

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS:  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF EAST ASIAN DIASPORIC IDENTITY  
THROUGH VIRTUAL REALITY

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## **ABSTRACT**

While East Asian diaspora studies have addressed inequities imposed by hegemonic epistemologies on diasporic communities and identities, expressing the equally important politics of diasporic agency and joy is also essential. My research-creation intervenes in this knowledge space through a phenomenological framework informed by cyborg theory and assemblage theory in a Virtual Reality experience. Reiterating metaphors of prostheses for diasporic transcendence, I consider if instrumental and ecological cultural affinities of East Asian-Canadian identity can be perceived as such. Mediated by the VR experience, I visualized this by inquiring about diasporic upbringing, everyday life, personal and institutional relationships, and cultural interactions. Informed by autoethnography and semi-constructed interviews with 14 East Asian-Canadian participants, I investigated what hybridity and empowerment look, feel, and mean when extensions of diasporic selfhood are metaphorized as prostheses in an assemblage network. I also explored the affordances of VR as a pedagogical medium to visualize this analysis.

Key Words: East Asian Canadian diaspora, third-culture, prosthetics, cultural hybridity, cyborg theory, assemblage theory, phenomenology, affect, embodiment, research-creation, autoethnography, virtual reality, media theory, diasporic collectivity, VR for storytelling, VR for world-building

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### 1. Introduction:

The earliest memories of my self-awareness in my cultural identity were when my mom would always say, “You are so lucky to be a *nisei* (second-generation Japanese); you get the best of both worlds!”. Sometimes I did not get it, sometimes I agreed, and sometimes I was jealous of *her* because she could say she was born and bred Japanese, but I could not. However, through the everyday moments of translating emails and phone calls for my parents, being able to easily enjoy Japanese and Canadian movies, TV shows, music, and food, navigating travel between Japan and Canada with my two passports, or finding job opportunities because of my bilingual abilities, more and more, I began to understand how I truly was getting the “best of both worlds.” I have always viewed exploring these sparks of my Japanese-Canadian identity as unlocking levels in a video game adventure. Of course, the experience of being Othered, discomfort, confusion, and frustration are undeniable parts of the diasporic experience. However, like a portal appears in the ground when you trigger a set of codes in a game, I felt like a portal to another realm opened when parts of my East Asian or Canadian identity led me to a new connection, experience, or perspective of my diasporic self.

This ironic idea that the very parts that could hurt you could also have the potential for transcendence runs throughout the objective of this project. Considering these powers embedded in the ambiguous hyphenated identity, I was drawn to phenomenology, cyborg theory, and assemblage theory as avenues to explore the mechanism of identity blocks cyclically emerging, flowing, and transforming as an interconnected network. As Wendy Chun introduced in her 2009 book, *Race and/as Technology; or, How to Do Things to Race*, contemporary race studies must

shift focus toward what race *does* rather than what race *is*. By integrating this perspective in my research, the *how* of identity hybridity rather than the *what* may become more apparent.

Through this research-creation project, I aim to contribute to this subversive approach to East Asian diaspora studies first by developing my prosthetic-assemblage theoretical model as a reinterpretation of Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) through Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's (1987) Assemblage theory exploring the agency and empowerment in identity hybridity. Second, I consider the pedagogical and creative affordances of Virtual Reality (henceforth VR) to visualize this phenomenological conceptualization of diasporic selfhood. The creation portion of this project follows the methods of racialized storytelling explored by other East Asian artists regarding diasporic selfhood and identities. Through my VR experience, I wish to visualize the phenomenological interpretation of diasporic hybridity to the wider public, sharing this perspective through an immersive experience.

In the spirit of the Communication and Culture Program's two core streams of Media and Culture and Technology in Practice, my objective is to interpret the instrumental and ecological infrastructures of East Asian diasporic culture, identity, and communities through my theoretical and technological intervention. Pursuing this objective, I formed my theoretical framework from East Asian diaspora studies, cyborg theory, assemblage theory, phenomenology, and VR. Through autoethnography and interviews with 14 female-identifying East Asian-Canadian participants, I explore (1) perceptions and discussions of ambiguity, (2) discovery and establishment of empowerment, (3) emotional and psychological affect, and (4) instrumental and ecological structures of diasporic identity. Using my prosthetic-assemblage model and VR storytelling, I contemplate empowerment and solidarity in East Asian identity formation.

## 2. Objectives:

Through this project, my objectives are to (1) explore formative affect, knowledge, and socio-cultural relationships unique to the East Asian-Canadian experience through a mix of interview and autoethnographic methodology; (2) analyze the instrumental and ecological structures of diasporic identity through my proposed prosthetic-assemblage model; (3) apply the immersive and interactive technology of VR to visualize a first-person perspective experience of my phenomenological theorizations. To approach these objectives, I guide my project with the following research questions:

### *Research Questions:*

1. Do East Asian-Canadian Individuals experience emotional/psychological responses when navigating conflict, discomfort, and the unfamiliar in socio-cultural contexts that make them hyper-aware of their ethnic-cultural presentation?
2. When socio-cultural components of multitudinous identities contradict each other, how does one reconcile the disparity?
3. How do East Asian diasporic individuals become a site of hybridity? What markers of selfhood become instrumental in adapting to their socio-cultural environment?
4. How is agency, in the form of self-assertion and self-acceptance defined and embodied in East Asian Canadian identity?
5. What are the limitations, affordances, and implications of VR as a medium for diasporic storytelling and knowledge production?

### 3. Glossary of Key Terms:

**Affect:** Refers to a psychological experience of feeling or emotion, often considered a fundamental aspect of human experience directly linked to bodily sensations and perceptions.

**Agency:** A sense of assertion in one's life, identity, and capacity to influence one's own thoughts and behaviours in the expression of one's individuality and beliefs.

**Assemblage:** A collection or gathering of things or people; A machine or object made of pieces fitted together; A work of art made by grouping found or unrelated objects. External relations of composition, mixture, and aggregation defined by contextualized networks: a multiplicity, neither a part nor a whole (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; as cited in Puar, 2012, p. 57).

**Chinese:** Participants may use the national, ethnic, and cultural descriptor "Chinese" interchangeably with Mainland China/-ese, Hong Kong/Cantonese, and Taiwan/-ese.

**Diaspora:** The dispersion of people from their original homeland, often referring to communities living outside their ancestral land while maintaining connections to their heritage and culture.

**Ecological:** Relating to or concerned with the relation of living organisms to one another and their physical surroundings. The interconnected systems and environments that influence human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; as cited in Noro, 2009, p. 4).

**First/second/third/mixed generation:** Refers to the generational status of individuals or families relative to their migration history and cultural backgrounds. First generation refers to individuals born in a foreign country who later immigrated to another country; Second generation refers to individuals who are the children of first-generation immigrants, typically born in the country where their parents immigrated to; Third generation refers to the grandchildren of first-generation and children of second-generation immigrants typically born and raised in the country their grandparents immigrated to. Mixed generation refers to the status

of an individual or a familial unit of mixed-generational heritage, for example, a child of a second-generation father and a first-generation mother born in the original country of heritage.

**Hafu** ハーフ\*: Refers to a person who is biracial or of mixed-ethnic heritage, typically half Japanese and half another ethnicity. Derived from the English word “half”.

\*Not always used interchangeably with *hapa*, which originates from the Hawaiian word *hapa-haole*, meaning half foreign or half white mixed with Asian or Pacific Islander heritage, encompassing a much larger demographic than the Japanese word *hafu*.

**Instrumental:** To serve as a means of pursuit or performance.

**Korean:** Participants may use the national, ethnic, and cultural descriptor “Korean” interchangeably with South Korean.

**Prosthetic:** Artificial replacement of a body part.

**Virtual Reality (VR):** Computer-generated environment with scenes and objects that appear real, immersing the user in their surroundings; A sensory simulation of reality conceived through a headset or helmet with a lens.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

With these objectives, I examine “What are you?” an all-too-familiar question for diasporic Canadians that conjures many emotions, interpretations, and responses from these three simple words. “What are you?” is an ambiguous inquisition- a broad question about one’s existence and identity but also an exposure to the possibilities that culminate into a single individual. Oftentimes, what are you can be interpreted as a “Where are you from”, another way of asking about an individual’s ethnic or racial background, interrogating their cultural and belief systems. However contextually, this question can be problematic, as the “where” of one’s origin explored through “what are you?” can be ambiguous in a multicultural society like Canada. Sometimes, “What are you?” can be read as a microaggression, raising questions of belonging, otherness, and implicit power dynamics behind the complex feat of attempting to neatly define diasporic identities.

Thus, I pose the theoretical answer to this question as “the hyphen” and dive into the complexities, contradictions, and creativity that generate between the “What are you?” and its answer. In this process, adopting “race as technology” (Chun, 2009) as a lens emphasizes what race, ethnicity, and culture *do* instrumentally and ecologically. Centring instrumentality and ecology in my interrogation of identity hybridity helps to engage with various factors and contexts derived from personal anecdotes and more extensive societal conditions as anchors of its process. Therefore, through a hybrid prosthetic-assemblage model, which collaboratively blends the strengths of cyborg theory and Deleuze-Guattari’s Assemblage theory, I consider the hyphen and its potential in both the institutional and personal pieces of diasporic identities. Finally, I contemplate the limitations and affordances of VR in diasporic identity visualization,

simulation, and storytelling. I experiment with VR's abilities to learn, feel, and perform in others' shoes, as well as the sensory act of embodying this.

### **Articulating “The Hyphen” as an answer to “What Are You?”**

“What are you?”, a common interrogation often experienced by diasporic individuals, can prompt questions of ambivalence, internalization of an external gaze, objectification, agency, resistance, and passivity in framing mixed race, ethnic, and cultural identities. As a result, this project explores this question with a multi-factorial and contextual understanding (Alcoff, 1999; DeSouza, 2018) to highlight nuance and subtexts that more generalized, impersonal questions and scopes in identity research may overlook. Individual and emotional experiences are crucial in how diasporic identities reflect this simple yet complex question, revealing how factors such as being born in versus moving to North America, being mixed-race/ethnic, linguistic proficiency, and family dynamics contextualize ambivalent identities (DeSouza, 2018). Context plays a significant role in this process. Jayne Ifekwunigwe urges the state of race studies to abandon universalist, essentializing theories, vocabulary, and reductive and pluralistic claims that neglect the experiences of mixed-race, ethnic, and cultural individuals (2004). She emphasizes the need to consider geographic, temporal, and interdisciplinary contextual factors (2004) to interpret the hyphen, helping us broaden our view of what context *does* in particular circumstances in identity construction. For example, instead of identifying as a Japanese-Canadian, identifying as a second-generation, Vancouver-based Japanese-Canadian indicates far more nuanced socio-cultural dimensions of identity.

Therefore, understanding the ambivalent “hyphen” as an answer to “What are you?” requires us to do two things: a) adopt an ecological understanding of socio-cultural contexts and b) pursue an instrumentalist understanding of socio-cultural factors that interplay. Hiroko Noro,

for example, illustrates the hyphen through Urie Brofenbrenner's ecological model framework of family dynamics, language use and retention, school environments, and so forth (1979; as cited in Noro, 2009). This ecological model provides insight into how children's primary, secondary, and tertiary social ecologies, namely microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems, demonstrate how individuals' immediate and peripheral social spheres are intertwined together in developing a sense of self (Brofenbrenner, 1979; as cited in Noro, 2009). Examples of microsystems include interpersonal relationships, mesosystems describing the site of socialization through interpersonal relationships such as home, neighbourhood, schools, and online spheres, and exosystems describing local governments, companies, mass media, and local industries that mechanize the mesosystems (Brofenbrenner, 1979; as cited in Noro, 2009). Finally, the macrosystems illustrate the amalgamated form of individuals' dominant beliefs, ideologies, and sense of identity (Brofenbrenner, 1979; as cited in Noro, 2009). These external factors weave the ecology of diasporic individuals and highlight their roles in constituting contextual and subjective definitions of the hyphen.

Shifting our focus to the effect (instrumentalist) and context (ecological) of the hyphen in response to the "What are you?" allows us to consider subdued sociocultural factors or environments relevant to diasporic identity construction which may be undermined otherwise. Furthermore, understanding the instrumentalist and ecological structure of the hyphen reveals larger sociocultural power dynamics. Minelle Mahtani (2002), Jillian Paragg (2017), and Celine Lebouef (2020) examine the "What are you?" in the Canadian context, revealing how the question often serves as a vehicle of an alienating, curious, objectifying investigation to transform the unfamiliar to the familiar for the inquisitor (Lebouef, 2020). The power dynamics surrounding the question depend on two factors: the *context* of the question (who, why, when,

and how are they asking) and the racial/ethnic visibility of the questioner relative to the individual being questioned (Paragg, 2017; Lebouef, 2020).

In the context of Canadian multiculturalism, mixed-race/ethnic or non-Euro-Canadians are subject to the curious objectification of the “What are you?” due to their visible, invisible, or ambiguous Otherness (Paragg, 2017; Lebouef, 2020; Mahtani, 2002). Despite Canada’s self-proclaimed multicultural identity, ethnic and racial in/visibility dictate static social categories inherent to euro-heteronormative dominance in its “multiculturalism” (Mahtani, 2002). This reality makes us question how ambiguity and non-conformity are accounted for in the Canadian multicultural imaginary. Albeit a question of curious desire to recognize ambiguity, the objectifying gaze in “What are you?” must not be mistaken as empathetic recognition of the Othered subject but must be problematized as a site of power (Fanon, 1952; as cited in Lebouef, 2020). The motive of subjugating curiosity situates racially, ethnically, and culturally mixed Canadians as passive spectacles, cornered to clarify their ambiguity.

Oftentimes, hyphenated individuals cannot earnestly answer the “What are you?” question with a simple word, nor without risking potentially ignorant responses from the questioner (Mahtani, 2002; Paragg, 2017; Lebouef, 2020; Törngren & Sato, 2021). The “in-between” hyphen identity treads a non-explicit line of approval and rejection, encompassing the simultaneous state of being visible and invisible and multiple and singular (Alcoff, 1999). Thus, to identify with, let alone be asked to describe, the hyphen can be burdensome and may further distance diasporic individuals from the idealized imagery of “multicultural Canadianness” (Mahtani, 2002). These sentiments toward the probing question were expressed in Sayaka Törngren and Yuna Sato’s study of multi-racial/ethnic individuals in Japan who either a) assimilate to the dominant national racial imaginary of a homogenous identity, b) resist

assimilation to the imaginary, c) accept a neitherness or bothness of their ambiguity, or even d) strongly identify as neither, and instead simply as a human being (2021). Beyond the “burdensome” hyphen, some may find the question to be an opportunity to reject passivity with “ready” narratives of the hyphen identity such as “I’m everything and nothing” (Paragg, 2017, p. 292) or “Canadian if that’s what you’re asking?” (Paragg, 2017, p. 292) that subvert this inherent power dynamic (Paragg, 2017).

These attitudes of resistance and reclamation of the hyphen open the “What are you?” question as an opportunity for identity play, resistance and flexibility (Paragg, 2017). For example, Aya Fujiwara defines hyphenated identities, or “ethnic elites,” as a result of successful navigation and manipulation of cultural, social, political and historical forces by diasporic individuals (2012). An instrumentalist lens is thus helpful in investigating how ethnic and cultural duality, like dual language capabilities and dual cultural knowledge, can be spun as a tool to maintain and prosper diasporic communities (2012). With this potentiality, the hyphen as an answer to “What are you?” can become a disruption cutting across the Canadian multicultural status quo, suggesting that identity is not always static or categorizable but strategic and synchronous with sociocultural ecologies (Alcoff, 1999). By dissecting the hyphen through an instrumental and ecological approach, I conceptualize race and ethnicity as its own agent to consider what the hyphen *does* as a tool rather than what it merely *is* in diasporic identity.

### **Race as Technology in Relation to Identity Construction**

Understanding “What are you?” as a site of production for the hyphen, a kaleidoscopic expression of complex identities, allows us to identify the contextuality, multifactoriality, utility, and essence of play surrounding diasporic ambiguity. Race as technology, the impactful analogy coined by Chun (2009), allows us to understand how race and ethnicity can be mechanized as

tools to investigate their instrumental and ecological “doings” in identity and community formation. What does “race as technology” say about being legible or non-legible? Being an isolate or a multiplicity? Being constructed (passive) or self-constructed (active)? The ontology of hybridity? This metaphor is critical to revealing what mechanizing and embodying lived experience means in identity construction as an ecological web.

First, understanding race as technology in diasporic identity construction means understanding that mixed-race, ethnic, and cultural selfhood is embodied, phenomenological and contextual (Alcoff, 1999). Race is “read” and rendered visible/invisible in different ways, and its socio-cultural impacts on societal and individual interpretations of race inevitably create a contextual dimension (Alcoff, 1999). For Linda Alcoff, this is the most sound and encompassing approach to race and racial identity studies as opposed to nominalist or essentialist approaches previously favoured in the field (Alcoff, 1999). This perspective challenges the notion that race is fixed and immutable, but rather the opposite, that it is fluid and malleable (Alcoff, 1999).

If we understand that contextuality informs behaviours and interactions of multi-racial, ethnic, and cultural identities in its formation, Chun’s “race as technology” emphasizes the power of race, ethnicity, and culture as a *tool, instrument, and method* to examine its manifestations in both the individual and society, questioning its utility and ethics (Chun, 2009). By understanding race as technology, the potential for race’s utility to dehumanize or empower hyphenated identities must be questioned. This evaluation of racial and ethnic utility and power, as I anticipate to be discussed in my research, may fluctuate depending on an individual’s sociocultural environment, upbringing, and other contextual factors. Seo-young Chu, for example, uses the uncanny valley model to explore how the ambiguity of mixed-race, ethnic, and cultural people are forced or “detained” as uncanny spectacles (2015) in the context of the Euro

normative narrative of multiculturalism that Mahtani (2002) criticizes. Using the uncanny valley as a metaphor, Chu criticizes the weaponization of race as an institutional power that oppresses, categorizes, and “detains” ambiguous individuals deemed uncanny to the dominant racial imaginary (2015). Race as technology thus offers a lens to *instrumentally* and *contextually* see how hyphenated identities navigate this categorical state of Canadian multiculturalism. I take this analogy further to consider the affordances of a hybrid prosthetic-assemblage model, borrowing from cyborg theory and assemblage theory (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Currier, 2003; Puar, 2012) to visualize the intricate, yet sprawling micro/macro processes of diasporic hybridity.

