict interactions involving prejudice during her child-hood and adult life years. Aspects of affective, cognitive, behavioral, and reflective thinking are integrated in these narratives to better understand her process of managing and resolving the intercultural conflicts. Both high and low context styles of handling intercultural conflict were used. In using both styles, the responses to the conflict were calm, nonemotional, brief and "noncharged" words or remaining silent. Thus, fostering surface harmony or not escalating the conflict with the prejudiced persons. Moreover, reflective thinking was a significant aspect in the process of understanding, healing, and resolving the intrapersonal and interpersonal harms of negative prejudicial acts.

Introduction

We tell people of our personal experiences in story form, sharing our life with others to either impart information, wisdom, joy, or comforting others. At times, we tell our stories to others to seek advice, self-therapy, and so forth. Our personal narratives have tremendous power for those who remember them and later utilize them to better their lives and others. It is the purpose of this article to impart my personal narratives of how I have managed conflict in which prejudice was manifested in intercultural interactions. As a second generation Chinese American, I was born and raised in California. I am the daughter of immigrant parents from Mainland China.

I will first begin with a brief review of Chinese conflict resolution and then a definition of prejudice. Thereafter, I will discuss the value of the autoethnographic approach, explore my personal narratives of resolving intercultural conflicts and offer recommendations.

Chinese Conflict Management

In Chen and Starosta's (1997) overview, they indicate three primary aspects of culture that influences conflict management/resolution: cultural context, language differences, and thinking patterns. Conflict management/ resolution has been theorized to differ between high-context and low- context cultures (Ting-Toomey, 1985). High-context cultures tend to engage in conflict when their "cultural normative expectations are violated, tend to adopt a non-confrontational and indirect attitude towards conflicts, and tend to use an affective-intuitive style of conflict management" (Chen & Starosta, 1997, p. 1). On the contrary, people in low-context cultures typically attend to conflict when "their personal normative expectations are violated, tend to adopt a confrontational and direct attitude towards conflicts, and tend to use a factual-inductive style of conflict management" (Chen & Starosta, 1997, p. 1).

Language differences, particularly verbal communication styles, are demonstrated in a direct or indirect way when handling conflict (Chen & Starosta, 1997). Contrary to the direct communication style mode, "people of indirect communication style tend to be more silent and

use ambiguous language in interactions, and avoid saying "no" directly to others in order to foster or maintain a harmonious atmosphere" (Chen & Starosta, 1997, p. 2).

Lastly, divergent thinking patterns influence the process of conflict management. Chen and Starosta (1997) summarize that Western people use a linear process of logic and rationality to discover external and objective truth. On the other hand, Easterners may use the non-linear thinking pattern to construct truth without an apparent pattern of logical reasoning or rationality.

Prejudice

Researchers have defined prejudice in scores of ways as formulated in an extensive review of the literature (Duckitt, 1992). In this autoethno-graphy prejudice is defined according to several researchers (Allport, 1954; Ashmore, 1970; Duckitt, 1992; Secord & Backman, 1964; Simpson & Yin-ger, 1985; van Dijk, 1984) who agree on two fundamental characteristics: (a) a rigid attitude that is based on group membership and (b) predisposes an individual to feel, think or act in a negative way toward another person or group of persons.

Method

Conquergood (1991) urges ethnographers and the research academy to embrace and expand another epistemological and methodological approach that moves from ethnography as text to ethnography as performance. Furthermore, he makes his call with the support from other ethnographic practitioners. Jackson (1989) encourages ethnographers to reestablish "the intimate connection between our bodily experience in the everyday world and our conceptual life" (p. 18). He further argues that in order to find common ground with cultural members, "we need to open ourselves to modes of sensory and bodily life which, while meaningful to us in our personal lives, tend to get suppressed in our academic discourse" (1989, p. 11). Jackson wants to refurbish the epistemological and methodological aspects of ethnography by bridging an ethnographer's experience and empiricism. This radical empiricism that Jackson (1989) calls it, is a means to include an ethnographer's "interactions with those he or she lives with and studies, while urging us to clarify the ways in which our knowledge is grounded in our practical, personal, and participatory experience in the field as much as our detached observations" (p. 182).

