Asian & Pacific Islander Identities
Definitions & Groupings

I. Definitions

In the 2000 U.S. Census, the Federal Government defines "Asian American" to include persons having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent. "Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander" includes Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Guamanian or Chamorro, Fijian, Tongan, or Marshallese peoples and encompasses the people within the United States jurisdictions of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. The previous "Asian and Pacific Islander" (API) category was separated into "Asian Americans" and "Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders" (NHOPI).

Historically, Asians and Pacific Islanders were grouped together by government classifications and by us, as part of an intentional community-based strategy to build coalitions with one another. There are conflicting views on the appropriateness of any aggregate classification or reference - "Asian Pacific American", "Asian American and Pacific Islander", etc; and a lot of significance can get attached to them, e.g., the word "Other" in "Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander" (NHOPI), and it is at times dropped in favor of "Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander". Whilst our communities use various names to describe themselves; these groupings are ultimately political and part of a dynamic, continuing process of self-determination and self-identification.

The Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence uses the term "Asian and Pacific Islander" to include all people of Asian, Asian American or Pacific Islander ancestry who trace their origins to the countries, states, jurisdictions and/or the diasporic communities of these geographic regions.

Definitions inevitably become wrapped up in notions of identity.

II. Identities

Identities overlap and occur simultaneously, not discretely or serially and because identities are experienced in many ways; one's power does not rest on a single axis (or category) of identity. Within each category that defines identity, there are several sub-categories; both are enumerated below:

(1) **Ethnicity**: single race, bi- or multi-racial;
(2) **Demographics**: gender/sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, languages spoken, religion, marital status;
(3) **Geographic location**: rural, urban, suburban, military bases, poor neighborhoods;

(4) **Family history**: nuclear, extended, blended, or single parent family, adopted or biological child, only child, sibling order, living with foster parents in foster homes;

(5) **Social location and history**: type of labor performed, level of education, class position and mobility, immigration or refugee status, employment status;

(6) **Political history**: be it shaped by colonialism, imperialism, civil or international wars, racial segregation, dictatorships, capitalism, socialism; and

(7) **Practices**: food, music, holidays, styles of dress, celebrations.

III. Asian Countries

There is no official definition of the boundary between Asia and Europe (nor between continents for that matter) so the boundaries are merely traditional – and some of the countries listed as Asian might not seem obvious. For example, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia lie south of the Caucasus Mountains which have traditionally divided the two continents. Turkey and Russia straddle both Europe and Asia (sometimes referred to as Eurasia); 80% of the latter is in Asia, but Russians are generally considered Europeans; in the former, east of Istanbul is customarily considered in Asia. These examples illustrate why a single factor cannot be used to describe ethnic identity or origin.

National Geographic lists the following countries in Asia: Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar (Burma), Nepal, North Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, Russia (parts in Europe and Asia), Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Syria, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste (East Timor), Turkey (parts in Europe and Asia), Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Uzbekistan, Vietnam, and Yemen.

Quick facts: http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/continents/asia/

IV. API Ethnicities and Regional Groupings

Ethnic identities can be referenced in the aggregate e.g., Southeast Asians or disaggregated e.g., Cambodians. Asians and Pacific Islanders are generally grouped by regions although some of these can be politically controversial. There is tremendous diversity, with Asia having more than 40 countries, and there are more ethnicities than countries, e.g., the Hmong are an ethnic group from Laos. Also, Asian diasporas are extremely large and ethnic identity oversimplifications do not apply. For example, people of Japanese origin in Brazil culturally identify as Brazilians, those of Chinese origin in Guatemala identify as Guatemalans; whereas hyphenated identities are more common in the U.S. as evidenced by terms like Asian American, or Korean American.

Notions of ethnic and national identity carry political, social and familial meanings too complex to analyze here.

- **Central Asians** Afghani, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Georgians, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Mongolian, Tajik, Turkmen, Uzbek.
- **East Asians** Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Okinawan, Taiwanese, Tibetan.
- **Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders** (in the U.S. Jurisdictions & Territories) Carolinian, Chamorro, Chuukese, Fijian, Guamanian, Hawaiian, Kosraean, Marshallesse, Native Hawaiian, Niuean, Palauan, Pohnpeian, Samoan, Tokelauan, Tongan, Yapese.
- **Southeast Asians** Bruneian, Burmese, Cambodian, Filipino, Hmong, Indonesian, Laotian, Malaysian, Mien, Papua New Guinean, Singaporean, Timorese, Thai, Vietnamese.
- **South Asians** Bangladeshi, Bhutanese, Indian, Maldivians, Nepali, Pakistani, Sri Lankan.
- **West Asians** This is a contested term, most people from the region do not self-identify as such. West Asia is typically referred to as the Middle East; and geographically includes the countries of Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey (straddles Europe and Asia) United Arab Emirates and Yemen.