### **The Notion of Prosthetic versus Assemblage**

Considering the limitations and affordances of phenomenological interventions of intersectionality and hybridity such as cyborg theory and intersectionality theory, I contemplate the possibility of a hybrid prosthetic-assemblage theory. Early theoretical conceptions of the cyborg and intersectionality have been criticized for the passivity of the theoretical model itself—the idea of an individual as an isolated centre or point of contact with intersections of identity as isolated extensions of the individual (Puar, 2012). Particularly for cyborg theory, the use of prosthetics as a metaphor is conceived as an isolated attachment to an individual. Kimberlé Crenshaw’s traffic intersection model has been criticized for similar reasons, and the conceptual flaw of how the individual, situated at the centre of an intersection, can only be passively met with determinant forces posed by society, represented by the roads meeting the intersection (Puar, 2012). These conceptions of intersectionality limit the materialization of ambiguity and fail to escape binary conceptualizations of identity, and fluidity within an individual.

For Currier (2003) and Puar (2012), the cyborg contradicts its original purpose to reject patriarchal binaries by ironically being unable to escape the binary logic of existence (Currier,

2003; Puar, 2012) as opposed to the cyclical, non-linear nature of envisioning identity construction as a network-like entity, or assemblage, for example. Cyborg models that emphasize the body and singular ontologies of identity still imagine selfhood as an isolate attached to another isolate, suggesting an inseparable, unilinear conceptualization of selfhood (Currier, 2003; Puar, 2012). Early ideological intentions proposed through cyborg feminism sought to break down traditional categorical boundaries that limit ambiguous individualism, like the difference between humans and animals or humans and machines (Haraway, 1985). However, Currier and Puar, point out that the idea of cyborgs ironically still relies on the old categories (like "human" and "technology") that these frameworks intended to challenge (2003; 2012). Currier argues that this approach accidentally keeps us stuck in the same way of thinking, where elements of the self are divided into distinctive categories when the goal is to transcend them (2003). Citing feminist theorist Luciana Parisi, Puar does not completely disavow but pushes the cyborg entity further by looking at how the natural world, culture, and digital technology mutually intersect, focusing on *how* pieces of identity are formed rather than simply what they represent (Parisi, 2009; as cited in Puar, 2012). In response to this call, both Currier and Puar offer Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory to mitigate these shortcomings.

Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory, when considered as an alternative to the cyborg or traffic intersection models, rejects the idea of isolated positionalities. It instead suggests a contextual, trans-spatial/temporal, and non-hierarchical configuration of flows, energies, and materials in both the personal and broader socio-cultural contexts of an individual's ecology (Deleuze Guattari, 1987; as cited in Currier, 2003 and Puar, 2012). The elements of an assemblage in identity construction are instrumental, multi-factorial, circumstantial, coming together and falling apart in a non-linear fashion (Puar, 2012). This assemblage, as explained by

Currier and Puar as a solution to the limitations of early conceptions of the cyborg, importantly does two things: 1) allows us to visualize power dynamics and relations between institutions and the personal in identity production and 2) allows us to see what objects (like race, ethnicity, and culture,) *do* instrumentally rather than what they simply *are* (2003; 2012). Puar also borrows from Brian Massumi's "event-space" conceptualization of social identity in her interpretation of Deleuze-Guattari's assemblage to consider contextuality and the porosity of identity (2011; as cited in Puar, 2012). The interconnectedness and porousness offered by the "event-space" model alleviate the misconception of an individual's identity as an aggregate of isolates composed of linear, static, and categorical structures (2011; as cited in Puar, 2012). This response to Haraway's cyborg model through assemblage theory invites an understanding of identity as a cyclical, non-linear, porous, and embodied assemblage constantly in flux.

Additionally, Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank contemplate specific roles of affect, performance, and embodiment, which I borrow as the glue, muscle, and motor that mobilizes the components in this assemblage model. In a diasporic individual, I suggest that the elements of an assemblage are best envisioned if we can see how affect (emotional and sensory-driven responses), performance (performed and action-based responses), and embodiment (manifestation of affect and performance in the body) accumulate in identity construction (2003). This dynamic again leads us to understand how race is technologized and contextually springs into action. Similarly, Young dissects the components of embodiment as modalities of existence, movement, and spatial orientation that establish identity in female experiences (1980). Young observes that the bodily comportment (personal bearing or conduct) of feminine existence is marked by the tension between immanence and transcendence in navigating the world, which urges a contextualist approach to understanding identity (Young, 1980). The three categories that

aid in this contextualist approach are: a) inhibited intentionality (self-contradiction/limitation); b) ambiguous transcendence (concrete and isolated mobility); and c) discontinuous unity (self-perception as an object or subject) (Young, 1980). With additional factors of racial, ethnic, and cultural hybridity in my research, this phenomenological understanding of perceiving and being perceived, embodying lived experience, and instrumentally and ecologically absorbing and performing societal conditions are crucial to the framework of my prosthetic-assemblage model.

While working with these particular conceptualizations of the cyborg and its metaphoric devices like prosthetics, there is something to be said about how cyborg theory, as pioneered by Haraway's *Manifesto*, has extended beyond the criticisms proposed by Puar and Currier. In the early forms of the cyborg I considered, its theoretical scope was focused on notions such as the body, self, and situating the body and self amidst and beyond the socio-political dualisms that bound them. Although I have referred to the *Manifesto* (1985) model of the cyborg in conceptualizing my prosthetic-assemblage theory, Haraway's more recent articulations of identity beyond mere existence and ownership of self must be noted (Ife, 2020). In her more recent works, Haraway redefines identity politics more in relation to affinities and making kin, viewing selfhood as a collective oneness and mutual boundary-pushing of one another (Ife, 2020). Rather than emphasizing the ontological process of intersectionality and hybridity as an individuated experience, this process is iterated as a collection of porous kinship and affinity, which characterizes much of Haraway's later works<sup>1</sup>. In the name of "staying with the trouble" (Haraway, 2016; as cited in Ife, 2020), I hope to reintegrate notions of the cyborg and selfhood beyond its primitive forms in future installments of my prosthetic-assemblage theory.

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<sup>1</sup> For further readings consider Haraway's work *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin with the Chthulucene* (2016).

## **Pedagogical and Representational Limitations/Affordances of VR**

The still-novel research in VR as a medium for racial, ethnic, and cultural storytelling remains contested across interdisciplinary fields. As I consider the limitations and affordances of VR to tell the stories of diasporic hybridity, this pillar of my theoretical framework is crucial in designing the experience. It is also critical to my theoretical analysis of VR mediums as a literal pedagogical representation of adaptability, affect, and permeability of selfhood. VR uniquely offers a transcendent medium between imagination and reality, rendering users both subject and object, extending visions of imagined diasporic utopias and dystopias, contemplating active versus passive learning and embodiment of multiple identities. These potentials of VR may also resonate with the experiences of many diasporic individuals born and/or raised in North America away from diasporic homelands, sometimes for generations, where their “homeland” identity is mediated and constructed through others’ experiences and knowledge (like immigrant parents, relatives, travel, media, etc.) (Zhang, 2021). This trans-spatial and temporal knowledge experience is an integral aspect of diasporic identity formation, as discussed later in my own research. These affordances of VR in this context may also indicate a possible exploration of radical futurism, a potential avenue of integrating VR and diasporic storytelling. Thus, while VR’s limitations as automated empathy machines for racialized suffering (Nakamura, 2020) and perpetrators of passive bystander user positionality critically need reform, I ponder mitigative ways to use VR as a diasporic forum and tool in knowledge production.

Neuroscientists Harry Farmer and Lara Maister’s research primarily explores the potentials of VR and considers how the psychological response of empathy can “transcend” the boundary between self and Others mediated by VR storytelling. Understanding the constitution of human selfhood as a coexistence of the a) bodily self and b) conceptual self, Farmer and

Masiter argue that self-representation and empathy between the VR user and their embodied experience operate similarly: they are malleable and plastic (2017). Through this understanding of selfhood, the authors suggest that sensory perception through our bodily self can activate or deactivate bias and prejudice through our conceptual self, comprised of personal values, knowledge, and familiar experience (2017). VR experiences, if following this logic, can change perceptions in users to reduce learned prejudice (2017). Being able to “see ourselves” through the subjects of the VR experience is vital for our conceptual self to become permeable and see ourselves in another’s reality virtually (Farmer & Maister, 2017). This phenomenon is supported by the fact that our brain can blur the boundaries between self (both bodily and conceptual) and other, making us feel responsible and take ownership (Farmer & Maister, 2017). This could be the defining power of VR as a tool for empathy. However, the limitation of this logic is in its practicality. The first concern is the current harmful representation of marginalized communities in corporate, mainstream VR media that may perpetuate prejudice and bias, and the second concern is the limitation of participating in another’s reality as an observer or bystander (passive interaction) versus as a primary agent in the experience (active interaction). How can VR experiences be designed to harbour “genuine” empathy versus performed, temporary empathy? Empathy itself is questionable as a desired emotional outcome of VR experiences.

Olivia Lee takes a more neutral, non-deterministic stance that considers gaps in accessibility, representation, and participation in the VR industry and its media content. She criticizes the issues of discriminatory content in VR applications and the Euro-normative upper-class power upholding its production (2022). Lee’s demands for “authentic” representation (2022) in VR, contemplating what self/collective storytelling and egalitarian production (Abril-Gonzales et al., 2021) look like in VR. There is also a need for equity in software design,

representation in industry designers, producers, and leaders, and gendered accessibility in hardware ergonomics (Lee, 2022). As VR becomes more readily accessible, improvements in these areas could scaffold the possibilities of VR, as Farmer and Maister mentioned earlier.

Finally, Lisa Nakamura takes a critical standpoint on the dangers of VR as a storytelling tool for minority experiences. She argues for the urgency of considering the perilous dystopic futures of VR as harbingers of “automated empathy” before considering its potential (2020, p. 60). The shift of big tech companies like Meta marketizing VR as a tool for empathy, particularly gendered or racialized empathy, is alarming as a self-satisfying empathy simulation for the rich, White and powerful and, in turn, exploiting marginalized communities and trauma (Nakamura, 2020). The reliance on VR for empathy and social change only encourages the exploitation of racialized and gendered people as a spectacle of pity and empathy for privileged users to essentially “feel good” about “feeling bad” (Nakamura, 2020). Nakamura criticizes that this false virtuousness is a projection of White guilt or saviour complex, hindering real social change (2020). Nakamura discusses Nonny de la Peña’s *One Dark Night* (2015), a VR experience that reproduces the 2012 murder of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American teenager in which the user bears witness to the crime in second-hand proximity (2020). Although *One Dark Night* intended to raise awareness of the pending issue of the unjust murders and incrimination of African Americans in the United States, Nakamura reasonably doubts the morality and genuine effectiveness of the temporary sensationalization of a real murder (2020). This is a significantly contrasting opinion from Farmer and Maister’s more optimistic, neuroscientific point of view.

Yet, the key discussion I find missing in these contrasting views of VR for racialized and gendered storytelling is the potential to transition from merely looking or observing (removed from the situation) versus becoming an active participant in VR experiences. This potential helps

me explore my fifth research question, considering the positionality of individuals in racialized storytelling. Through my VR experience, I hope to explore what an immersive, participatory form of storytelling entails in terms of accountability of one's actions, sense of selfhood, and embodying the process of identity construction, even if they are unfamiliar experiences for some.

Nakamura's critical questions must be addressed in the context of my VR production. Rather than passive bystander participation and empathy as the primary affective goal, I wonder if a sense of realness, presence, and gravity in VR storytelling can be facilitated through a game design that emphasizes active participation and decision-making. This could shift the prominent sentiment of the experience from empathy to something more actively participatory like accountability, relatability, or solidarity. Another dire issue in VR for racial storytelling is rooted in the content, who the creators are, and who the content is made *for*. As a novel experimental form of storytelling technology, VR's usefulness in social change may take a long run of trial and error to fruition. Pitfalls may be inevitable, but I wish to capitalize on the affordances of VR to explore the story of East Asian diasporic hybridity to potentially evoke a sense of responsibility, agency, and solidarity in imagining possible futures for the community. I consider experimenting with VR as a tool for immersive knowledge production and conscious sharing in diasporic storytelling, perhaps through a choose-your-own-adventure experience rather than an experience that may encourage passive participation, avoiding a bystander positionality of the User.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### 3.1 Research Design:

Due to the narrative-focused nature of my research, I employed a multi-methods methodology, gathering data from interviews and autoethnographic sources to incorporate into the VR experience's narrative script and storyboarding. This methodology best allows myself, as a Japanese-Canadian, to take on the role both as the researcher and participant to systematically and relationally expand personal experiences, memories, cultural backgrounds, oral histories, and interpersonal relationships as a point of reference to draw parallels between diasporic identity hybridity and my theoretical framework. This dual positionality of the researcher allows for a nuanced lens into the research topic. Because phenomenological analysis engages with introspective emotional and psychological exploration, my autoethnography helps engage with this deeply personal investigation that may be limited in my interviews.

The other participants in my research will be my 14 interviewees. These semi-constructed interviews offer 14 diverse perspectives on the same questions that I explore in my autoethnography (see Figure 3, interview questions). These interviews aim to provide a broader look into the personal, private, and every day as well as institutional, public and profound experiences and perspectives on the East Asian Canadian experience, tracing a timespan from childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood onwards. The interviews and autoethnographic fieldwork follow identical inquisitory procedures not only to compare subjective experiences with other East Asian diasporic Canadians but also to illustrate diverse forms of the East Asian-Canadian experience to be used as source material for my VR experience.

Finally, this project employs a research-creation methodology to explore complex, nuanced narratives of diasporic hybridity by creatively interpreting my findings and analysis. Research-creation integrates traditional qualitative research methodologies such as interviewing and ethnography with creative practices, allowing the exploration and expression of research findings through artistic and imaginative story-telling mediums (Loveless, 2019). Through this triad of methods, I explore my findings first through theoretical analysis and second through a visual interpretation to envision my analysis.

### *Autoethnography*

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that intertwines personal experiences with cultural analysis to explore the complexities of identity, belonging, and culture. Originating in and subverting ethnographic traditions, autoethnography allows researchers to illuminate their subjective experiences traversing broad socio-cultural, introspective, and personal contexts, offering rich insights into lived realities that might otherwise remain obscured in more generalized samples (Iosefo et al., 2021, p. 9). By integrating the researcher's personal reflections and experiences as an East Asian-Canadian individual, autoethnography facilitates a reflexive understanding of the complexities and nuances of identity negotiation, cultural adaptation, and belonging within diasporic communities. My use of autoethnography not only enriches the research process but also contributes to the amplification of subjective perspectives and experiences within academic discourse by articulating personal lived and psychological experiences through theoretical analysis and connections to general phenomena experienced by an individual's community or society. Autoethnography allowed myself to explore the deeper psychology and possibly discomforting thoughts, feelings, and experiences that may not be

explored as directly in my interviews. Thus, this opportunity created a channel to discuss the emotional undercurrents of diasporic upbringing and identity formation.

### *Research-creation*

Research-creation, a methodology merging artistic practice and academic-led inquiry, is a potent tool for exploring complex phenomena at the intersection of art and scholarship. This approach traverses traditional disciplinary boundaries, inviting scholars and artists to engage in knowledge production through creative practice. Rather than adhere to transparency and traditional methodological rigour and structure, practice-based research can muddle the lines between the subjective and objective, evoking dialogue through inductive means as a form of introspection and intervention (Chapman and Sawchuk, 2012). Drawing from diverse fields such as fine arts, media studies, cultural studies, and performance, research-creation foregrounds the significance of practice-led research, emphasizing experimental learning, embodied knowledge, auto-theory (interpretation of theoretical frameworks through lived experience), and aesthetic exploration (Loveless, 2019). In my project, this methodology is appropriate to visually mediate East Asian diasporic experience and my phenomenological and abstract claims. Especially when it comes to my prosthetic-assemblage framework, I find that a visual representation may benefit my arguments of identity formation and hybridity.

### *Participants*

There are 15 total participants in my study including myself as the autoethnography participant. My interview participants were solely recruited through targeted outreach in specific forums and groups on social media platforms such as Facebook (Subtle Asian traits) and Reddit forums dedicated to East Asian diasporic communities such as r/subtleasiantraits,

r/EastAsianDiaspora and r/aznidentity. Participants were invited to participate in the study in response to the recruitment poster, description, and application questionnaire that I posted on each site. I created anonymous accounts on each platform (Facebook and Reddit) for the recruitment process to avoid undue influence and conflict of interest. The extent of my anonymity was described as a 25-year-old female East Asian Master's student. Since my identity was described as the same demographic as the inclusion criteria for the participants, I feel that despite my anonymity, my recruitment posting invited a positive response. I exceeded my initial expectations of 10 participants with a turnout of 14 participants, which I attribute to the demographic information I disclosed about myself and the context provided by my project description. These factors may have granted a degree of accountability in my project, leading to this successful recruitment outcome. The inclusion criteria for recruitment were defined in the postings to ensure a contained sample in terms of age (19-30), gender (female-identifying), racial, ethnic, and cultural identity (East Asian-Canadian). Between my posting date of March 10th, 2024 and the application deadline of March 30th, 2024, I recruited 14 eligible respondents: seven from Facebook's Subtle Asian Traits Group, four from Reddit's r/subtleasiantraits forum, two from Reddit's r/EastAsianDiaspora, and one from Reddit's r/aznidentity.