Fisher (1984) offers researchers a means to engage in Jackson's radical empiricism as storytellers who make sense of their lives and the world around them through the sharing of their narratives with others. Philipsen (1987) also agrees that virtually in every culture, people create narratives of their personal experiences as a way of making sense of their lives.

Rosaldo (1989) urges that our intercultural research enterprise needs to move from centers to "borderlands," "zones of difference," and "busy intersections" where many cultural identities converse with multiple others (pp. 17, 28). Moreover, Rosaldo (1989) states that "cities throughout the world today increasingly include minorities defined by race, ethnicity, language, class, religion, and sexual orientation. Encounters with 'difference' now pervade modern everyday life in urban settings" (p. 186).

Crawford (1996) takes an ethnographic turn in the direction of Conquergood's (1991) and others earlier promptings by calling the ethnographic life of living and writing as essentially a self-report of personal experiences, in which he calls it autoethnography. Crawford explains that an autoethnography involves the ethnographer who is "unavoidably in the ethnography one way or another, manifest in the text, however subtly or obviously" (p. 158).

It is in this autoethnography where I step into the "zones of difference" and "busy intersections" where I have at times encountered landmines of intercultural conflict. I have lived in predominantly Hispanic and North American communities in the Southern California area; and have daily encounters with North American colleagues at higher educational institutions. It is the aim of this autoethnography that I share and analyze my personal narratives within these zones of difference where landmines of prejudice have festered and exploded. In my narratives I describe, analyze and do sense-making as a process of managing these intercultural conflicts as a Chinese American. Lastly, at hindsight, as a communication specialist, I would like to offer my recommendations of how these intercultural conflict situations and the aftermath can be bettered.

Intercultural Conflict Resolution

In this section I present four narratives of intercultural conflict involving prejudice. In each of my narratives of intercultural conflict, four aspects are involved in the process of resolving the conflicts. These aspects are: affective, cognitive, behavioral, and reflective thinking. Affective refers to the participants' emotions and feelings experienced. Cognitive involves the participants' thoughts, interpretations, and meanings they have regarding the conflict and resolving the situation. Behavioral are the displayed communicative behaviors used in managing the conflict. Reflective thinking is the process of sense-making that requires in-depth analysis after the occurrence of the conflict in order to understand the verbal and nonverbal acts, issues, and ramifications that emerge from the interaction to create some resolution either intrapersonally and inter-personally. The following narratives range from my experiences in my childhood and my adult life.

Narrative 1

In the mid 1960s in Long Beach, California, my family was the only Asian family living in our community. When I was in the first and second grades, little girls in my classes did not play with me during recess. The only time that the Caucasian American girls played with me was after I returned back to school from one or two weeks of absence due to an illness. They played with me for one day, and thereafter, they stopped playing with me. Today, I believe that my grade school teacher told them to be nice by playing with me to make me feel welcomed back. And so they obeyed the teacher.

I also recall that some of the Caucasian American boys in the same grades occasionally, slanted their eyes with their fingers and bucked their teeth out at me while trying to imitate the sounds of an Asian language. The Caucasian American boys also shouted repeatedly at me, "You're a Jap! You're a Jap!" And I stood there out of surprise and just looked at their distorted antics. I said nothing to them, but only thought, "I'm not Japanese, I'm Chinese."

The treatment of prejudice that I received in the first and second grades from the Caucasian American children definitely ostracized me. My initial way of managing the conflict of girls not wanting to play with me was to play alone on the monkey bars, sandbox, and compete in single and double dutch rope contests. All of these activities did not require any teammates. I began developing a sense of independence and self-reliance. I never inquired or complained about the girls not choosing to play with me. As for the cruel antics of the boys, initially I was just stunned and did not cry or disclose the mistreatment to anyone in my family or school authorities.