### 3.2. Data Collection Procedures and Analysis:

#### *Semi-structured interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants to explore their lived experiences, cultural identities, and perceptions of hybridity within the diasporic context. The interview questions (Figure 3) were designed to elicit rich narratives and personal reflections while allowing emergent themes to arise organically. Interviews were audio recorded with the

consent of participants and transcribed for analysis. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was audio-recorded through Zoom upon receiving consent from the participants.

### *Autoethnographic Fieldwork*

In addition to interviews, I engaged in autoethnographic reflection to critically examine my own East Asian-Canadian experiences and identities based on the same seven interview questions as the interviews (Figure 3). The autoethnographic fieldwork was conducted before the interviews to not influence potential bias in the outcomes of my interviews. I engaged in autoethnography by journaling personal experiences and reflections based on the prompts given by the questions as field notes. I identified general points of inquiry based on my research questions, such as a) emotional and psychological experiences of identity, b) perceiving and being perceived, and c) empowerment and self-acceptance as agency and self-worth. This prototypical outline guided my fieldwork process in the form of streams of consciousness and journaling. After this autoethnographic process, I refined the points of inquiry to their more specific renditions as my interview questions.

### *Thematic Analysis*

The data collected from interviews and autoethnographic reflections were thematically analyzed using the qualitative coding program Delve. Transcripts from interviews and autoethnographic fieldnotes were categorized by themes surrounding codes identified through recurring emotions, topics, conversations, patterns, and contradictions within the data. Themes were iteratively defined through data familiarization, rounds of combining similar codes and eliminating irrelevant ones, cross-referencing, and rearranging to ensure utmost rigour and validity. The four themes and 24 codes (Figure 4) were identified through comparison within and

across participants' quotes and keywords to capture patterns and variations in the interview and autoethnography findings, offering sufficient data to explore my research questions.

### *Research-Creation- VR Experience*

#### *Conceptualization*

The VR experience serves as a medium to visualize findings and analysis from my interview and autoethnography. This component aims to immerse viewers in a virtual experience exploring East Asian diasporic identity formation, empowerment, and hybridity. This is an important step because of the previously stated objectives of my VR experience- to visually explore user-centric decision-making and active participation in racialized storytelling and knowledge production. This visualization aims to enhance the comprehension of my Prosthetic-Assemblage model, as I draw heavily phenomenological and metaphorical conclusions that may benefit from visualization. Second, aspects of affect, performance, and embodiment are crucial elements of my theoretical analysis that may benefit from expressing through a sensory experience like VR. The VR experience semi-fictitiously encompasses the anecdotes shared by my participants. This experiential structure encapsulates subdued, formative moments of East Asian-Canadian hybridity that provide visual and experiential insight into the ontology of selfhood presented throughout my paper. However, despite these intentions with my research-creation, there was dissonance between the theoretical framework and visual execution in the resulting prototype of my research-creation, which will be elaborated on later.

#### *Development*

I first developed this VR experience by conceptualizing a storyline based on my interviews and autoethnography. I then crafted a semi-fictional script highlighting the sensory

experiences, emotional resonance and theoretical findings. Then, I created a storyboard and visual materials, which were imported into the game engine software Unreal Engine 5 to begin my virtual world-building and filmmaking. This creation process was supported by peers who offered their expertise in using the software and those who provided their performance as voice actors. The VR experience has yet to be playtested but may be considered in the future. Further details regarding the VR experience will be explored later in Chapter 5: Discussion.

### 3.3 Ethical Considerations and Limitations:

Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the York University Office of Research Ethics in February 2024. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their interview participation. They were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, honest representation of participants' narratives in this project, and the voluntary nature of their involvement.

Pseudonyms in the form of "Participant (randomized assigned alphabet)" are used throughout the paper to protect anonymity. Potential emotionally sensitive data, which I anticipated due to the nature of my research, was handled with care and/or omitted upon deliberation by providing resources post-interview to support those who may have experienced distress in the process.

Despite my attempt to maintain the rigour of this research project, it is essential to acknowledge the potential barriers in my methodology. A crucial limitation is the relatively small sample size of 14 participants, and myself as the autoethnography participant (total of 15 participants), which restricts the feasibility of making claims regarding the broader East Asian Canadian community and may underrepresent specific subgroups. Despite efforts to recruit diverse participants, the sample may still be skewed because of the prevalence of particular demographics of people on the social media forums and groups I sampled from. Future research

with larger or more specific samples recruited from different platforms or offline sources could offer a more comprehensive understanding.

Another limitation is my use of autoethnography, which inherently limits the generalizability of findings due to its reliance on personal experiences and affect, providing a subjective lens. My chosen methodologies may offer a diverse yet non-generalizable data set, as it centers on individual narratives rather than broader population trends. However, these methodological implications align with my objective of exploring the complex subject interplay within diasporic hybridity through a phenomenological, narrative interpretation, so I deem this approach appropriate.

Finally, there were some challenges in the research-creation process, primarily in the frustrations with insufficient technical skills in the VR experience programming and oversight in translating the theoretical interpretations of my findings into the visual storyboarding and game design. These challenges and insights I experienced through the research-creation process will be explored further in the discussion section.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

This section begins with a summary of the interview and autoethnography participants' demographic information (Figures 1 and 2), autoethnography and interview questions (Figure 3), and the categorical themes and codes as a result of my data collection process (Figure 4), followed by the presentation of findings (Figures 5-9).

Figure 1. List of Participants, pronouns, age, and self-described identity.

Pseudonym/ID	Age	Pronoun(s)	Self-described identity
Researcher	25	she/her	Japanese-Canadian
Participant Z	22	she/her	Chinese-Canadian
Participant G	30	she/they	Half-Chinese Half-French Canadian
Participant P	25	she/her	South Korean-Canadian
Participant M	26	they/them	Japanese and Canadian (sometimes with Dad is German)
Participant E	22	she/her	Chinese-Canadian
Participant L	25	she/her	Chinese-Canadian
Participant K	22	she/her	Half Japanese Half Korean-Canadian
Participant J	25	she/her	Chinese-Canadian
Participant H	22	she/her	Japanese-Canadian
Participant S	23	she/her	Half Japanese Half English-Canadian
Participant C	25	she/her	Chinese-Canadian
Participant X	22	she/her	Chinese-Canadian
Participant A	25	she/her	Chinese-Canadian
Participant N	30	she/her	Born in China, living in Canada

Figure 2. List of Participants' biographical details

Pseudonym/ID	Biographical Details
Researcher	Second-generation Japanese-Canadian, born and raised in Vancouver to first-generation Japanese parents, has lived in Toronto, and currently living in New York
Participant Z	First-generation Chinese, born and raised in Mainland China to Chinese parents, came to Canada in her teens, currently living in Toronto
Participant G	Mixed generation half Chinese and half French-Canadian, born in the United Kingdom to third-generation Chinese mother and second-generation French father, raised briefly in the UK, grew up in Toronto, has lived in Vancouver, and currently living in Los Angeles.
Participant P	First-generation South Korean-Canadian, born and briefly raised in South Korea to South Korean parents, grew up in Vancouver, and currently living in Toronto
Participant M	Mixed-generation half Japanese half German-Canadian, born and raised in Vancouver to a first-generation Japanese mother and second-generation German father, has lived in Ontario and currently living in Vancouver
Participant E	First-generation Chinese-Canadian, born and briefly raised in Mainland China to first-generation Chinese parents, grew up and currently living in Vancouver
Participant L	Second-generation Chinese-Canadian, born and raised in Vancouver to first-generation Chinese parents, has lived in Toronto, and currently living in Vancouver
Participant K	Second-generation half Japanese half South Korean-Canadian, born and raised in Vancouver to a first-generation Japanese mother and first-generation South Korean father, currently living in Vancouver
Participant J	First-generation Chinese-Canadian, born and briefly raised in Mainland China to first-generation Chinese parents, grew up in Vancouver, has lived in Montreal, and currently living in Toronto
Participant H	Second-generation Japanese, born and raised in Vancouver to first-generation Japanese parents, currently living in Vancouver
Participant S	Mixed-generation half Japanese half British-Canadian, born and raised in Vancouver to first-generation Japanese father and second-generation British mother, currently living in Vancouver
Participant C	Second-generation Chinese-Canadian born in Vancouver to first-generation Chinese parents, raised briefly in Mainland China, grew up in Vancouver, currently living in Ontario
Participant X	First-generation Chinese-Canadian born and briefly raised in Mainland China to first-generation Chinese parents, grew up in Toronto, currently living in Toronto
Participant A	First-generation Chinese-Canadian, born and raised in China to Chinese parents, came to Canada in her teens, currently living in Vancouver
Participant N	First-generation Chinese-Canadian, born and raised in China to Chinese parents, came to Canada in her teens, currently living in Vancouver

As seen in these tables, seven of the 15 participants were born and raised in Canada, with eight growing up in Canada from early childhood to secondary school. Another significant demographic factor is that four participants are mixed-ethnic or mixed-race like Participant G, Participant M, Participant K, and Participant S. This background is noteworthy to highlight another dimension of ambiguity in the diasporic experience, such as visible ambiguity and bi or tri-lingual/cultural upbringings. Contextualized by this demographic of my participant pool, I explored the interview/autoethnography questions in the following.

### Figure 3. Interview and Autoethnography Questions

1. Can you recall instances/ how would you answer the question “Where are you from?”
2. Where and when do you feel like you most belong?
3. Reflecting on your upbringing, to what degree do you feel like you have been exposed to your cultural background?
4. How has your East Asian heritage positively shaped your upbringing in Canada?
5. Are there any aspects/cultural values of your East Asian culture that you feel are currently a substantial part of who you are?
6. If you could speak to your childhood/younger self, is there anything you would want to say in terms of coming to terms with your identity or relationship with your heritage?
7. If you could speak to your future hypothetical child or a younger loved one, is there anything you would consider in fostering their East Asian diasporic upbringing?

In response to the above seven questions, 15 interview and autoethnography answers to each question totalled up to 105 answers. These answers were then segmented by quotes and codified according to recurring emotional and narrative patterns, key topics, and words. The codes were then thematically categorized to guide my research questions.

Figure 4. Categorical Themes and Codes:

Themes	Number of Codes	
Theme 1: Perceptions of Ambiguity	4	
Theme 2: Discovery and Establishment of Empowerment in Ambiguous Diasporic Identities	5	
Theme 3: Emotional and Psychological Structures of Diasporic Identity	6	
Theme 4: Instrumental and Ecological Structures of Hybridity	12	
	<b>Total:</b>	27
Codes	Number of highlight Quotes	Number of similar quotes
Code 1:Explicit and implicit indicators of identity probing	4	32
Code 2: Visibility and invisibility of ambiguity	3	15
Code 3: Power dynamics of conversations surrounding diasporic identity	2	26
Code 4: Nature of identity probing and its necessity in identity politics	2	14
Code 5: Deliberate manipulation of identity expression in specific contexts	2	23
Code 6: Simultaneity/Multiplicity of identity categories fluidly maneuvered	3	24
Code 7: Conscious categorization, curation, and expression of identities in anticipation of others' reflections	4	28
Code 8: Opportunistic adaptation and fluidity in identity formation	3	27
Code 9: Sense of agency in identity formation as an ongoing experimental project	12	97
Code 10: Sense of misalignment with Canadian/East Asian culture, values, society	11	80
Code 11: Invasiveness and discomfort of identity probing	2	24
Code 12: Confusion in the discrepancy between one's self-identity and external perception	2	16
Code 13: Doubt towards Canadian multiculturalism and its institutions	3	25
Code 14: Remnants of childhood nostalgia in identity formation	2	22
Code 15: Reverse culture shock and the sense of being 'frozen in time and space'	2	10
Code 16: Human relationships and networks	12	96
Code 17: Shared experiences and relatability	12	69
Code 18: Structure as aid	2	12
Code 19: Travel to the homeland	4	36
Code 20: Pieces of East Asian culture	14	111
Code 21: Cultural and political knowledge	12	77
Code 22: Customs and values	11	66
Code 23: Ancestry, family, and home life	15	111
Code 24: Language and linguistic proficiency	14	108
	<b>Total:</b>	153

The thematic categories I identified through my interviews and autoethnography were (1) Perceptions of ambiguity, (2) discovery and establishment of empowerment, (3) emotional and psychological experiences, and (4) instrumental and ecological structures of diasporic hybridity. These findings will be interpreted through my prosthetic-assemblage model later in Chapter 5.

### Perceptions and Discussions of Ambiguity:

Critical thoughts and observations emerged regarding the perception and discussion of ambiguity in the first category. Participants noted explicit and implicit probing, invisible or visible expressions of identity and power dynamics surrounding the complex positionalities and relationships caused by mixed-race, ethnic, and cultural ambiguity.

Ignorant approaches to identity probing often led to discomfort, particularly when questions were posed by Euro-Canadians or worded in ways that othered individuals or instigated unsolicited probing of ambiguity. Yet, responses to discussing one's identity varied contextually; interactions with other East Asians were generally deemed neutral or even reciprocal and even beneficial for forming social connections.

The in/visibility of ambiguous traits played a crucial role in how cultural identity was perceived. For example, participants with "uncommon" physical or tangible features for their ethnicity, such as having curly hair as a half-Japanese, having monolids (eyes without a defined upper eyelid crease) as a half-Euro-Canadian or speaking with a slight accent for certain English words, often felt that superficial characteristics of ambiguity undermined their ethnocultural identity. These superficial "markers" of identity can become a source of inclusion and exclusion and thus lead to unwanted exposure or erasure of multicultural identities.

Power dynamics significantly influenced how diasporic individuals navigated identity discussions. The context, such as the identity of the person asking, their relationship to the individual, and the social environment, shapes responses and subsequent interactions, with participants adapting their cultural expressions accordingly. Finally, participants debated the necessity of identity probing itself, with some viewing it as a means of building community and understanding. In contrast, others questioned its relevance in Canada's ambiguous "multicultural" normalcy and its potential harms. This exploration reveals the intricate layers of diasporic ambiguity and how it is expressed, contemplated, and embodied.

The subsequent five tables (Figures 5-9) represent the most informative quotes pertaining to each categorical theme and attributed code from my thematic analysis. The first column indicates the thematic category, the second column represents the specific thematic code capturing key ideas and topics, the third column indicates the participant who stated the quote,

the fourth column indicates the number of times other participants stated similar ideas or thoughts, and finally, the fifth column describes the direct quote.

Figure 5. Findings Theme 1 Perceptions of Ambiguity

Theme	Code	Quoted by	# of similar quotes	Highlight quote
1	1	Participant L	9	"I know the probing gaze well. It's the fixation on my face or appearance that follows the "What are you?"
1	1	Participant M	5	"They fixate on my ambiguous physical features. Like my curly hair-even though it's from my Japanese mom, not my White dad!
1	1	Participant H	10	"[An indicator of the intention of the objectifying question is] From the phrasing of their questioning, like 'where are you <i>really</i> from' after I say 'I'm Canadian'."
1	1	Participant K	8	"Sometimes, though, 'where are you from?' can be a productive question to make connections with other East Asian people to associate ourselves with each other and the potential of making new friends or relationships and closeness"
1	2	Participant M	2	"For me, having curly hair as a half Japanese half German-Canadian ethnic person leads people to guess my non-East Asian side, but it's actually from my Japanese mom"
1	2	Participant S	7	"Because I'm more 'white-passing' I always felt kind of insecure about calling myself Japanese in Japan, because I feel like I was seen as a foreigner despite having close ties with my Japanese heritage and being able to speak Japanese fluently."
1	2	Participant E	6	"My 'mixedness' is pretty invisible. As a half Japanese half Korean person, one or the other is usually forgotten by others, sometimes even myself, because it's not a visible ambiguity."
1	3	Participant J	14	"Who is asking, why are they asking, how do I answer, and how would my answer impact my relationship with them determines the power dynamics when I'm talking about my ethnicity and nationality"
1	3	Participant L	12	"The duality of what this question means depends on the social factor, I usually respond to the question differently according to how I should navigate the social situation by reading the room and picking up on explicit and implicit cues."
1	4	Participant H	8	"I feel these days that it's a little obscure to have to go out of the way to know others' ethnic or cultural identities if it's unproductive or if it can be a potentially harmful interaction."
1	4	Participant A	6	"As someone who grew up in China, I question Canada's obsession with identity politics and why race, culture, and ethnicity are at the forefront of diasporic peoples' identity. It could be because in China, race and ethnicity aren't tied to prominent societal structures."

### Discovery and Establishment of Empowerment:

The second categorical theme revealed how empowerment and agency were defined by East Asian-Canadian individuals in their diasporic identity and within their communities overall. Participants shared their experiences navigating hybrid identities, revealing strategic forms of expression in gaining control over their self-narratives. These strategies include deliberately manipulating their identities based on context, fluidly identifying between multiple racial, ethnic,

national, and cultural categories, contextually curating self-expression in anticipation of others' perceptions and engaging in an ongoing, experimental process of identity formation.

First, participants often prepare "ready answers," as defined by Paragg (2017), to identity-probing questions, allowing them to assert control over their perceptions. This preparedness reflects agency in managing the narrative surrounding how their ambiguous identity may be perceived and avoiding feeling Othered or objectified. Additionally, these preparations suggest the prominent impact from learned expectations of Othering that individuals anticipate through experiences as diasporic individuals in predominantly Euro-Canadian spaces.

Second, conscious choosing and curation in identity formation emerged as common experiences. Participants described a sense of empowerment in not adhering strictly to a single cultural identity. Instead, they blend elements from various backgrounds, choosing what resonates in different socio-cultural contexts. The simultaneity of not only being East Asian-Canadian, but also factors such as being queer, neurodivergent, religious background, place of birth, and so forth meant certain aspects of their identities became prominent or subdued, sometimes through conscious choice or unconsciously, depending on the circumstance. This fluidity allows for dynamic identity expression that activates individual agency and opportunities for community building through the power of choice and adaptability. Fluid identity expression mutually impacts the socio-cultural environment of individuals not only through representation but also through the kind of dialogue and cultural mixing that emerges.

Fourth, participants emphasized that identity formation is an ongoing, experimental project, often involving trial and error. Various factors, including family, social relationships, home life, cultural knowledge and values influence this process. This category reveals that empowerment in diasporic identity is explored and expressed through circumstantial processes of deliberating, choosing, curating, adapting, and experimenting. Overall, I noticed that the concept

of agency is contextual. As an ironic duality, participants provided many cases suggesting that the very ambiguity that may cause discomfort or challenges can equally transform into opportunities for personal growth or community connection.

Figure 6. Findings Theme 2 Discovery and Establishment of Empowerment

Theme	Code	Quoted by	# of similar quotes	Highlight quote
2	5	Participant G	11	"As a mixed race person, I always felt growing up that I owed an explanation of my visible and invisible ambiguousness. But as I get older, I've been more selective with who I share these things with. Now I just say 'I'm everything'."
2	5	Participant M	12	"To Japanese people I would say 'I'm Japanese' and to White Canadians I would say 'I'm Canadian', mainly because I know that's not the answer they are looking for"
2	6	Participant S	9	"[describing] My identities are bigger than me alone, it's a collection of my ancestral roots and all the people I've been attached to throughout my life."
2	6	Participant C	10	"So many factors like being queer, being a child of immigrant parents, being a child of a single parent, and being neurodivergent animate how I bond with other people, not just my ethnicity or my cultural identity."
2	6	Participant N	5	"The way I channel these parts of my identity looks different, but it's always an underlying current. The contextual circumstance where they are emphasized depends on the social environment and power dynamics of the room"
2	7	Participant E	4	"How I choose to identify and explore my identity as a Chinese-Canadian person now is a curation of my Chinese/Canadian mixed culture upbringing. These factors of my upbringing have constantly made me face and consciously choose what [values and cultural ideals] works and what doesn't"
2	7	Participant L	11	"It comes down to how I see myself at the end of the day. It might change several times in a lifetime, even within a year, even within a day, depending on who I 'need to be' in the situation I'm in [with family, at work, with friends] and who I am with."
2	7	Participant G	7	"I stopped genuinely answering the 'what are you?' question awhile ago. I learned to be more opportunistic in my identity expression."
2	7	Participant C	6	"Choosing to disclose my identity comes in handy when it calls for it, like establishing closer customer relationships at work or in the medical field where patients may not speak English and may need your assistance in translating. Self-identification is opportunistic, and doesn't have to always be phrased the same way."
2	8	Auto	12	"I constantly choose what East Asian or Canadian values resonate with me in that moment. Sometimes I identify strongly with a Japanese or Canadian identity depending on whichever cultural knowledge, expressions, mannerisms establish common ground with others, or can enhance myself in an opportunity."
2	8	Participant A	9	"I can get creative by drawing from a rich pool of knowledge and influence not only through my own Chinese heritage but also borrowing from other East Asian ideologies, art, and philosophies that I've been exposed to from living in a multicultural place like Canada, and being able to translate that into my own work and relationships."
2	8	Participant J	6	"A good example is like the Olympics. When the Olympics roll around every 2 years, I always cheer for the winning team, like I'm team China during the summer Olympics and team Canada during the winter Olympics. Because China is stronger during summer and Canada during winter-why not, right? I am Chinese and Canadian so I can do that."
2	9	Participant X	8	"For me, identity isn't about picking and choosing, but rather more like a process of seeing where different pieces fit where it deems themselves, revealing to be useful over time, and finding the usefulness of it when it arises, rather than an active selection."
2	9	Participant A	7	"As a Chinese-Canadian, I realize that my Chinese heritage and Canadian upbringing doesn't predetermine anything, I just always expected my identity to form itself through trial and error, it never has been formulaic"
2	9	Participant S	9	"My identities are bigger than myself, they transcend location and time because I know I am Japanese even though I didn't grow up there myself, and spending time with my grandparents, I've formed my Japanese identity through her as well. All of these things manifest in different ways throughout my life. There's been a sense of power in recognizing this alone, not necessarily putting all of myself in categories and choosing, but more like acknowledging the abundance of choice."
2	9	Participant X	8	"Moving to Canada from China was like being thrown into a cold pool from a comfortable hot tub, then as I'm adjusting to the temperature, I'm being thrown back into the hot tub again, repeat, repeat, repeat. What was once comfortable is no longer comfortable, but eventually, I become more acclimated to the temperature difference and it doesn't feel so bad anymore."
2	9	Participant E	12	"I had trouble adjusting to Canadian school, finding space and people for me was the hard part but it's not always the same process. There's no predeceasing template or example for anyone, 'self-discovery' is not formulaic for me."
2	9	Participant K	6	"Being half Korean and Japanese-Canadian, I've learned to let go of meeting an 'expectation' to be validated as Japanese and Korean, but rather trying to see what elements of my three [Japanese, Korean, and Canadian] cultural upbringings do or do not serve me."
2	9	Participant Z	11	"Juggling identities can be experimental, really, like in mundane things like how I cook or dress, apply makeup, there's lots of experimenting with East Asian influence and Canadian culture to use as tools for self-expression."
2	9	Participant J	3	"I recently visited my hometown in China and re-experiencing it again felt so different. I found myself in awe of the beauty of Chinese culture through my own means and adventure, rather than passively 'receiving' an image of China through my parents."
2	9	Auto	9	"As an adult, allowing space for failure and awkwardness let me create my own interpretation of Japaneseness. I've realized and embodied Japaneseness in so many ways, though not always necessarily 'authentic', but every version has been an iterative experiment."
2	9	Participant M	5	"As a visibly mixed person, I sometimes feel like I'm auditioning my Japaneseness when I'm in Japan and end up overcompensating by performing what I think an 'authentic' Japanese person should look like. But this isn't necessarily 'authentic' to me, and I've been experimenting with balancing my Canadian upbringing but also asserting myself of my Japanese heritage."
2	9	Participant C	10	"As a logical, science-background person, experimentation is a fundamental part of who I am and how I understand the world. For example, when I make clothes [Participant C's hobby], I plug my curiosity, research, and discovery in Chinese and Japanese fashion and history into a formula and experiment with the results."
2	9	Participant H	9	"Growing up, identity expression was a binary in my mind, it came from places of insecurity and pleasing others, but the natural trajectory of change and adaptations of growing up has led me to be okay with forever roaming in the middle."

### **Emotional and Psychological Affect:**

The third categorical theme of my findings sheds light on the emotional and psychological dimensions of diasporic identity formation. First, participants frequently discussed a sense of misalignment with both Canadian and East Asian cultures, norms, and values. This misalignment manifests in various ways: feeling like an outsider to Canadian social norms, being subjected to Othering interactions, the inability to conform entirely to one or the other, language proficiency expectations, and other visible/invisible determinants of “passing.” Participants also described a complex relationship with East Asian culture, characterized by feelings of shame and insecurity, detachment to East Asian identity in Canada, or facing rejection in East Asia.

Second, the invasiveness of identity probing in North America emerged as another significant emotional point. Many participants have learned to manage this discomfort by taking control over discussing their identities through strategic “ready answers.” (Paragg, 2017) and other social maneuvering. However, the experience was unanimous across my sample, including the dual nature of identity probing, which has the potential to be a source of connection with other East Asian Canadians or diasporic-Canadian groups or a point of Othering.

Third, a recurring psychological challenge was the confusion stemming from discrepancies between self-identity and external perceptions. This issue was particularly pronounced among racially and ethnically mixed participants, leading to difficulties in self-acceptance and the internalization of external judgments and arbitrary categorizations. Many second and third-generation participants also shared a similar sentiment due to their cultural distance from their homeland heritage and the generational gap between parents. In this regard, participants expressed hope for future generations to move beyond binary categorizations, to accept and be accommodated for multifaceted identities as their own third cultural category.

Fourth, participants voiced their skepticism of traditional models of Canadian multiculturalism. Personal experiences of multiculturalism often contradicted certain ideals of Canadian multiculturalism, revealing the representational insufficiencies of what being “Canadian” looks like. In contrast to the harmonious diversity that Canadian multiculturalism idealizes, the reality may resemble pluralized categorizations which contain identities into isolated ethnocultural groupings. These doubts were discussed in multiple contexts. For example, participants’ inability to grasp the sense of nationality versus cultural identity, especially at a younger age, through experiences such as losing their dual citizenship due to laws in East Asian countries or experiences of mixed-race/ethnic participants who feel that their mixed-ness is often subsumed within respective ethnic categories making their particular experiences feel invisible.

Finally, nostalgia for childhood and reverse culture shock were significant emotional responses linked to participants' connections with their homelands. Many described feeling a dual sense of identity, gaining direct and indirect exposure to their East Asian and Canadian heritage simultaneously. Many participants described how their relationship with East Asian cultural and societal influence leads to a skewed perspective of their East Asian heritage, where participants either expressed that their East Asian identity feels dormant and distant *or* that it feels like a hyper fixation, yearning, and romanticization. However, even more so conflicting in the latter case, participants described a sense of alienation upon returning to or visiting their “homeland,” where what should be called home feels foreign, evoking a dynamic emotional response ranging from guilt to pride. Through these complex emotional and psychological experiences surrounding their diaspora identities, participants expressed adaptability and resilience as a *feeling* through navigating cultural boundaries and identities, finding confidence or joy in this process.

Figure 7. Findings Theme 3 Emotional and Psychological Structures

Theme	Code	Quoted by	# of similar quotes	Highlight quote
3	10	Participant S	10	"I've sometimes felt like like I've had to perform as a caricature of a Japanese person"
3	10	Participant J	9	"[Ambiguity is like] Feeling like an outsider to Canadian social norms and what Canadianness looks like"
3	10	Participant A	7	"'Canadianness' is not intuitive to understand and it's confusing as a newcomer to Canada"
3	10	Participant M	11	"Having a complicated relationship with East Asian culture despite being East Asian because of the big difference in values between East Asia and Canada"
3	10	Participant J	7	"I was embarrassed by being different from everyone else in primary school ages, like having a different lunch from everyone, being singled out of class to go to ESL, my teacher mispronouncing my name during roll call or for having an accent because I speak Chinese at home and English only at school."
3	10	Auto	8	"I felt some shame and rejection towards East Asian culture, values, and projecting them onto my family because I saw them as a source of shame and insecurity. I found myself trying to fit into the "White-washed" category of East Asian Canadian identity through the people I surrounded myself with, music and media I consumed, fashion and make up style, and so forth. This made my Canadian identity feel more pronounced than my Japanese identity, and felt more secure."
3	10	Participant E	11	"I've felt a sense of detachment because I feel too Westernized to be accepted by my parents' generation's East Asian communities, so finding community in others who feel similarly about their East Asian identity or other non-East Asian peers has helped"
3	10	Auto	9	"I feel like I stand out in East Asia because I look like I'm from there, but because I didn't grow up there, I feel like I'm a Canadian imposter in an East Asian shell"
3	10	Participant S	4	"Standing out in East Asia, I look racially ambiguous and especially more white passing, so I do feel unseen in East Asia despite being East Asian."
3	10	Participant Z	7	"I relate and feel the most belonging with people in Canada who understand the struggles of being the odd one out, or relate to the feeling of Chinese parental pressure."
3	10	Participant Z	3	"I felt like I wasn't romantically desirable in China according to Chinese personality/beauty standards, but I realized that I am more loved for who I authentically am in Canada."
3	11	Participant G	12	"I've definitely felt invasiveness when I've been asked about my ethnicity or how I identify. I've redirected to sticking to what makes me comfortable and what benefits me, not for the benefit or comfort of others."
3	11	Participant P	12	"Also, it's ['What are you?' is] a pretty universal experience that can be a point of relatability. I hope in the future 'Who are you' would be more of a point of friendliness, not Othering, which I already see happening in younger generations."
3	12	Auto	12	"I've felt some discrepancy in how others have categorized me, regardless of being in Japan or Canada, and my own perception of myself. This discrepancy becomes difficult because there's the natural human need to fit in that resists that inability to be easily categorized."
3	12	Participant K	4	"Being ethnically but not racially mixed, there is a mismatch between how I reflect my cultural duality and what people see visually. It can be confusing for others simply because it's not a visible ambiguity. But of course, it can be confusing for me too sometimes."
3	13	Participant M	10	"There's such a big disparity between Canadian multicultural reality versus the ideal, like the stuff about diversity and inclusion we hear throughout childhood, versus the 'multiculturalism' I've lived as a visibly ambiguous person."
3	13	Participant G	8	"I feel like when I grew up learning and seeing stuff about diversity in Canada, I felt invisible in it, I feel like it was more about highlighting distinctly different categories, rather than those in between those categories."
3	13	Participant P	7	"I feel like in Canadian race/ethnicity talk, something that isn't talked about is nationality. I didn't know how to grapple with being 'only' Canadian 'on paper' when I had to let go of my Korean passport because Korea doesn't allow dual citizenship. It was confusing because I was technically not 'Korean' anymore"
3	14	Participant H	12	"Nostalgia plays a huge role in my relationship with my Japanese identity. Like activities from childhood, movies, and stuff I'm not as in touch with them"
3	14	Participant P	10	"I didn't realize how much I've drifted away from my Christian Korean upbringing that was a huge part of my life when I was a kid. I feel some guilt, but I also think it happened for a reason like I had to update my OS [operating system] to adapt to my personal life experience and worldview as I became older"
3	15	Participant N	10	"I felt some reverse culture shock when I went back to my hometown in China after a long time. I wasn't sure if I was 'allowed' to be loud and proud Chinese as I did when I lived there"

The final theme of my findings revealed the role of instrumental and ecological infrastructures in diasporic identity formation. This category explored various instrumental and ecological components of identity that form the East Asian-Canadian experience.

### Ecological Structures:

Regarding the ecological elements, first, a central finding was the pivotal role of human relationships and networks in establishing a sense of belonging. Participants highlighted how connections with others, whether within the East Asian community or broader multicultural networks, provided comfort, a sense of mutual learning and a window to diasporic culture.

Examples include Chinatowns, social hubs such as East Asian malls, grocery stores, festivals, community events, and language schools, which cultivated a sense of home, familiarity, community, and normalcy in what diasporic East Asian culture looks and feels like. This sense of belonging often extended to friendships formed within diasporic communities, where shared experiences and cultural backgrounds fostered deep symbiotic connections.

Second, travel to the homeland emerged as another significant factor. These journeys offered participants a direct and immersive connection with their ancestral cultures, helping bridge the gap between their Canadian upbringing and their East Asian heritage they often only get to experience through stories, photos, parents' stories, the internet, and other secondary means. Such experiences with diasporic homelands fostered a more profound sense of belonging and identity through a direct, firsthand experience of their heritage.

Third, shared experiences and relatability played a crucial role in community formation. Participants frequently mentioned how common experiences, such as growing up as children of immigrants, being mixed-race or mixed-ethnic, or navigating life as minorities in Canada in general, created a sense of solidarity and mutual understanding. These shared backgrounds helped participants find common ground and support within the diasporic community, gaining a grasp of their identity that coincides with others of similar cultural backgrounds.

Fourth, institutional and social structures in educational settings like public schools, language schools, higher education and online networks such as social media pages, groups, or apps were discussed as ecological infrastructures. These institutional spaces fostered environments where individuals explored their diasporic identities through particular social dynamics, cultural expectations, and customs and values that constitute the space. Educational environments provide spaces for cultural exchange, learning, and primary socialization, especially at a younger age. Online platforms facilitated connections and community building

across geographical boundaries, like East Asian-specific dating or meet-up apps or apps for East Asian communities to network and share information.

Fifth, participants discussed the impact of structure and routine as crucial ecological factors that facilitate identity formation, particularly in the household and everyday practices. The exposure to and continuity of cultural practices in daily routines, such as cooking traditional foods or celebrating cultural festivals, played a vital role in maintaining and reinforcing cultural identity. Structure and routine cultivate an environment with a sense of trust and mutual expectation between individuals and their surrounding ecological and cultural infrastructures. Socio-cultural environments with structured and routine expectations of social and cultural values and behavioural patterns can encourage individuals to explore and express their identities with a sense of security. This is reminiscent of Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework, where immediate and peripheral ecologies of family, school, community, and governmental institutions provide mutually integrated understandings and expressions of culture and social values with an individual.

Finally, participants highlighted the discrepancies between romanticized and realistic perceptions of their heritage. The complexities between idealized childhood memories and learning about the "ugly side" of their heritage countries, such as political histories, harmful cultural values, intense work culture and social pressures, can be complex realities to navigate, especially in the diaspora. This often leads to a "take what works and leave what doesn't" approach in hybridizing East Asian and Canadian values and customs.