According to van Dijk, (1987) the Caucasian American children were prejudiced toward me on the basis of being a foreigner and looking different in appearance. Perhaps their grotesque antics toward me were learned from old movies or from other kids. These mistreatments ostracized me and created psychological conflict which lead me to have a need for acceptance and belongingness. I didn't want to feel different and feel that something was wrong with me. Eventually, the mistreatments lead to an identity crisis of self-hate, not wanting to be Chinese, but desiring to be a Caucasian American. I would cry alone wishing that I was not Chinese, but Caucasian American. I internalized this negative treatment and I simply did not know how to disclose my experiences to anyone.

In resolving this intercultural conflict, I felt that I needed to be better than all of my peers in order for them to take positive notice of me and to accept me. Since I was naturally ambitious, I became competitive-minded and excelled in jump roping, running, tetherball, rings, and academics. As a first and second grader, I surpassed 6th grade girls in competitive jump roping. This early childhood mistreatments made me feel unaccepted which propelled me to excel. Also, these mistreatments influenced me to have a childhood dream that people would look up to me someday because I was worthy. Consequently, I would treat my peers with goodness and equality in hopes that my peers would learn they can treat others better.

For the first ten years of my life, I only socialized with Caucasian American children. By the third and fourth grade, my family moved to Torrance and Sun Valley, California. I continued to be the fastest runner and tetherball champ. My peers at both of these Caucasian American communities treated me better.

By the fifth grade, my family moved to Chinatown, Los Angeles. My classmates were mostly lower socio-economic Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong, a few Chinese Americans, some Mexicans and Mexican Americans. My family lived in Chinatown for four years. I attended multicultural schools in the Los Angeles district that consisted of first and second generation students. Particularly during the time I lived in Chinatown, I learned more about my culture like celebrating the Chinese New Year and socializing with other Chinese children. My socialization with Chinese children and community people revitalized my ethnic identity. I was no longer treated like an outcast, and I no longer suffered from an identity crisis.

The next three narratives occurred in my adult life within the last decade. The second narrative occurred in the early 1990s.

Narrative 2

I was staying at my parent's home in Highland Park, California where it is predominantly a Hispanic community of first and second generations. One day I was at the supermarket filling my water bottles at the water machine. As I was waiting for one of my bottles to fill up with water, a Hispanic woman and her two-year-old child was in close proximity to me. The child was running around and was mischievously wanting to touch the water that flowed into my water bottle. When the child reached up to try to touch my water, I nudged him lightly on the shoulder and said, "Excuse me," so that he would not contaminate my water. Then he ran about. Meanwhile his mother did nothing but stood there looking elsewhere with her arms crossed. Again, the child mischievously attempted to touch the flowing water two more times, but I nudged him on the shoulder once again and said, "excuse me." His mother stood by and said nothing, but looked at me. Then, suddenly, out of no where, his mother yelled at the top of her voice at me, "We can't all be like you Orientals!" I stood there totally astonished and embarrassed by her public shout at me. I responded defensively, but not angrily by saying, "He

was trying to touch my water." She said nothing. I quickly finished filling up my water bottles and carried them to my car.

In managing this intercultural conflict with the Hispanic woman and her child, I felt that I needed to defend myself by simply giving her the reason and facts for my behavior toward her child. Moreover, I said, "He was trying to touch my water" in a firm tone, but not angrily in order to not incite her further. I remained silent toward the woman because I didn't feel that I needed to say anything further to defend myself, and I didn't want the situation to erupt into chaotic conflict.

While at my car, I started to feel infuriated and thought pridefully, "who does she think she is? I sat in my car planning to write a brief note to place on her car windshield in hopes to indirectly chide her for her irresponsibility and rudeness toward me. However, I decided not to, because she could possibly have a gun, and it wouldn't be worth any further negative consequences. So I internalized the conflict situation and chose to use forebearance to avoid any potential harm to myself. As Hwang (1997) has pointed out that forebearance is a practice in Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. He defines forebearance that involves one controlling and suppressing one's emotion, desire, and psychological impulse.

After internalizing this intercultural conflict, in time I began to intrapersonally reflect upon the interaction and felt bothered by the Hispanic woman's irrelevant response to the situation, "We can't all be like you Orientals!" Her angry response revealed her positive stereotypical view of Asians. In trying to understand and resolve the internalized conflict I felt, I asked myself, "what happened to her that enraged her to say such an irrelevant negative response to me?" I felt that she must have experienced repeated negative messages from people and the mass media that were stereotypical images of Hispanic and Asian people.