Figure 8. Findings Theme 4A Ecological Structures

Figure 8: Theme 4A Ecological Structures of Hybridity				
Theme	Code	Quoted by	# of similar quotes	Highlight quote
4	16	Participant J	8	"Experiences of moving around both to Canada and within, made me realize that the concept of home is primarily about people and human connection and comfort, like Chinatowns, grocery stores, or hearing Chinese being spoken even though I wasn't fluent as I was when I first came to Canada"
4	16	Participant G	12	"My friends and closest circle become a part of me. I've been inspired by my diverse social circle, even if they're not the same "East Asian" as me, I've picked up on beliefs and manners and have interpreted them in a way that makes sense with who I am and how I've grown through them"
4	16	Auto	9	"People are one of the core scaffolding in my upbringing. In creating and discovering environments to foster my own version of a diasporic community, I think the most important idea is for people of all backgrounds and generations to find commonality as a strong infrastructure."
4	16	Participant M	5	"As an educator, I want to contribute to fostering diasporic communities by continuing to share and appreciate what I know about East Asian culture and experiences to provide as many options to access stories, language, and community no matter people's relationships with their Japanese-ness"
4	16	Participant P	9	"When my family first immigrated to Canada, the Korean Vancouver Christian community gave us a sense of belonging, and even though I grew up and grew distant from the community, I still attribute its positive impact to how my family was able to adjust to Canada as newcomers, being a home away from home."
4	16	Participant J	6	"I usually feel inclined to seek and connect with other East Asian or immigrant diasporic people because of a shared unspoken connection, developing commonality through shared experiences, self-awareness, and self-perception that comes with adopting a minority mindset from a young age."
4	16	Participant S	7	"It felt like a big deal when specifically my white friends showed interest and openness to East Asian culture. It boosted my self-esteem and was completely unshamed of my cultural background at a young age. Even though it sounds like this validation shouldn't matter as an adult, as a kid it did a lot."
4	16	Participant X	9	"I notice that most people of my circle tend to be East Asian-Canadian or people of another diasporic community."
4	16	Participant C	8	"Vancouver is a very immigrant-dense and developed place, and growing up I've had so many people, not just my family, that I was able to feel belonging with."
4	16	Participant G	7	"Because I didn't grow up with a lot of familiarity with my Chinese heritage, I find comfort and gravitation towards other East Asian friends and chosen family because that's one of the only avenues to be in touch with my Chinese identity."
4	16	Participant M	9	"I feel like there's a sense of competition among East Asian diasporic kids, especially in childhood to teenage years deep in the discomforts of not quite 'fitting in' the dominant White Canadian image, also when it comes soft culture stuff like media and food, or political tension between East Asian countries."
4	16	Participant P	7	"[Being] East Asian is not the ultimate factor behind community formation, but there are other factors like being queer, being a child of immigrants, child of a single-parent, moved to vs. being born in Canada, closeness with cultural heritage, and positive or negative experiences with East Asian culture and values."
4	17	Participant S	8	"Especially as women, East Asian-Canadian girlhood is oftentimes surrounded by objectification, being constantly probed about my ethnicity, and either being "too Asian" or not being "Asian enough in a sexualized way."
4	17	Participant H	6	"I've felt like the odd one out in my dominantly White classes because I lived in a smaller city."
4	17	Participant M	12	"I've felt like ill-fitting [in East Asian or Canadian standards]"
4	17	Participant C	10	"Being a child of immigrants is something I relate with other people a lot."
4	17	Participant G	4	"Being queer or neurodivergent as an East Asian-Canadian is a whole other experience."
4	17	Participant G	10	"My biggest conscious identity was the minority identity. Even though I'm trying to unlearn this, or at least identify the line between having a minority identity vs. victimhood, I feel like the connections I was able to see being East Asian as a spectrum of experiences and not a binary."
4	17	Participant K	6	"[If] There's a shared understanding of each other, not only do you become friends easily, there is a shared assumption that you might understand how I perceive the world and process problems because we view the world through a similar lens."
4	17	Participant J	7	"The kind of people who made me feel safe growing up usually had a similar vibe and a familiar immigrant upbringing in a household like parents speaking broken English, the mom cutting up fruit, aunts gathered in the living room, all of these things evoke a sense of trust and safety with the other person."
4	17	Participant M	8	"Especially as a highschool teacher now, I resonate with newcomers to Canada, ESL people, people of colour, East Asian queer people, because we're all trying to survive in a system that challenges them and not built for them, which is something I had gone through."
4	17	Participant E	9	"Elderly respect, politeness for the sake of de-escalating a situation, not causing a scene, these values are definitely not limited to East Asian values, but might be more naturally occurring in East Asian culture so there's a lot of shared understanding of each other and why we do things the way we do."
4	17	Participant P	10	"Other things like politics, religion, family dynamic, physical discipline, family of immigrants, birth order play a significant role in forming relationships. The openmindedness and ability to find common ground despite differences are also pretty significant factors in overcoming barriers that might be imposed by ethnicity. But especially with East Asian friends, the gap between who you are and why they are is more narrow."
4	17	Participant X	9	"I feel more comfortable with people who accept my flexible identity between being Canadian and Chinese because I'm able to comfortably tap into either, which I subconsciously do. When I'm with similar Chinese-Canadian or East Asian-Canadian people, I'm able to have this shared understanding and find a natural flow."
4	18	Participant A	7	"Structure is so important in how I can express my identity and experiment who I am and who I want to be."
4	18	Participant C	5	"Structure, not to the point where it's excessively stressful, offers me security and a sense of belonging for me because it's a space where how I expect the place to work and how the place expects me to work is aligned. For me, Canada is that. Mainly because I think in general, Canada is more accommodating to all the non-traditional (like being neurodivergent or queer) parts of me compared to China."
4	19	Auto	10	"Whether it's for the first time or the first time in awhile, going back to Japan is always an interesting experience. Being born in Canada, travelling to Japan physically was a first-time thing, but psychologically it was familiar because it is my ancestral home. As a kid, I imagined my parents growing up in this unfamiliar place before they came to Canada, and imagined how my parents and my life's trajectories would have gone had they not moved to Canada."
4	19	Participant J	9	"Travelling back to China as an adult was pretty exciting because I got to re-experience and find beauty in my Chinese heritage by experiencing my parents' hometown, the city I lived in until I moved to Canada when I was a kid, and exploring the food, places and culture there. Being able to appreciate the rich culture, history and religion and art in China made me realize that these are all parts of me that I can call my own, even though I grew up in Canada."
4	19	Participant P	8	"If I were to have kids, I would hope we could go back to visit Korea and fall in love with Korea like how I love Korea. I think it's a valuable sensory experience to get physical, first-hand interaction with my roots, explore Korean culture through personal means, and feel a sense of belonging in the big, ancestral sense of the word."
4	19	Participant S	9	"Travelling to Japan evoked a sense of comfort and awe. It was a mixed bag of destructing imaginary myths of the homeland I pictured in my head of what Japan is like and experiencing it firsthand while reminding myself that I'm allowed to call this foreign place my home. It's interesting to find new ways to appreciate Japan that I wouldn't have thought of if I lived in Canada my whole life."

### **Instrumental Structures:**

Regarding instrumental infrastructures, first, cultural elements such as food, fashion, and media were instrumental in shaping diasporic identities. For food and cooking, participants noted that the diverse availability of East Asian food ingredients in pan-Asian grocery stores in Canada, like HMart and T&T, leads to experimentation, blending various cuisines into a new hybrid form of “diasporic East Asian food.” Fashion and artistic mediums allowed participants to engage with their heritage creatively, expressing a hybrid form of multicultural influences. Media forms like TV shows and music provided a means to connect with diverse cultures as well. These instrumental cultural sources were discussed as sites of hybridity because, in Canada, East Asian sources of culture such as food, media, and music are often accessed adjacently online or in-person spaces, so participants frequently engaged with many cultural influences outside of their own, solely through proximity and readily access.

Second, cultural and political awareness emerged as pivotal in shaping diasporic identities. For instance, understanding imperial histories and being aware of diplomatic relationships informs the social dynamics between Japanese, Chinese, and Korean friends, fostering socio-politically nuanced friendships that might not have been possible if these individuals were raised in their heritage countries. Because participants discussed how many personal relationships are with other East Asian people, this awareness becomes a sensitivity and a courtesy.

Third, many participants discussed the trial-and-error process of integrating cultural values from their East Asian heritage and Canadian upbringing. This process involves selecting values that resonate personally while discerning ones that do not in particular stages of life or changing worldviews. For instance, traditional East Asian values of familial duty and educational achievement were discussed by participants as something both embraced and critically examined, leading to a perspective that incorporates the strengths of both cultures, often in

negotiation with Canadian values that may conflict with East Asian ones. In these cases, participants shared how they learned to identify the *whys* and *hows* of why certain cultural values are the way they are and how applicable they are to their personal experiences, backgrounds, personalities, and other factors.

Fourth, ancestry and family play a central role in forming diasporic identities. Family bonds, whether with parents or siblings, provide a mirror for identity projection and a source of cultural continuity. Participants described the importance of family in maintaining cultural practices and languages, even as they navigate their Canadian environments. For example, multicultural home environments foster individuals to gain bilingual exposure, observe cultural activities from older family members, participate in festivities, and learn about cultural practices and values. Finally, many East Asian diasporic family structures are multi-generational, unlike the common North American nuclear family. This meant that for many participants, grandparents and other relatives were a central part of their cultural exploration.

Fifth, multilingual proficiency emerged as a crucial element, facilitating social connections, and professional opportunities, and as another sensory expression of East Asian identity. Saturday language schools and familial/community exposure were everyday experiences that participants reflected as sources of exposure and opportunities to connect with their heritage through speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Bilingual abilities were most frequently mentioned as enriching social relationships and multicultural worldviews. Participants discussed how these abilities translated to careers and professional opportunities, where harnessing cultural knowledge and linguistic ability resulted in unique contributions to their fields, highlighting the practical benefits of multicultural backgrounds.

Figure 9. Findings Theme 4B Instrumental Structures

Theme	Code	Quoted by	# of similar quotes	Highlight quote
4	20	Participant A	8	"[in Canada] the 'Global foods' aisle of grocery stores tends to sell a bunch of interesting ingredients from different East Asian countries in one store. This leads to me being curious about other East Asian Countries' foods and I experiment by mixing ingredients that I wouldn't have discovered otherwise."
4	20	Participant L	10	"My cooking is now significantly influenced by my mother's cooking and what my grandma cooked for me when I was a kid, and now that I've moved out, I find myself emulating or asking my mom for recipes."
4	20	Participant C	8	"Fashion, makeup, cosplaying and self-expression through my appearance helps create a deeper connection with my Chinese history and beauty, and through my other East Asian friends growing up in Vancouver, my passion has led me to explore other non-Chinese fashion and makeup expressions."
4	20	Participant G	9	"My passion for Japanese fashion, even as a half-Chinese person, started because my friends growing up happened to be mostly Japanese and I loved anime. Now as a fashion business owner, I'm heavily inspired by Japanese fashion and culture. It makes me so happy to turn my childhood into my life."
4	20	Participant S	9	"Channelling East Asian elements into my art, it's making me realize that as an adult, I'm remembering who I am, rather than 'finding' myself. Watching my grandma paint or do calligraphy as a kid, doing origami and cooking, these parts of me that I grew up with naturally enter my creative and professional mind."
4	20	Auto	10	"TV and other visual media played a big role in my upbringing, I remember TV Japan, a diasporic TV channel that played Japanese reruns and channels in North America, always playing in the background at home, and it was a way for my immigrant parents to create a sense of familiarity in our household."
4	20	Participant E	7	"K-pop, anime, and Japanese fashion being so popular in my middle school and high school days even by non-East Asian people was so cool now that I think about it. This facilitated a sense of pride because I saw these East Asian media and trends as an extension of me."
4	20	Participant J	6	"The difference between Western medicinal practice I was taught as a Canadian med student and the Eastern medicine stuff my mom would swear by was confusing and frustrating. But as I'm getting older, I find myself reaching for Eastern medicinal practices. Maybe it's coming from a place of comfort now."
4	20	Auto	11	"My mom would elaborately prepare for festivals when we were little to expose us to as many Japanese cultural influences as possible. Because this is how I grew up, I also find myself learning about Chinese festivities for my Chinese partner because for me, it's an opportunity to stay in touch with our cultures."
4	20	Participant H	7	"Extra-curricular activities growing up, like martial arts, doing calligraphy with my grandma who lived with my family, traditional dance and music, these were all investments from my parents to help me and my brother enjoy our culture in a fun, interactive way and enrich our Japanese identity."
4	20	Participant X	9	"As I get older, I find myself preferring dominant Asian parts of the city, like Chinatown and Ktown, where there's lots of access to East Asian shops and restaurants. I like taking my non-East Asian friends to these places and introduce them to food, music, and activities that we can bond together over."
4	20	Participant L	10	"As someone who lived in multiple different cities in Canada, I always looked out for AAPI events, Asian nights at night clubs, and seeking East Asian hubs like karaoke, grocery stores, bars, and other social venues to stay in touch. Even if the smallest piece of the city has it, it makes it feel more like home."
4	20	Participant X	3	"Being active on social media has been a critical source of socialization and staying in touch with East Asian trends and media."
4	20	Participant N	4	"Chinese social media platforms are very powerful in Vancouver to make connections with other Chinese people living in the city. It's becoming more and more of a central tool to develop a network not only to make friends but also for business and promoting work and services to help each other."
4	21	Auto	8	"Especially as a Japanese person, I know that being friends with other Chinese or Korean friends means I may have to explore a specific social dynamic grounded in Japan's colonial history. I am conscious about educating myself about Japan's history and current events that may affect my friendships. I feel like these connections are so precious because I probably couldn't cultivate these friendships if I were born and raised in Japan."
4	21	Participant S	7	"My alignment with Japanese society is conflicted. There is a part of me that romanticizes the idea of Japan as someone who didn't grow up there, but as I grew older and considered living there or meeting non-family Japanese people of my own, I've had to change my perception of Japan, hearing about the intense work culture, the hypercapitalist society, the mistreatment of mixed-race/ethnic and LGBTQA representation that I take for granted in Canada."
4	21	Participant A	4	"As someone who first had to adjust to Canadian culture and values as a Chinese person, now as an adult I find myself seeking out Chinese people and researching Chinese history, arts, and philosophies. This led me to a nuanced perspective on politics, media, pop culture, nationality, and travel because of my mixed-cultural upbringing, and also led to an openness to many different cultures in ways I couldn't have if I stayed in China my whole life."
4	21	Participant M	8	"Knowing the good and bad parts of Japanese culture and history, I'm able to consciously categorize what I am and am not proud of in Japanese culture. I think because of it, I'm more introspective about conversations surrounding these things. I learned the skill of being eternally curious and finding truth in non-Western philosophies, work ethics, and ways of living that translate in Canadian contexts."

4	21	Participant E	7	"Professionally and just overall in my life, my knowledge and openness to cultural values, philosophies, language skills, and events helps me gain more opportunities and find ways to transmit this in tangible forms. For example, projects at work, making connections with international designers and companies, and non-tangible forms like discovering different ways to activate my skills, personality, and making friends."
4	21	Participant H	10	"Translating for my immigrant parents from a young age, I would be angry that my parents weren't able to speak English well enough and that they had to rely on their child daughter who herself was working through assimilating to Canadian culture. But growing up in this home environment, I think I was able to restructure my brain to process stimuli and information, developing the skill to pick up nuances and communicate really effectively."
4	21	Participant M	3	"As a Japanese-Canadian teacher teaching Japanese, I've had to disconnect myself with Japan as a nation, its government and history. As a Japanese person, I'm not proud of my Japanese country's historical and political past. I try to educate myself and be aware of the political-historical dynamics surrounding my national history, but to also hold my own and understand that I'm not the nation of Japan, but that I'm Japanese."
4	21	Participant J	5	"My cultural knowledge of my East Asian heritage manifests in unexpected ways. The more knowledge I have on the customs, superstitions, holidays, medicinal practices, and lifestyles of my Chinese culture, the more I find myself sharing this information with friends or being able to connect with them in areas I wouldn't have expected. Knowledge of aesthetics and art forms have also been helpful to express myself in fun ways that are authentic to me."
4	21	Participant Z	7	"Being in between China and Canada gives me a good objective distance to approach both cultures, values, and people with a more objective and informed point of view, and I feel a sense of agency to choose what I ascribe to."
4	21	Participant X	6	"In my field as an academic, my lived experience of grasping multi-cultural histories and politics of my mixed heritage background gives me an introspective and analytical perspective towards everything. This ability strengthens my critical thinking skill to find common ground and relatability in topics that might not always be obviously connected. I'm able to identify patterns out of disparate things."
4	21	Auto	9	"When I think about how I want to raise my future kids, I hope I'm able to incorporate this knowledge of culture, politics, and values into raising them so they can express themselves or learn about themselves through it, or at least have the option to do so if they want."
4	21	Participant G	3	"I'd want my kids to know their family history because that's something I didn't grow up with and it's catching up on me now. I'm craving a deeper connection to my heritage and ancestry and I hope I can foster that access for my future kids."
4	22	Participant P	4	"Throughout my upbringing, I've grown to pinpoint what customs and values resonate with me and which ones don't, for both Canadian and Korean. Although I've departed from learning and absorbing my worldview from my family to creating my own through the people I've met and relationships I've cultivated, I find myself re-appreciating some things from growing up in a diasporic Korean environment as a part of my values now."
4	22	Participant J	10	"The emphasis on high achievements and education in East Asian cultures has a strong presence, for better or worse, throughout my life. Although this has been a source of stress in certain periods of my life, I acknowledge that even though it's something I could unlearn to an extent, it has gotten me very far in my life, in terms of career and education."
4	22	Participant N	3	"I felt daunted by the expected trajectory of graduating college, getting a good job, getting married, and having kids all before age 30 in China. In Canada, I find that there is a complete release of these expectations and freedom to take as long as I need to be whoever I want to be. Both of these feel like polar opposite values and can actually feel overwhelming both ways. I'm currently trying to find a happy medium of structured freedom that works for me."
4	22	Participant E	5	"I pick and choose between Chinese and Canadian values in my work. The Chinese values of collectivity and deep respect I learned from my family and aunts growing up, even though I didn't always understand them or fumbled in executing them, I've been applying these values in my career now. As someone who liaises between Canadian and Chinese companies, I've been applying the values I've picked up over the years in these situations."
4	22	Participant C	5	"I believe tradition evolves to values, values evolve into cultural norms, and this process determines what benefits that culture or society. Based on this principle, I believe that we're not predetermined to be or do anything, I think it's about trial and error and facing the errors to choose what I wish to become and what benefits me. This is the beauty in not belonging to either and I can choose whatever I want, it's definitely made me more introspective."
4	22	Participant H	4	"It's hard to tell the difference between personality and cultural values, just going to show that 'East Asian' values I adhere to are unconsciously a part of me and maybe the ones that don't resonate with me stand out, making me more aware of them negatively. There are 'big values' and 'small values' like certain values I hold are immensely liberal Canadian, but I also certain, small-scale, everyday values are adopted from my East Asian upbringing."
4	22	Participant X	9	"For my future kids, there are some things that I don't want to pass on my children like the intense emphasis on education and career pressure, an unconditional obedience to parents and authoritative figures, and the negligence of mental health and sacrifice for material achievements."

4	22	Participant J	4	"I don't believe that one can consciously pick or choose what values they adhere to. Even for the positive values I see in Chinese culture, there's no way I can enforce anything, because my own parents instilled their values into me thinking they were the best for me, but they grew up in post-cultural revolution China. What made sense for them in their context growing up doesn't apply to me as someone who grew up in Canada, but it doesn't necessarily make it a 'good' or 'bad' value. There might even be a grain of truth in there somewhere that I might relate to one day."
4	22	Auto	9	"The difference between East Asian collectivism and North American individualism is one of the biggest differences I see between my East Asian heritage and Canadian upbringing. Communal mentality is something that is heavily influenced by my Japanese values that bleed into how I approach work, like the philosophy of gratitude, sharing and seeing myself as a part of a larger collective entity is something that comes naturally to me."
4	22	Participant S	5	"As someone who is socially awkward and not always comfortable in Canada's hyper-individualistic society, I feel weirdly comfortable in Japan, a collectivist society despite me being a <i>hafu</i> , an outsider, and also growing up in Canada. I think an emphasis on individuality draws too much attention to myself and I feel comfortable being one of countless fishes in the sea."
4	22	Participant E	8	"The collectivist vs. individualistic difference can be a double-edged sword sometimes. Right now, I ultimately feel like the more individualistic way of life makes more sense for who I am, but it's a choice that was posed to me among other options, and it was an informed decision. One is not better than the other because I don't like how non-confrontational Chinese people can be sometimes in Canada. These values definitely become <i>valuable</i> in its own context."
4	23	Auto	8	"My family is my first and most central source of my Japanese identity. My family has been a mirror, a sounding board, and a site of my identity projections and crises throughout my upbringing. In this process, cycles of fights, resentment, reconciliation, bonding, and love have led to where I find my own version of Japanese in me."
4	23	Participant K	6	"My bond with my brother is special. My mom and dad are immigrants who grew up in Japan and Korea respectively. So, distinct from my parents, my brother and I share the specific experience of being both mixed-ethnic and growing up in Canada. Although our journey as adults has been different, we have bonded through the awkwardness and uncertainty, with a sense of unshakeable understanding for each other."
4	23	Participant S	4	"As a Japanese/British-Canadian <i>hafu</i> , my father was my only source of Japanese identity and culture, so I grew up very closely with him. Even in turbulent periods of our relationship, our shared Japanese identity has been a mutual link in our relationship."
4	23	Participant M	9	"I'm thankful for my mom for her relentless investment in Japanese cooking and cultural experiences both at home and in community events. I find myself becoming more like my mom and have been actively seeking Japanese philosophies, values, cooking, festivities, and cultural experiences as a sense of comfort and familiarity in my adult age."
4	23	Participant L	5	"In Cantonese culture, there is an emphasis on giving back to parents, taking care of grandparents, cooking for each other and eating together. The family-orientedness of a Cantonese family, though it's suffocating at times, has made me think of my family as a special source as an extension of the 'homeland'."
4	23	Participant G	2	"Even though I didn't grow up that closely with my Chinese roots because my mom was a third-generation, born and raised in Canada Chinese, now as an adult, I have been blessed by my chosen family, be it Japanese family friends or my extended Cantonese family through my partner. This is what the charm of Canadian multiculturalism is, I think."
4	23	Participant K	12	"Liaising, translating, and helping my parents adapt to Canada has become a set of soft skills in my current job where I do this professionally with Chinese clients. It's really become a full circle moment."
4	23	Participant X	7	"Being raised by grandparents, I'm so grateful for the unique symbiotic relationship I have with them. While I helped them with English in Canada, a completely foreign country to them, I had direct and dense access to my Chinese culture through them. This is definitely an asset now, working in health care in an area with lots of Chinese immigrant elderly people who can't speak English. I feel happy that I can pay back to the people who've raised me."
4	23	Participant E	6	"As the eldest sister who was born and raised in China, my view towards my Chinese identity is completely different than my Canadian-born-8-year-age gap younger sister. It's so interesting how she views her Chinese identity and how I see mine."
4	23	Auto	9	"I hope my future kids will have access to my siblings and my parents' embodiment of Japanese culture because the older I get, the more I am interested in my ancestry and eager to stay in touch with it as long as I can."
4	23	Auto	12	"The routineness and continuation of my home environment throughout my entire life is something I associate most with 'being Japanese'. Certain key parts of me and my sibling's lifestyle choices and desire to go back home to spend Japanese holidays is due to the household we were raised in."
4	23	Participant P	9	"The way I set up my home now as I live away from my family emulates what I grew up with. Like having certain fridge staples, having specific kinds of slippers, the type of cleaning products I use, what is an ordinary lifestyle for me is actually a piece of culture embedded from my childhood."

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4	23	Participant L	6	"I feel lucky that my parents got my grandparents to live with us and take care of me in Canada because I was able to spend a lot of time speaking Chinese and watching my grandma prepare food and talk with her friends, and teach us how she runs in the household."
4	23	Participant K	9	"Living in both a Korean household and in a Canadian outside life was like living in two different dimensions. This unique border was uncomfortable at a young age because I would try to accommodate to one or the other (usually more towards my public, "Canadian" persona)."
4	23	Participant J	7	"Chinese cultural exposure was primarily through my household growing up, and interpreting this familiarity into my transition to adulthood evokes a sense of home, structure, and resonates with my Chinese upbringing."
4	24	Auto	8	"Being multilingual has been so integral to my personality and my worldview. Because I not only speak but think in both languages. I'm able to conceptualize my thoughts and ideas in a more diverse way thanks to my knowledge and proficiency in East Asian cultures and languages."
4	24	Participant E	11	"Being multilingual has helped in my career, working in retail, job opportunities, and expanding client demographics, as a tangible asset."
4	24	Participant P	12	"Being multilingual creates more connections with people and it makes it easy to learn other languages, and there are unique expressions in Korean that don't translate directly to English, which makes me feel like I have more access to a wealth of expressions."
4	24	Participant L	10	"Going to Saturday Chinese school was so annoying. I didn't understand why my other friends didn't have to go to this weird "school" on the weekend. But now as an adult, I'm glad my parents enrolled me for the language exposure. I hope there is a way in the future to improve how language schools are run, making them more exciting so kids will be inclined to go."
4	24	Participant S	4	"As a <i>hafu</i> , I felt so uncomfortable and out of place in Saturday Japanese school. My dad saw how much I was struggling, and also unhappy with the outdated curriculum they used. He ended up teaching me Japanese himself, so I can have a more 'authentic' source to learn the language and cultural contexts."
4	24	Participant Z	8	"Having to learn English to adjust to Canadian society has made me more empathetic with older Chinese people in my city. I know the struggle first hand, and it makes me feel inclined to help them when I interact with them."
4	24	Auto	9	"The Japanese I know is learned from my family, so when I went back to Japan and spoke with my cousins there, I realized how outdated and 'uncool' my Japanese was. Learning modern Japanese would have been only accessible through living in Japan or through friends who grew up there and unfortunately, I didn't have access to that. The plus side is that I find it very easy to learn foreign languages like I have a muscle for it because of my upbringing."
4	24	Participant H	4	"Even though being able to speak Japanese is impressive I guess, I feel like in Vancouver, being able to speak Korean or Chinese is a more useful asset because the Japanese population in Vancouver is small."Nonetheless, it has definitely helped me make friends and not have to read subtitles when watching Japanese anime, movies, and TV shows."
4	24	Auto	3	"It's so cool that my Korean best friend was interested in Japanese language and culture when I was interested in Korean language and culture because we would practice with each other and indulge in each other's media, pop culture, and music together. We bonded so much through this."
4	24	Participant X	6	"As someone who had to learn how to speak English and tried to assimilate to sound as 'native' as I could, I know that this Othering and isolating experience has taught me to be kind to those who are going through the discomfort of adjusting to a culture and language that is totally different from where they had spent most of their lives in. Also, I wish the self-pressure within East Asian communities have in trying to have 'accent-less' English would stop!"
4	24	Participant J	9	"Even if my future kids don't want to go to language school or are disinterested in learning how to read and write, I hope they can still grow up in an environment where they can at least familiarize their ears and understand it to an extent. It is definitely much harder to learn it as an adult than as a kid."
4	24	Participant N	8	"Being multilingual and my knowledge of East Asian language, philosophies and cultural values have helped me so much in my career as I adapt and expand the way I approach projects and face East Asian clients."
4	24	Participant M	10	"The mentality and sense of community is something I think has been heavily influenced by my Japanese upbringing, knowledge of Japanese emphasis on collectivity, and work ethics values. When I try to translate this in my approach to my work in Canada, I find that it yields a unique and effective work environment and team work."
4	24	Participant G	4	"Familiarity with East Asian Culture has helped my business, like my interest and passion in Japanese fashion. What was once my personal hobby became integral to my brand's identity and I still can't believe and feel so lucky that my love and passion for Japanese culture and fashion has blossomed into this line of work."

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

These findings offer rich, informative insights for my first four research questions exploring emotional and psychological schemas of diasporic identity ambiguity (RQ1), mediation of multitudinous identities (RQ2), instrumental and ecological constitutions of hybridity (RQ3), and diasporic agency in embodying ambiguous identities (RQ4). I will then explore my VR experience creation process and its implications in answering my final research question, which explores the affordances of immersive mediums for racialized storytelling (RQ5). The results of my interviews, autoethnography, and VR film creation process are summarized below.

The first categorical theme examined perceptions and discussions of diasporic ambiguity. Participants noted that identity expression is influenced by explicit, implicit, external and internal identity probing, in/visibility of ambiguous traits, and intentions embedded in social cues. Questions like “What are you?” or “Where are you from?” can cause discomfort and alienation or community and reciprocity depending on the context. Invisible or visible characteristics, such as phenotypical features, speaking accents, and language proficiency, impact how ambiguity is perceived and internalized. The power dynamics and reality of Canadian multiculturalism were explored in this question, as well as the very necessity of identity probing. Overall, this category highlights how socio-cultural factors emphasize perceptions and embodiments of ambiguity.

In the second categorical theme of my findings, I observed how individuals with ambiguous identities find empowerment by navigating their hybrid identities through various practical and psychological strategies. Participants shared their strategic “ready answers” (Paragg, 2017) to manage how their ambiguities were expressed and perceived, enabling control over their narratives. They also shared their fluidity between identity categories, curating their

self-expressions to blend elements from diverse cultural backgrounds. This opportunistic adaptation allows participants to thrive in different cross-cultural social and professional contexts, serving adaptability as both a survival mechanism and strength. Furthermore, identity formation was described as an ongoing, experimental process influenced by ancestral, historical, political and personal knowledge and experiences. This dynamic interplay of choice, fluidity, and adaptation highlights the agency and empowerment within diasporic identities.

In the third categorical theme, emotional and psychological dimensions of diasporic identity presented several key findings. Participants often described feelings of misalignment with both Canadian and East Asian identities, experiencing alienation and the challenge of adhering to one or the other. Unwanted identity probing was also considered invasive but morally ambiguous, simultaneously connecting and Othering individuals. Psychological confusion arose from the discrepancy between self-identity and external perceptions, especially for mixed-race/ethnic individuals. This disorientation led to participants' skepticism towards Canadian multiculturalism, feeling a lack of space for fluidity and ambiguity. Further, nostalgia and reverse culture shock was discussed in navigating a crystalized sense of the "homeland", evoking emotional complexities between East Asian heritage and Canadian upbringing. Finally, empowerment and belonging were discussed through shared experiences with other East Asian-Canadians. These emotional and psychological experiences revealed the affect that characterizes the diasporic experience.

The fourth categorical theme revealed the intricate interplay of instrumental and ecological factors in identity hybridity. Key findings highlighted the pivotal role of human relationships and networks within East Asian and multicultural communities, providing comfort and space for cultural expression and experimentation. Cultural elements such as food, fashion, and media were also discussed as facilitating cultural education, exploration and a sense of pride.

Travel to ancestral homelands was discussed as offering immersive trans-spatial and cultural connections, while shared experiences within the diasporic community fostered solidarity. Institutional structures, such as educational, political, and online environments, influence identity formation and cultural practices in the private sphere. Cultural and political awareness nuanced social dynamics and opened up opportunities for hybridity in participants' beliefs and hybridizing values from their East Asian heritage and Canadian upbringing. Family bonds and linguistic proficiency were also discussed as central instrumental pieces, enriching social connections and professional opportunities. This category underscored the instrumental and ecological richness of diasporic hybridity.

Finally, the VR film conception, creation, and implications, which I explore later in this chapter, also resulted in rich findings. With a highly abstract and phenomenological lens into East Asian hybridity in this project, I felt inclined to visualize my theoretical analysis in a visual, tangible form. Leaning heavily on the prosthetic metaphor, I first identified 15 anecdotal examples shared by participants, emphasizing sensory experiences, expression, and embodiment in identity hybridity. The second layer to my VR film is that I wanted the stories shared by the participants not to be isolated from each other but rather linked in a narrative that encapsulates 15 distinct, unique experiences for the user to experience. Finally, the VR experience creation process aimed to consider positioning users from passive spectators to active participants. The purpose of these creative choices was to communicate the message that diasporic identity is multitudinous and never self-contained, that “We write our own stories, but we are also a part of others” (Abril-Gonzales et al., 2021, p. 441), that we are a sum of the people we have touched and have been touched by. However, this process, as I discuss later, led to a linear narrative which failed to capture the non-linear nature of the assemblage system. My emphasis on the prosthetic element of my theoretical analysis and encompassing narrative of my 15 participants

led to an underrepresentation of the assemblage network portion of my theoretical model. Details of the VR experience's plot, creative process, implications, and challenges in translating my theoretical analysis with the VR experience will be discussed later in this chapter.

### **Application of a Hybrid Prosthetic Assemblage Theory:**

According to Haraway, a prosthetic is not just a tool or artificial replacement but a complex entity blurring the boundary between human and machine, nature and culture. In the bodily context of a cyborg, prostheses are an extension of human capabilities, and they challenge traditional notions of identity, self, and embodiment (1985). Based on this metaphorical definition, I deduce in my theoretical analysis that a prosthetic is an instrument that a) “technologizes” parts of identities and b) serves as a means to augment categorical binaries of selfhood. As I found through my interviews and autoethnography, many instrumental components of diasporic selfhood can be interpreted as prostheses by Haraway’s definition. These prostheses can be tangible or intangible instrumental and ecological infrastructures that aid in enhancing diasporic community formation and identity hybridity, serving as a means to transcend the binary of being Canadian *or* East Asian and instead mending these categories together. Many participants in my study described various instrumental and ecological forms of their cultural backgrounds as an “extension of oneself” (Participant L). Thus, it is a worthy metaphorical parallel to investigate how prostheses are created and animate identity expression and hybridity, which seems to be a response to diasporic individuals’ own questioning of “What are you?” and “Where are you from.” To envision East Asian diasporic identities as a collection of cultural prostheses, it is crucial to map out its linkages. The most apparent link is the literal visual hyphen that characterizes East Asian-Canadian individuals. Many participants of my study described their cultural or ethnic background with a hyphen, such as “Japanese-Canadian,” “half

Korean, half Japanese-Canadian,” “Chinese-Canadian,” etc. (See Figure 1, pg. 30). This hyphen connotes a certain duality and mixing, which may at times be described as “burdensome” (Mahtani, 2012), especially in the context such as the invasive probing of “What are you?” or “Where Are you from?”, an at times alienating and objectifying investigation to categorize the unfamiliar to the familiar (Lebouef, 2020). As indicated by my participants’ answers to interview question 1, this sentiment was agreed upon to an extent, questioning the necessity of identity probing and whether it is beneficial in identity formation or harmful. The “burdensome” label is also a subjective perception, with its ambiguous moral nature as a point of connection or alienation, depending on the context of inquiry. Participants described that the context of who, why, when and how the question is asked, as well as the racial/ethnic visibility of the questioner, reveals the power dynamic embedded in the question (Paragg, 2017; Lebouef, 2020).

The visibility and invisibility of identifying as a mixed race, ethnic, and cultural Canadian, were highlighted frequently by participants as a point of ambiguity. Phenotypical indicators like hair texture, eye colour, and facial features, particularly in racially ambiguous participants, lead to presumptions of their identity, often feeling the erasure of either their East Asian or Euro-Canadian ethnicity. Invisibility feels invalidating as well, as many East Asian Canadians feel like their Canadian identity is downplayed because visually, they “look” East Asian. Other than physicality, a range of sociocultural factors demonstrate that the hyphen is experienced and embodied differently, once again, in accordance with the fact that diasporic identities cannot be approached with a universal perspective, as mixed-culture identities are contextual and subjective (Ifekwunigwe, 2004). As I discovered in my research, the hyphen between East Asian-Canadian is contextualized by multiple factors (Alcoff, 1999; DeSouza, 2018), like moving to/born in Canada, being visibly mixed-race, religion, queerness, neurodivergence, family structure, and the demographic of the social environments in

individuals' upbringings. These factors indicate that many simultaneous dichotomies characterize the hyphen, demonstrating the multiplicity of diasporic identities (Alcoff, 1999).