It is clear to me that the mass media is a powerful, larger than life "boob tube" or hypodermic needle (Infante, Rancer & Womack, 1997) that feeds into the minds of its viewers a particular image of events and people, and in this case, the Hispanic people. This hypodermic needle theory or magic bullet theory suggests that the mass media could influence a mass of people directly and uniformly by "shooting" or "injecting" them with appropriate messages designed to trigger a desired response. Moreover, the cultivation theory (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1980, 1986) argues that television is primarily responsible for people's perceptions of daily norms and cultivates a particular view of reality. van Dijk (1987) argues that the "social model constructed by the media, actors, and speakers on ethnic affairs are also the national and local authorities, the state institutions (courts, police, education, welfare offices, and so forth), and all those groups that are equipped to provide routine stories to the news media" (p. 361). He further points out that news values and other social and professional ideologies of news makers have a propensity toward negative topics for groups that are ideologically or ethnically distant, different, or deviant (Cohen & Young, 1981; van Dijk, 1987b). He further states that the standard news items about ethnic minority groups suggest that minorities cause social, cultural, and economic problems for the dominant (White) in-group. Along this transmittable message link are everyday talks and stories of crime, aggression, threats, deviance, and many forms of cultural conflict found in the mass media.

People who watch the daily news develop such views of various cultural groups, especially if they have little contact with them. Insensitive comments, behaviors, and decisions are made that create animosities and divide people, especially if cultural groups do not desire to reach out and get to know one another and their cultural ways.

The Hispanic woman's angry response, "We can't all be like you Orientals!" reverberated in my reflective thoughts in which I began feeling a world of stereotypic oppression that she has experienced by people and the mass media that ignites anger through belittlement. Insensitive comments that compare or pits one cultural people to another, creates a positioning of inferiority and superiority. Thus, creating a negative image for one cultural group and a favorable image for another.

A struggle for power and dignity occurs in even the smallest and innocent interactions. Just her one comment made me stand outside of myself for just a moment in an attempt to wear her shoes that were much too large for me because it was filled with a self-image of negativity, oppression, and hostility because of the irresponsibility in which society has allowed it, including herself. It was a Hispanic woman's voice of pain that I heard when I eventually allowed my pride to subside as I listened more and more to her words, "We can't all be like you Orientals!" As her voice echoed more and more within the depths of my mind, heart and spirit, my initial prideful response to her hostile comment diminished by knowing not my pain, but knowing her pain I felt.

What do I do with this invaluable intercultural conflict experience? Do I choose to see it superficially as a voice and eyes of hatred that uncontrollably pierces my conscious and initially arouses defensiveness in me? Do I choose to stereotype her and all of her people from just one unfavorable interaction of conflict? I choose to lessen the pain I felt for her by telling my narrative here and to my students in my intercultural communication courses so that we can understand her pain and remember it when it counts.

The next two narratives involve two professional colleagues of mine. Although both are educated with doctorates with cultural and intercultural communication studies backgrounds, they have demonstrated their acts of prejudice that have created conflict for me.

Narrative 3

In the early 1990's, I had completed my doctoral coursework and was ABD (all but dissertation) status. I was out on the job market looking for a tenure-track assistant professorship on the west coast. A Caucasian American colleague of mine at the same doctoral institution was also applying for many of the same positions in intercultural communication. This colleague had voiced that she wanted the job at X University. When interviews were granted all ready, she had asked me one day on campus if I had received an interview at X university. I felt that her question was a personal one because I preferred my job hunting to remain confidential. Since I did not want to lie nor did I want to say to her that I would like my job hunting to remain confidential, I acknowledged that I had received an interview at X university in order to avoid any feelings of distrust to occur. Later that week, we both came across one another at the campus library and the following interaction occurred,

Caucasian colleague: You have a good chance in getting the job at X University.
Me: I don't know. Why do you think this?
Caucasian colleague: Because you're a female and a minority.
Me: You never know. Maybe I'll be competing against another minority.
Caucasian colleague: Then you'll be fucked up! [angry]
Me: Well, you'll never know. [Calm and shrugged my shoulders]

In managing this conflict of expressed anger and underlying prejudice toward me, I knew that I had to keep intellectually and emotionally controlled in what I said and how I expressed it

to my Caucasian American colleague because I wanted to maintain an air of harmony, rather than conflict. I did not want to add "fuel to the fire," of angry comments from her such as, "because you're a female and a minority" and "then you'll be fucked up!" I strategically maintained my forbearance by communicating a calm demeanor and not appearing confident of my chances of getting hired at X university by saying, "You never know. Maybe I'll be competing against another minority." I did not allow myself to get emotionally offended by her comments because I knew that she had the problem of being hostile, and I knew that I didn't do anything wrong.

Initially, I tried to ignore the intercultural conflict by internalizing it and going about my busy schedule of studies. However, because her negative and hostile response, "Then you'll be fucked up" kept resounding in my mind. I could no longer suppress her angry response that reverberated in my mind. I began reflecting on the conflict that had occurred. To understand and to resolve this intercultural conflict for my well being, I cognitively asked why did she express a hostile response toward me?

According to van Dijk (1987), he found that one of the categories of prejudice talk involved that "they" (minority) threaten our (non-minority) interests. I would assess that my colleague's interest was threatened, in that she wanted the job at X University. van Dijk further argues that there is a perceived "competition" that is closely linked to a sense of their interests being threatened. Since my colleague was not granted an interview at X University, she saw me as competition and definitely a threat. van Dijk (1987) also found that people who are prejudiced will "resent 'favorable treatment,' for instance, in the form of assumed 'easy' welfare or housing, affirmative action, or other 'unfair' help or 'discrimination' against our 'own people'"(p. 386).

Part of resolving intercultural conflict involves not only a strategic nonthreatening means of communications toward the perpetrator, but also understanding below the surface of the roots of conflict in order to achieve peace between self and others. Some intercultural conflicts exist not only because of communication style differences and socio-cultural experiences, but simply a lack of understanding from the other's view and the issues within the situation. Therefore, in resolving my intercultural conflict, in part, it requires me to self reflect on conflict interactions in order to have a choice to go back and resolve the difficulties with further talk or to see future conflict interactions with better insights and ways.

Recommendations regarding this intercultural conflict are to maintain calmness and to create harmony. People who are angry to begin with can get angrier if something incites them further. Also, I believe that people of all cultural groups need to educate themselves about the issues and goals of affirmative action. A superficial under-standing based on hearsay or common clique comments like, "that's reverse discrimination" or "s/he got the job because s/he was a minority" or "that minority isn't as qualified as that other person, and s/he got the job" are comments that reflect a lack of understanding of the particular case and in relations to the whole societal picture. Do any of these clique comments have substance behind them or are they just superficial and uninformed comments that mask the real issue and situation?

Here "I step up to the plate" by responding to the clique comments in hopes to resolving some of the misunderstandings about affirmative action that create intercultural conflict. If a person who thinks or says that this minority got the job because of affirmative action, I believe the person is judging the minority unfairly and prejudicially. First, a person with this attitude has not seen the minority's resume. Therefore, the accusation is totally unfounded because of a lack of evidence and knowledge of what is completely on the resume of the applicant who

applied for the position. Second, it is not clearly known what the hiring committee's criteria are. That is, what are the hiring committee's and institutional needs and wants that an applicant can fulfill at their work? A person from the outside does not know accurately how "qualified" is defined according to the hiring committee. Every company and institution have differing needs and wants. Third, affirmative action has been implemented for the purpose of increasing more equal representation of leaders who reflect the constituency of people who are served. That is, if the people in power are of one type with the same educational background, ethnicity, socio-economic class, etc., the chances are that these people who are similar will usually make decisions based on their own experiences, and not the experiences and needs of the people who are to be served. Whereas, if there is diversity of equal representation, there are many voices that are heard in the process in making a final decision for the welfare of the people it is to serve.