I was also interested in how participants reflected on their hyphenated identities and whether the hyphen could be interpreted as a collection of prostheses intertwined and assembled together. As a site of hybridity, East Asian diasporic individuals are oftentimes self-aware that they can be both perceived by others and themselves as ambivalent, paradoxical, and self-contradictory. Their embodiment of this hybridity is explored internally and through internalizing external perceptions. Participants discussed how hybridity can sometimes be an internalization of the external gaze of the dominant Euro-Canadian racial imaginary, and as a product, the image of what a Canadian should “look like” or “sound like” becomes ingrained as a “prerequisite” of being Canadian. These emotional and psychological experiences in one’s upbringing may render individuals to feel subjugated to arbitrary categorization, begging the question of how these conflicting and discomfoting feelings are navigated.

This discussion of being one or the other and the standardized ideals of being Canadian *or* Japanese led to a skepticism towards Canadian multiculturalism. The implicitly categorical norm of Canada’s multiculturalism dictates the confines of Canadian identity that often leave little space for ambiguity, but rather ambiguity as something to be clarified and categorized (Mahtani, 2002; Paragg, 2017; Lebouef, 2020). These implicit ideals of Canadian multiculturalism manifested in participants’ personal experiences. Some mixed-race participants revealed that they felt like they had to *prove* their Japanese identity to the Japanese community in Vancouver because “most Japanese people in Canada are visually clearly 100% Japanese” (Participant S) without question. On the other hand, I discussed in my autoethnography how I overcompensated for my fully Japanese ethnicity by performing as more “White-Washed” or, Canadian-presenting to feel like my Canadian identity was validated and pronounced in my

Euro-Canadian social environment. My clothing choices, make-up style, and predominantly Euro-Canadian social circles and clubs I adhered to in my upbringing expressed this.

As explored by mixed-race and diaspora studies in my literature review, responses to discomfort and misalignment could lead to various types of identification: a) conformity to one cultural identity over another, b) resistance to this conformity altogether, or c) identifying as in-between (Törngren & Sato, 2021). Despite their struggles in grappling with identity ambiguity, participants discussed various ways to reclaim their hyphenated identity. Some of my participants discussed how they subvert the interrogatory gaze in the “What are you?” by replying with “I’m everything” (Participant G) or “Canadian. Where are *you* from?” (Autoethnography), echoing Paragg’s “ready” narratives (2017) to open the hyphen as an opportunity for identity play, resistance, flexibility, and rejecting passivity. Participants voiced how hyphenated identities cannot be easily answered by the “What are you?” question and can lead to discomfort, conflict, and Othering, as explored previously by other scholars (Mahtani, 2002; Paragg, 2017; Lebouef, 2020; Törngren & Sato, 2021). However, this power dynamic surrounding the hyphen can equally have the potential for solidarity or empowerment. As a vessel of multiple identities, the hyphen becomes a site of production for cultural experimentation. Negotiating multiple racial, ethnic, and cultural identities is an adaptive process in accordance with contextual factors and opportunities with an essence of play.

When considering the potential of the hyphen, contextuality is key in understanding the hindrances and potentials in the power dynamics surrounding framing diasporic identities as ambiguously neither, both, and fluid (Alcoff, 1999). The malleability between identity categories facilitates the hyphen, and its adaptability and resilience developed through lived experience create acceptance and a sense of community despite its ambiguities. Defining the potentials of the hyphen is a complex web that must consider contradictions, fluidity, and uncertainty.

Depending on the socio-cultural context, empowerment in the hyphen was identified by participants as a) an involuntary and unconscious process of cultural elements manifesting when the situation calls for it or b) a voluntary and opportunistic adaptation to different social and cultural contexts. There is a sense of empowerment, whether through deliberate choosing or unconscious manifestation, that demonstrates ambiguity as a form of power.

This intriguing process of finding comfort and certainty in the very thing that causes discomfort and uncertainty in the hyphen is a testament that ambiguity is perceived and experienced differently based on its contexts. Claiming multitudinous identities can be self-contradicting at times, such as departing from certain East Asian cultural values instilled by parents, as Participant P shares:

"Throughout my upbringing, I've grown to pinpoint what customs and values resonate with me and which ones don't, for both Canadian and Korean. Although I've distanced from learning and absorbing my worldview from my family to creating my own through the people I've met and relationships I've cultivated." However, there is also excitement in the ability to adhere to a range of things depending on context, as humorously and metaphorically described by Participant J:

"When the Olympics roll around every two years, I always cheer for the winning team, like I'm Team China during the Summer Olympics and Team Canada during the Winter Olympics. Because China is stronger during Summer and Canada during Winter-why not, right? I am Chinese and Canadian, so I can do that."

These perspectives demonstrate that contextuality informs the utility and benefit of particular cultural identities revealed when certain circumstances call for it. Whether this contextuality is consciously assessed or unconsciously sensed, hybridity is a process that draws from multiple cultural backgrounds through opportunity and adaptation. Participant X says:

"For me, my Chinese identity isn't about picking and choosing, but rather more like a process of seeing where different pieces of my culture fit where they deem themselves, and they prove themselves useful over time, and finding the usefulness of when it arises, rather than an active selection."

In my autoethnography, I observed that my Japanese cultural background becomes useful through conscious conjuring. The hyphen empowerment becomes activated when I can relate with other East Asian or non-East Asian people through overlapping cultural aspects or values with Japanese culture, like cooking certain Japanese dishes for friends who are curious about Japanese food or recognizing certain words in Chinese or Korean because of my knowledge from my Japanese language skills. Based on situational socio-cultural contexts, I refer to my Japanese heritage as a cultural pool within myself and draw out skills and knowledge through sensory use, like Haraway's prosthetic, by speaking, making, eating, thinking, listening, seeing and so on.

In the East Asian context, my participants also described how they use the "I'm a foreigner' card" (autoethnography) when they feel unable to align with certain customs or values in East Asia or practical or logistic situations where identifying as a Canadian might be beneficial. For example, though Participant P understands where her parents are coming from, she does not always agree with their traditional South Korean values. In these moments of conflicting values, she described that explaining to her parents about being raised in Canada and surrounded by a certain demographic of people led her to establish conflicting beliefs, even though she may have aligned with them as a child. For myself, and some other participants included, Japanese and English names have been an aspect of identity I code-switched for convenience for myself or others, using my English name in Japan as a "foreign" English teacher or in Canada for more convenient pronunciation. At the same time, I reserved my Japanese name for family and close friends. These curations and negotiations suggest a certain *performance* of identity, treading multiple categories of the self simultaneously or with an intuitive turnover. When conceived this way, the hyphen can be considered a "third place," as Homi Bhabha refers to (1994), a locus that mends East Asian and Canadian identities together.

To consider the hyphen identity through the prosthetic-assemblage model, I turn to a technological conception of multi-racial, ethnic, and cultural hybridity. As explored in the literature review, Chun urges to consider race as technology, mechanizing forms of racialized identity that accumulate and are expressed through various socio-cultural contexts (2009). Many participants have also demonstrated this process when discussing how parts of their East Asian identity hybridize and manifest within themselves from every day or institutional contexts. For the purposes of my research, I labelled these parts as “big” blocks and “small” blocks of identity, which I interpret as prostheses, by Haraway’s definition.

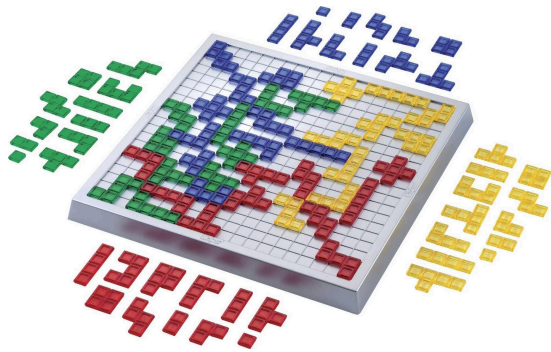


Figure 10. Blokus, strategy game

How I envisioned these blocks came from a childhood strategy game, Blokus (Figure 10). The game's premise is that each player is assigned a colour with varying sizes of blocks composed of one to five cubes. The game's objective is to occupy as much of the white grid board as possible, challenging players to find the perfect piece that fits in the ebbs and flows of the other player’s pieces. This game metaphorically captures how I pictured the identity blocks that constitute the hyphen of East Asian-Canadian identities. The bigger five or four-cube blocks symbolize the “big” identity blocks, like linguistic ability, cultural values, belief systems, educational and governmental systems, social networks, and ancestry. The smaller three-, two-, or one-cube blocks represent “small” identity blocks, like food, films, music, activities, festivals, and everyday home life. Going by the game's logic, bigger blocks are not necessarily more

important than smaller ones. Sometimes, smaller blocks are the most crucial to open up a possible channel to a larger space on the board, allowing for more pieces to expand upon. This Blokus metaphor is very helpful in demonstrating the process of my proposed prosthetic-assemblage model, envisioning how big and small identity blocks, as prostheses of diasporic individuals, navigate across the “game board”, or assemblage to hybridize in unpredictable sociocultural contexts of the diaspora. The limitations of this metaphoric representation are that unlike Blokus pieces, identity blocks in diasporic hybridity are not rigid, finite, and plastic. They are malleable and can transform their utility circumstantially. However, this metaphor does help visualize the assemblage network I envision, representing the linkages that form depending on the surrounding circumstances.

This process is an improvised experimentation and curation of blocks that outlines the linkages formed by diasporic individuals' experiences, relationships, values, and perspectives. This is the ontology of diasporic hybridity, becoming the key to revealing, mechanizing, and embodying lived experiences in identity construction as an ecological web, or assemblage, as described by Deleuze and Guattari (Puar, 2012). Returning to Alcoff once again, mixed-race, ethnic, and cultural selfhood is inherently embodied, phenomenological, and contextual (1999), and its socio-cultural implications are contextual as well, depending on individuals' upbringings, cultural exposure and social ecology. This way of discussing race challenges the perspective that racial, ethnic, and cultural expression are fixed and predetermined (2009), but rather that it is fluid, flexible, and intertwined as a network. If seen as an extension of power and self-assertion, identity blocks, like the technologization of race (Chun, 2009; Chu, 2015), provide the ability to mediate restriction and confusion in how hyphenated identities navigate their self-expression and empowerment. Thus, the prosthetic-assemblage model allows us to understand these identity blocks as prostheses (Haraway, 1985) to consider their potential utility within an assemblage

system (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Currier, 2003; Puar, 2012). This visualization offers insight into how micro and macro processes of identity formation, like childhood routines and home environments, become opportunities for decision-making and self-assertion.

When understood as a deeply and expansively interconnected network of identity blocks of various origins, the prosthetic-assemblage model allows us to holistically understand how multitudinous identity blocks operate *involving* an individual rather than identity blocks operating in isolation *to* an individual. This is the main critique of early models of the cyborg (Currier, 2003) and the traffic intersection model (Currier, 2003; Puar, 2012), where selfhood is seen as a sum or singular loci of disparate parts and linearities, a dichotomous relationship between self and extensions of self. Instead, this model allows us to see that identity hybridity is an active, interlinked process rather than a passive, linear process. Deleuze and Guattari's proposed assemblage model prioritizes socio-cultural context, transcendence of space and time, and clusters of people, knowledge, values, institutions and communities as agents, rejecting hierarchical structures of self and society (1987, as cited in Puar, 2012). Some participants shared how diasporic identity captures beyond direct individual experiences but also encompasses lineage, memory, and others' experiences, transcending beyond individuals' place of birth or upbringing. For example, Zhang, regarding Chinese diasporic futurisms, observed that the diasporic experience of their heritage homeland is experienced through trans-spatial knowledge of ancestry and memories of their ancestors, family members, and other stories that become ingrained in diasporic identity (2021). Participants of my study also discussed how their knowledge of their East Asian heritage was informed through stories of their lineage and ancestral homelands, vicariously embodying their East Asian identity through others' memories and experiences. As captured by Participant S,

“My identities[...]transcend location and time because I know I'm Japanese even though I didn't grow up there myself, and spending a lot of time growing up with

my grandparents, I've formed my Japanese identity through them as well. [...] There's been a sense of power in recognizing this, [...] acknowledging the abundance of choice.”.

This perspective of diasporic selfhood in the prosthetic-assemblage model first rejects that hybridity is an isolated occurrence of a sum of experiences and knowledge only directly experienced by the individuals themselves. Second, this model emphasizes the fluidity in how identity blocks manifest and how contextual factors like time, space, and social environment place their expressions under constant change, with new prostheses and linkages always forming. Third, this model allows us to view how identity blocks are in flux with one another, merging and separating contextually (Alcoff, 1999; Ifekwunigwe, 2003), porous and spongy, constantly absorbing and releasing (Massumi, 2011; as cited in Puar, 2012), and circumstantially adapting to many socio-cultural ecologies of the diaspora.

In this model, power dynamics and emotional/psychological responses surrounding diasporic ambiguity within Euro-normative Canadianness, Othering in both East Asian and Canadian spaces, and the invalidating gatekeeping of tangible requirements (like language proficiency, knowledge of values, ethnic “purity”) are all still substantial experiences of hyphenated identities. At the same time, I offer the prosthetic-assemblage model to aid in changing our perception of ambiguity by seeing how the dynamic, transient network of multicultural identity blocks can create new opportunities, a sense of pride, or joy contextually rather than in permanent isolation. In my assemblage model, identity blocks (prostheses) are non-hierarchical, and their power is circumstantially revealed, like making friends, exploring food, experiencing cultural festivals, or having that “language learning muscle” stemming from hearing and speaking multiple languages in a multilingual upbringing. These identity blocks become powerful prostheses even if they may have been a source of stress or shame at one point.

In sum, the prosthetic-assemblage model allows us to see how identity blocks of one's racial, ethnic, and cultural background remain disparate and contradictory; it is a matter of seeing manifestations of beneficial identity blocks circumstantially and relationally. Here, I reference Heidegger's "Essence of Technology" (1977) to define how the prosthetic-assemblage model reveals the power of ambiguity in identity hybridity. The potential power (*poiesis*) in the identity blocks, or prostheses of one's identity (technological object) are circumstantially revealed and emerges from its utility (*enframing*) in the socio-cultural environment of the diaspora and within individuals in the form of an interconnected assemblage (standing reserve). The merged prosthetic-assemblage model forms a blueprint for how instrumental and ecological infrastructures reveal the potential (*poiesis*) in ambiguity within individuals and the overall diasporic community. Upon exploring the logic and components of the prosthetic-assemblage model, it is important to further understand the dynamics that form and mobilize it.

### **An Instrumentalist and Ecological Framing of Diasporic Identities:**

Identity blocks serve as a prosthetic, an aid, within not only diasporic individuals but also the extensive East Asian -Canadian community as a network of assemblages. Retrospectively, since its original conceptualization in the 1980s, early iterations of the cyborg model have been criticized for its inability to escape the dichotomy problem as a permanent, static object merged with a static individual (Currier, 2003; Puar, 2012). Rather, I subvert Haraway's metaphorical definition of prostheses by conceiving them as instrumental identity blocks in motion within a Deleuze-Guattarian assemblage of diasporic contextualities and socio-cultural networks, converging and diverging in a non-hierarchical, non-linear fashion informed a fluid ecology. In the previous section, I introduced the prosthetic-assemblage model and how this framework offers a valuable lens into how emotional and psychological experiences of discomfort and

ambiguity in East Asian diasporic identity are navigated (RQ1) and how multitudinous and disparate cultural backgrounds are mediated in the identity formation process (RQ2). This phenomenological framework then urges us to highlight the instrumental and ecological infrastructures (RQ3) and *how* instrumental prostheses are mobilized and expressed in the assemblage framework toward discovering empowerment and agency in ambiguity (RQ4).

In this process, we must again focus on the *how* rather than *what* of diasporic hybridity (Chun, 2009; Alcoff, 1999). To explore the *how* of the prosthetic-assemblage interpretation of diasporic hybridity, this section considers the roles of affect, performance, and embodiment as the motor animating identity blocks as prostheses (instrumental) within assemblage networks (ecological). First, We must characterize how contextuality triggers linkages between identity blocks, evaluating their nature as innately or actively created. Second, we must illustrate the roles of sensory data, memory, knowledge, and experience in embodying instrumental and ecological identity blocks. Third, we must map out how instrumental and ecological components are mobilized by affect (emotional and sensory-driven responses), performance (performed and action-based responses), and embodiment (manifestation of affect and performance in the body) (Sedgwick & Frank, 2003). These points further lead to what identity blocks *do* in diasporic hybridity and define how a sense of individual and collective agency emerges in this process, potentially even offering an alternative imaginary of Canadian multiculturalism.

The prosthetic-assemblage model helps us understand various sociocultural factors that endow instrumental and ecological identity blocks with mobilizing power or utility within the individual and in the greater diasporic community as an assemblage. This perspective has been explored in a variety of forms in diaspora studies, such as Hiroko Noro's adaptation of Brofenbrenner's ecological model framework (1979), which captures how socio-cultural factors form a mutual ecology that fosters and is fostered *by* identity blocks in one's upbringing, from

early stages of life and expanding in breadth and dispersity over time (2009). Aya Fujiwara examined “ethnic elite” identities in Canada’s early beginnings as a multicultural society, where instrumental identity blocks such as bilingual proficiency and multicultural and political knowledge were navigated (Fujiwara, 2012) to establish a hybrid set of customs and values in an emerging “third space” (Bhabha, 1994). By integrating instrumentalist and ecological perspectives into the prosthetic-assemblage model, I consider the role of instrumental identity blocks in navigating ambiguity within a diasporic ecology constituted for and by East Asian-Canadian individuals and communities.

Ecologically, human relationships and networks were most frequently mentioned by participants as fundamental to fostering a sense of belonging through connections and community reinforcement. Connections with others through shared experience or identity, whether within the East Asian community or others, offer a safe environment to explore relationships with East Asian culture and deep communal understanding. This is a crucial aspect of how an individual’s social ecology merges with others’ ecologies through shared third-culture experiences. This is captured by Participant J, who says:

“I usually feel inclined to seek and connect with other East Asian or immigrant diasporic people because of a shared unspoken connection, developing commonality through shared experiences, self-awareness, and self-perception that comes with adopting a minority mindset from a young age.”