Fourth, many Caucasian Americans decry that affirmative action is reverse discrimination. That is, Caucasian American applicants are considered qualified or more qualified than the minority, but they are either not granted the job or admissions to an educational institution. In terms of a job, perhaps in the 70s when affirmative action was at its beginnings of implementation, I can conceive that there was more of a likelihood that minorities were not as qualified. Reasonably, because most pioneers, especially the first and second generation people who grew up with uneducated parents and low income families, but who are educated themselves, typically have not had fair opportunities regarding jobs and education. However, in the 90s and in our 21st century, it is highly likely that minorities who are hired are well-qualified, if not "most qualified" because thirty years have passed since the implementation of affirmative action which have helped the children of the educated pioneers to have more equal footing in jobs and education.   But we, as citizens of the U.S.A. need to continue to support affirmative action and the goal of equal representations that reflects our society, so that decisions made will serve the needs of the mass, rather than the privileged few. I am not claiming that affirmative action is flawless, it does however need some revamping in regards to reviewing people who come from a particular cultural group who are truly disadvantaged, as opposed to people who are not disadvantaged. Otherwise, the one who is not disadvantaged in a particular cultural group will gain the opportunities, while the disadvantaged will be left behind and will not have a voice in representative leadership.

Lastly, a Caucasian American need not fear that one will not get a job or get admitted to an educational institution. There are opportunities available for one's livelihood and happiness. Look all around, and Caucasian Americans are hired in all kinds of jobs and granted opportunities. Do not allow people who do not understand affirmative action to create fear. With a full understanding of affirmative action its goal is to bring goodness and protection to our nation as a whole--increase opportunities and representations for all.

The last narrative involves a Caucasian American colleague who shows a pattern of prejudicial acts in which I found offensive and troubling because he is in a position to make decisions about another's fate.

Narrative 4
I have taught at several universities over the years, but one Caucasian American colleague who I have encountered demonstrated prejudicial views and actions toward a few candidates who were applying for positions at X department at X University. One instance involved three colleagues and me sitting in a conference room reviewing all the application files. As I was beginning to review one applicant, one of my colleagues said, "She is applying here because she

says that she has a lover who teaches at Y University." I responded nonchantlantly by saying, "Oh, yeah," and I continued reviewing the applicant's file. I interpreted my colleagues comment as an intent to inform me that the applicant is a lesbian in order to bias my view against the applicant.

I chose not to create open and direct conflict with this colleague, but neutrally said, "Oh, yeah" in an ambiguous fashion. Hwang (1997) states that Chinese at times will respond in an ambiguous manner in order to maintain an ambience of harmony. It was not until later as I reflected on this episode that I thought to myself, "So what that she has a lover. What does that got to do with her competencies for this job?" I felt dismayed by my colleague's comment.

I felt a sense of responsibility since I was a member of the hiring committee. At the following meeting, I said to the committee, "I want to bring it up to the surface, that there be no discrimination toward any applicants we review. I just want to say that we should hire people based on their competencies and not for other personal bias reasons. I just want to bring that up to the surface." I did not look at anyone in the eyes, I just felt that I needed to responsibly state that. No one on the committee said anything. I felt that I handled this internal conflict in a direct and indirect manner. Direct in the sense that I made the statement to the committee, but indirect in the sense that I did not look at anyone in the eyes nor made reference to any particular person. Also I made my comment general rather than with specific details.

For the same position, a group of us were entertaining our top interviewee at a Benihana restaurant. As we sat around the counter while the chef was cooking before us, the same Caucasian American colleague makes a comment to the group that he could use a massage right now. He further stated that he needed someone to walk on his back. He then mentioned a former Japanese student and commented if she wouldn't mind walking on his back. I made a polite comment to him in which I showed disapproval to what he said. He responded to me, "You can interpret what I said anyway you want to."

Upon reflection and sense-making of my colleague's prejudicial comment regarding the Japanese student walking on his back, I perceived his intent behind his comment was to "turn off" the female interviewee, so that she would have doubts about accepting the position if she was offered. His motive was purely a selfish reason because he wanted a male "buddy" to socialize with. The female candidate was our top choice candidate who accepted our position offered to her.

In another position, an applicant had noted that he was from Mainland China. After the candidate's interview and teaching demonstration, the same Caucasian American colleague chatted with me in the hallway. He asked me, "How would you feel if there was another Asian colleague in this department?" I replied, "That wouldn't bother me." I was a bit taken back by my colleague's unexpected question.

How I handled this conflict regarding his prejudicial comment was to just flow with the conversation and not create any tension regarding his comment. Upon reflection and sense-making of this interaction with the same bias colleague, I thought to myself, "Do I ask you, 'How would you feel if we had another Caucasian American colleague in this department?'" His question is not only ludicrous, but it clearly tells me that he has some prejudice against this Chinese interviewee. Moreover, he argued that the Chinese interviewee treated the males better than the female students during his teaching demonstration by remembering their names and calling on them more often. According to my observation, the Chinese interviewee only had three students participate during his discussion with them. This bias colleague was not in favor

of this Chinese interviewee. No doubt the Chinese interviewee was well qualified for the position. However, he was not offered the position.

After I had noticed an alarming pattern of conflict interactions in which my colleague showed prejudice, I felt a need to resolve it. I had mentioned to the department chairperson of the incidences. I have told two other colleagues about the prejudice comments that I have noticed coming from the bias colleague. I feel restrained not to tell this colleague directly about these incidences that I find troubling because, overall, most of the colleagues think favorably towards him. Second, I do not wish to create any overt tension between us since we need to get along as colleagues. Thirdly, there could be definite repercussions from him towards me in the future when he is in a position of power. I believe he knows that I do not play his political game, so it is very possible that he may be bias toward me in the future.

I would recommend that all hiring committees go through a formal training on the current legal practices of hiring in order to alleviate unethical practices and to update us on current changes. From this experience, I realize hiring committees need to be informed so that they will carry out hiring practices and procedures in the most legal and ethical manner.

Discussion and Conclusion

In all four of these main narratives, patterns and unique circumstances emerge regarding how I managed intercultural conflict that stems from prejudice. In accomplishing this, I will further discuss these four aspects: affective, cognitive, behavioral, and reflective. Before I discuss these four aspects, I would like to briefly summarize the prejudiced participants' orientation toward me. As defined earlier in this article, the prejudiced participants displayed a rigid attitude based on group membership and communicated feelings, thoughts, and action in a negative way toward another. The Caucasian American children saw me as a foreigner by their accusations that I was a "Jap" and their display of offensive antics toward me. The Hispanic woman made an angry comparative remark between Hispanics and Orientals. The Caucasian American female colleague saw me as a minority who had special treatment through affirmative action and communicated hostile responses to me. Another Caucasian American male colleague made sexist comments and prejudicial remarks regarding gays in an indirect, manipulative, and calm manner.

How can a person manage and resolve an intercultural conflict that stems from the other person's cultural prejudice? What can a person do when negative and angry feelings, thoughts, and actions are perpetrated toward another person? Is there anything that a person can say or do that will maintain a level of harmony, understanding or even changing the perpetrator's mind?

In the four mentioned narratives, under the conditions of hostility and closed-mindedness, it would be difficult to talk with and reach an understanding with the perpetrator to change one's attitude and behavior because of their bias and emotional state of mind. To react in a hostile manner could either ignite the fire of intercultural conflict more or possibly embarrass the perpetrator so that one will discontinue the prejudicial acts, but not necessarily one's attitudes and beliefs. Under these conditions, the probability of a perpetrator's prejudice will not diminish substantially.

Moreover, it is evident in this essay that prejudice comes in all forms from intentional negative actions to indirect sophisticated ways. No cultural group member, educated or uneducated are exempt from falling into the pitfalls of prejudice.

The only reasonable recourse to manage intercultural conflicts involving prejudice as I have shown in all four narratives is to not react in a negative manner toward the perpetrator. If the perpetrator's emotional level of hostility is escalated, it can result in physical harm as in the cases of the Caucasian American children and the Hispanic woman, or future negative repercussions in the scenarios with both colleagues who are in the same discipline.

I have chosen to handle all four intercultural conflicts using forbearance by controlling my feelings to remain neutral and calm, but yet surprised by the persons' prejudiced actions toward me. Behaviorally, I responded calmly with comments that briefly defended my position like "he was trying to touch my water" and "You never know. Maybe I'll be competing against another minority". My responses in these two situations reflect a confrontational, direct, factual-inductive style of managing conflict which is consistent to a low context cultural style (Chen & Starosta, 1997). However, in the other two conflicts, I neutrally commented, "Oh, yeah," and in another situation, I politely disapproved of the sexist comment my colleague said. These two responses would perhaps tend to reflect more of an indirect communication style using an ambiguous language and avoidance of saying "no" directly (Chen & Starosta, 1997) and in a non-confrontational way (Ting-Toomey, 1985) in order to have a harmonious atmosphere. My calm responses on the most part did not escalate further conflict, tension, and anger for the purpose to maintain intercultural harmony with the other person. Because my responses were communicated in a non-emotional and calm demeanor with brief verbal responses they did not on the most part incite the other to escalate the conflict.

Cognitively, during the intercultural conflicts, it was usually not clearly comprehensible to me on what was occurring during these face-to-face encounters. The only sense-making I could make during the intercultural conflict encounters was that their prejudicial acts were negative. I tend to have delay reactions both in thought and emotions, especially when interactions are filled with negativity. It is not until I start reflecting on the interaction that I cognitively and emotionally begin to respond after understanding more of what had occurred.

The reflective thinking phase of managing intercultural conflict is useful both intrapersonally and interpersonally because it helps me to begin to resolve the negative effects that resulted from the encounter. Although my childhood experience did not involve an extensive and conscious problem solving reflection, my other three narratives as an adult involved an in-depth analysis of the intercultural conflict interactions.

Prejudicial acts are not only negative, but they are also psychologically harmful to the receiver. When I internalized the prejudicial acts of conflict, it created an imbalance of uneasiness and discomfort within me. In my childhood, it was the most damaging because the prejudicial acts created an ethnic identity crisis that led to self-hate and stress. Unknowingly, this also prompted me to want to be better in activities than the Caucasian American children so they would accept me. This event moved me to be self-reliant and independent. In time, socializing with other Chinese children and a Chinese community helped regained my ethnic identity.

The other three narratives during my adult life involved reflecting upon the intercultural conflict situations that enabled me to understand and make better sense of what transpired. The process of reflective thinking involves questioning why the prejudiced person did what they did to me. I recall my father's lectures about problem-solving and saying in Cantonese that we need to *xiang* or think and *num ching cho* or think very carefully what the problem is and to find a solution. During the reflective thinking process I ask why did they say and act in such a negative

manner, and what was their intent. By asking these questions, it helped me to focus on the heart of the conflict.

In truth, I have a tendency to have delay reactions of dismay when I have had time to reflect and do some sense making of the situations. At times, I become inferioriated by the acts of prejudice and self-serving intent. At times, I have told my confidants of the intercultural conflicts as a part of managing my confusion and dismay. They in turn provide me with feedback. Other times, I would speak to someone who has authority over the perpetrator regarding the prejudicial acts. And if the situation allows me to interact with the prejudiced person, I would find a way to communicate my thoughts indirectly and in a non-confrontational manner in order that I would not be offensive and to avoid any future repercussions. In this situation, my style is consistent with current research (Chen & Starosta, 1997; Ting-Toomey, 1985) regarding high context cultures adopting a non-confrontational and indirect style of managing conflict.

In these four narratives, as a Chinese American person, I have used both low and high context cultural styles of resolving intercultural conflicts. In using both styles, it is clear that my responses that were calm, non-emotional, brief and "non-charged" words or remaining silent on the most part, benefited me the most and helped either foster surface harmony or did not escalate the conflict with the prejudiced persons.

The managing of these intercultural conflicts extends beyond the time of occurrence because the negative acts do indeed create conflict that hurts another person which requires them to invest thought and time to heal. This healing process also provides a time to understand not only oneself but the prejudiced person and what possible experiences and misunderstandings that they hold. The reflection phase is a healing process and also a preventive means by sharing one's narratives of conflicts interpersonally and also in written form in order that others may learn and be informed to hopefully stop the cycle of prejudicial acts that create intercultural conflicts of harm.

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