Ecological identity blocks like human connection create a social scape that is neither East Asian nor Euro-Canadian, but something in between. Collectivity, particularly in specific contexts such as being a student or young professional breaking into a White corporate space, in addition to other identity affiliations connected to gender, sexuality, or neurodivergence, for example, leads to human connections that scaffold sociocultural spaces that are not necessarily built for them.

Though deeply integral in diasporic identity formation, many ecological infrastructures in an assemblage framework are out of individual control to manipulate. What *can* be manipulated

is how institutions and social structures such as educational, corporate, and online environments are reinvented through diasporic hybridity. These spaces in an individual's ecology can significantly influence identity formation, where instrumental identity blocks such as knowledge, cultural production, values, and media, become exchanged, challenged, or hybridized with the dominant Canadian counterparts. For example, participants have described their implementation of Japanese work ethic values and teamwork style (Participant M), Chinese cultural influence in company projects (Participant N, Participant A, Participant G, Participant K), and institutions requesting bilingual workers and staff to accommodate elderly clients with limited English proficiency (Participant C, Participant L), demonstrating how the institutional and individual merge in the diasporic ecology.

Many participants credited structure and routine as a crucial element in their diasporic upbringing that emphasized the role of everyday practices in reinforcing their identity, which brought security and consistency, easing the back and forth between their Canadian and East Asian worldviews. Cultural practices such as cooking traditional foods at home, celebrating annual festivals, bilingual households, having East Asian friends at school or work, and attending East Asian Canadian community events provided a consistent environment that offered a sense of security and belonging. Participant C highlights that:

“Structure, not to the point where it's excessively stressful, offers me security and a sense of belonging for me because it's a space where how I expect the place to work and how the place expects me to work is aligned.”

Structured routine and consistency, both in private and public settings, allowed participants to build a toolkit of cultural values and knowledge, helping them navigate contrasting multi-cultural ecologies through routinely encountered expectations and customs. As Participant C discussed above, a certain trust develops between individuals and their diasporic ecologies, and even the initially disorienting ambiguities or discrepancies become a part of the expectation and structure.

Finally, the ancestral homeland emerged as a significant ecology fostering a deeper, more complex cultural connection and sense of belonging. Participants described their immersive experiences travelling or spending early childhood years in Japan, China, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan as life-changing, providing a sensory experience that fostered relationships with their East Asian heritage. Particularly, second and third-generation diasporic participants in my study described how their East Asian homeland has always been explored from a distance, hearing stories from their parents, video calling relatives they've never met in person, imported media, or online sources. The contrast between romanticized versus realistic perceptions of the pseudo-mythical homeland further complicates the misalignment in grappling with "a culture [East Asian-Canadians] did not grow up in full-time." (Participant P). Many participants noted the disorienting "reverse culture shock" of travelling to East Asia and experiencing the homeland once again as adults or for the first time, from learning about Japan's high-stress work culture (Participant S, Participant M, Participant H) to China's restrictive social pressures (Participant C, Participant E, Participant Z, Participant N). Participant J, who moved to Canada from Mainland China in her early childhood, described this process of disillusionment and "re-falling in love" with China, saying:

"I recently visited my hometown in China, and re-experiencing it again felt so different. I found myself in awe of the beauty of Chinese culture through my own means and adventure, rather than passively 'receiving' an image of China through my parents."

These experiences are significant in demystifying and grounding individuals' relationships with their diasporic homelands. In diasporic identity, East Asia transcends beyond a geographic location but as a locus of culture, identity, and belonging in the assemblage framework.

These ecological elements of the assemblage framework are dynamically entangled with the emergence, manifestation, and expression of instrumental identity blocks within a dynamic, complex web. Returning again to big identity blocks and small identity blocks, many participants

defined sources of their East Asian cultural exposure and expression as “pieces” of culture, including big ones like cultural and political knowledge, values, work ethics, language, and nationality to small ones like food, fashion, television, music, films, and online social media platforms that constitute instrumental prostheses of the assemblage system.

For many participants, small identity blocks were defined as easily accessible, everyday opportunities to learn, experience, and express their cultural heritage. For example, many noted the availability of diverse East Asian ingredients in Canadian grocery stores, which they used to blend familiar East Asian dishes with Canadian ingredients to create hybrid culinary experiments (Participant A, Participant K). Others discussed how fashion, film, music, and art allowed them to express their culture, feeling a sense of pride when these forms were mutually celebrated by both East Asian and non-East Asian individuals (Participant G, Participant C, Participant S, Participant N, Participant E, Participant A). Additionally, media forms like TV shows and music provided a means to connect with their cultural roots, especially in childhood or adolescence (Participant P, Participant J, Participant K). Though mundane and part of everyday life, these 'small' identity blocks were not only sources of personal enjoyment but also a frequently and consistently accessible form of identity that facilitated cultural expression and pride. Participant Z, regarding these small identity blocks, said:

“juggling identities can be experimental, really, like in mundane things like how I cook or dress, apply makeup, there’s lots of experimenting with East Asian influence and Canadian culture to use as tools for self-expression.”.

Participant Z, who came to Canada from Mainland China in her late teens, spoke fondly of these small identity blocks as a grounding connection with her upbringing in China. The hybridity of these aspects of her Chinese identity has rendered pieces of her everyday life in China into an extension of her Chinese identity now as an adult living in Canada.

As one of the big identity blocks, participants talked about cultural, historical and political knowledge and discourse of their East Asian homeland in the Canadian context, fostering nuanced relationships and scope of selfhood. This is a unique instrumental dimension to diasporic identities, as East Asian nations particularly have complex diplomatic and historical relationships. Many participants described how this had been made aware from a young age, playing a significant role in identity formation. For instance, I discussed in my autoethnography how Japan's imperial history in Asia and the Pacific during the inter-war and World War II period felt like a burden I carried in my upbringing as I had many Korean and Chinese-Canadian friends growing up. This consciousness evolved into a feeling of accountability in political tensions and historical dynamics for a country I have never called home. Other participants noted similar sentiments, discussing how they carry certain generational traumas of their ancestors and homelands as a dimension of their heritage. Despite the psychological discomforts that entails, this awareness and sensitivity to culture and politics evokes a deeply nuanced and informed experience of identity hybridity. These big identity blocks link the personal and political, fostering a multi-cultural perspective in diasporic identities.

In addition to political knowledge, cultural knowledge and values were discussed by participants as having a significant role in their career choices, academic research, and philosophies behind life and relationships. For example, Participant E stated that:

“Professionally and just overall in my life, my knowledge and openness to cultural values, philosophies, language skills, and events helps me gain more opportunities and find ways to transmit this in tangible forms. For example, projects at work, making connections with international designers and companies, and non-tangible forms like discovering different ways to activate my skills, personality, and making friends.”

Regarding cultural values, many participants discussed repeated trial-and-error in learning, rejecting, or resonating with East Asian and Canadian values. Predominantly, participants

described the following dichotomous values between East Asia and Canada, such as the difference between collectivism and individualism:

“My communal mentality is something I think has been heavily influenced by my Japanese upbringing, like from knowing how Japanese culture emphasizes collectivity in work ethics. When I try to translate this in my work approach in Canada, I find that things run very smoothly because Canada has that North American individualism.” (Participant M)

And between the risk-free, curated life trajectory and journey-centered life trajectory:

"I felt daunted by the expected trajectory of graduating college, getting a good job, getting married, and having kids all before age 30 in China. In Canada, I find that there is a complete release of these expectations and freedom to take as long as I need to be whoever I want to be. Both of these feel like polar opposite values and can actually feel overwhelming both ways. I'm currently trying to find a happy medium of structured freedom that works for me." (Participant N)

Many participants discussed how navigating these dichotomous values results from exposure to them in close, consistent proximity in private and public social environments. This social environment can be suffocating, commanding, and disorienting, which resulted, as stated by participants in “rebellious against my parents” (autoethnography) or “distancing myself from East Asian values as far as I can.” (Participant X). It seems that cultural values are not beneficial when perceived as a strict guideline adhered to “validate” Canadian or East Asian identity. Rather, participants described how, consciously or unconsciously, circumstantial resonance and applicability bestow utility in certain East Asian and Canadian cultural values. In response to the prevalence of Chinese values in her identity as a Chinese-Canadian, Participant C said:

"I don't believe that one can consciously pick or choose what values they adhere to. Even for the positive values I see in Chinese culture, there's no way I can enforce anything because my own parents instilled their values into me thinking they were the best for me, but they grew up in post-cultural revolution China. What made sense for them in their contexts does not apply to me, but it doesn't necessarily make it a 'good' or 'bad' value."

When cultural values as a big identity block are contextually revealed to be beneficial, they become crucial instrumental elements in diasporic identity formation. Many participants

discussed the hybridity of cultural values, such as teachers sharing Japanese work culture and educational philosophy among Canadian colleagues, designers implementing Chinese aesthetic knowledge to Canadian projects, or even how individuals establish belief systems and worldviews. The strengths of East Asian and Canadian values merge into a third cultural value, revealing its potential utility in flux with other instrumental building blocks such as people, public institutions, and careers from adaptability and experimentation.

Next, ancestry and family were discussed as vital instrumental agents in diasporic identity formation. Familial bonds, such as with immigrant parents, grandparents, or siblings, serve as living reflections of individuals' East Asian heritage. Participants described family as a source of cultural continuity and exposure, maintaining cultural practices and languages while navigating the Canadian socio-cultural environment outside the home. Multi-racial and ethnic participants with one East Asian parent often find that parent to be their primary source of cultural exposure, as Participant S described:

“As a Japanese-British-Canadian *hafu*, my father was my only source of Japanese identity and culture, so I grew up very closely with him. Even in turbulent periods of our relationship, our shared Japanese identity has been a mutual link in our relationship.”

Participant K, who is half Japanese and half Korean-Canadian, discussed her sibling relationship:

“My bond with my brother is special. My mom and dad are immigrants who grew up in Japan and Korea respectively. So, my brother and I share the specific experience of being both mixed-ethnic and growing up in Canada that might parents can't relate to. Even though our journey [in navigating our East Asian identity] as adults has been different, we bonded through the awkwardness and uncertainty, with an unspoken understanding for each other.”

Family members act as mirrors and sources of East Asian heritage, creating unique parent-child and sibling relationships. In multi-generational diasporic homes, a typical household structure in East Asian families, familial relationships become loci of hybridity. Participants described grandparents taking care of them in their native language, regularly partaking in cultural

activities and cooking, and providing rich access to their cultural background (Participants H, L, N). Others discussed negotiating their Canadian and East Asian identities with their parents, who, as immigrants, do not have the same journey with their Canadian identities. These negotiations, cross-generational interaction, and navigating between East Asian family dynamics and the Canadian socio-cultural environment become an integral instrumental component of identity hybridity. Participant X described this process metaphorically, saying:

"Adjusting to Canada after moving from China was like continuously being thrown into a cold pool [Canadian social environment] from a comfortable hot tub [Chinese family and household], then as I'm adjusting to the pool temperature, I'm being thrown back into the hot tub again, repeat, repeat, repeat. What was once comfortable is no longer comfortable, but eventually, I become more acclimated to the temperature difference and it doesn't feel so bad anymore."

Familial relationships add another dimension of ambiguity, sometimes a source of comfort or conflict as an ecosystem of contrasting multi-generational experiences. Regardless, family and ancestry are crucial aspects many participants emphasize as an essential identity block in their heritage and identity. Regarding the significance of ancestral connection, Participant G says:

"I'd want my kids to know their family history because that's something I didn't grow up with and it's catching up on me now. I'm craving a deeper connection to my heritage and ancestry and I hope I can foster that access for my future kids."

Linguistic proficiency was discussed constantly as a crucial player in participants' relationships with their East Asian heritage. Multilingual upbringing can be challenging to navigate for children of immigrants whose parents may not always speak English themselves, causing confusion and involuntary code-switching from a young age. Ecological infrastructures, such as being pulled out of main homeroom classes for ESL (English as Second Language) enrichment classes and Saturday language schools, were recalled as a distinct yet isolating experience. Some participants disliked being singled out for ESL class blocks or attending extracurricular language schools, feeling Othered from their Euro-Canadian peers. Mixed-race

participants often felt “less-than” (Participant G) and insecure about their language skills amidst fully ethnically East Asian classmates. Hiroko Noro's research (2009) on Japanese language schools in British Columbia further details these challenges. However, this cultural environment helps develop a “linguistic muscle” that is beneficial in translation for parents, professional opportunities, and connections with other East Asian diasporic children. These opportunities arising from linguistic proficiency, human connections, institutions, and cultural knowledge could become powerful identity blocks. This is detailed in Aya Fujiwara’s “ethnic elites” (2012), where diasporic individuals capitalize on their multicultural backgrounds for social, political, and cultural gain. Similarly, participants discussed how their multilingual and cultural skills and knowledge provided deeper exposure, learning, and expression in many circumstances, leading to unique, culturally sensitive contributions. Participant C stated:

"Choosing to disclose my identity comes in handy when it calls for it, like establishing closer customer relationships at work or in the medical field where patients may not speak English and may need your assistance in translating. Self-identification is opportunistic."

Manifestations of multilingual skills and resulting cognitive flexibility can become a source of confidence and agency. Overall, as discussed throughout this section, instrumental and ecological identity blocks are often ambiguous in nature. They can be a source of hindrance and Othering but also have the potential to broaden worldviews and invite diverse opportunities.

To further examine the generation of subversive experimentation, empowerment, and hybridity in the dynamic flux of these instrumental and ecological prostheses, I reiterate Deleuze and Guattari’s definition of assemblage as a guide. According to Deleuze and Guattari, objects, or prostheses, in my case, within an assemblage must be addressed as fluid instrumental entities, not static fixtures (1987, as cited in Puar, 2012). The assemblage is porous, heterogeneous, and ephemeral, where objects and actors are intertwined in mutually influential and dependent

networks (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, as cited in Puar, 2012). This nature is reflected in how identity blocks are integrated, absorbed, and released in hybridity. Participant P describes:

“I didn’t realize how much I’ve drifted away from my Christian Korean upbringing that was a huge part of my life when I was a kid. I feel some guilt, but I also think it happened for a reason, like how my laptop has to update my OS [operating system] to adapt to accommodate more features and better CPU [computer processing unit]. I’ve had to let go of that part of my identity because of the changes in my life experience and views I developed as I became older.”.

This sentiment captures the nature of the assemblage where identity blocks are experienced, mobilized, expressed, embodied, and cycled in diasporic adaptation.

In the cycle of experiencing, mobilizing, expressing, and embodying instrumental and ecological identity blocks within an assemblage system, the intricate dynamics between affect, performance, and embodiment are the driving forces. For my participants, identity blocks formed through human interaction, sensory information, and observation are expressed through performance, becoming embodied as cultural identity. This multi-sensory process gathers observable and experienced data that are emotionally interpreted through means of touch, listening, speaking, eating, smelling, movement, and seeing. Sensory experiences surrounding cooking and eating food, smelling familiar “Asian grocery store smells” (participant J), listening to aunties gossiping during gatherings (Participant L), participating in community events like dragon boat festivals (Participant L) and lifting the ceremonial *omikoshi* (shrine) at Japanese day of the dead festivals (Participant K, Participant H), were some of many sensory associations mentioned by participants. Canadian identity blocks were also discussed as well. Participants recalled that even though watching classmates eat Mac n Cheese and peanut butter jelly sandwiches for lunch did not seem appealing, they asked their moms to make those things for lunch because it was a “Canadian thing” (Participant L, Participant M). Developing sensitivity to how “native English speakers say words a certain way” (Autoethnography, Participant S) or going to Canada Day fireworks and celebrating Western holidays (Participant E, Participant K)

were some other sensory experiences mentioned that became embedded in the cultural repository of identity blocks that intertwined with feeling, performance, and embodiment.

Further, regarding the role of performance, many participants discussed the performative embodiment of their identities. Participant S said:

“[As a mixed-race individual] I’ve sometimes felt like I’ve had to perform as a caricature of a Canadian person to make up for my ambiguous appearance.”

And Participant M concurred, saying:

“As a *hafu*, I sometimes feel like I’m auditioning my Japaneseness when I’m in Japan and end up overcompensating by performing what I think an ‘authentic’ Japanese person should be. But this isn’t necessarily ‘authentic’ to me, and I’ve been experimenting with balancing my Canadian upbringing but also asserting myself of my Japanese heritage.”

The metabolization of sensory and emotional experiences (affect) through expression (performance) and claiming them as a part of their identity (embodiment) is the life cycle and blueprint of how multiracial, ethnic, and cultural identity blocks, or prostheses, are technologized and contextually sprung into action through the assemblage system.

Engaging deeper with what the embodiment of identity blocks or prostheses looks like, feels, and *does* within the assemblage system, I draw from Young’s (1980) phenomenological dissection of embodiment as a product of contextual bodily and psychological reaction. By applying Young’s phenomenological approach to East Asian-Canadian existence and bodily comportment, we can attempt to challenge the notion that race, ethnicity, and culture are inherent and biological (Alcoff, 1999). In *Throwing Like a Girl* (1980), Young described how embodied modalities of feminine bodily existence, movement, and spatial orientation operate as a network in which self-awareness is formed (1980). This can be applied to our prosthetic-assemblage model, in which bodily existence from sensory data, movement through performance and expression, and spatial orientation through being an ambiguous entity in Euro-Canadian multiculturalism become embodied as diasporic identity (Young, 1980).

This form of bodily comportment is marked by the tension between immanence, an inherent state of permanence as an object, and transcendence, a state of surpassing or changing of state in navigating the world as a subject (Young, 1980). As a result, this tension, hesitancy, and timidity manifests in bodily comportment, impacting self-image and sense of self. Young identifies three embodiments of this tension and discomfort, namely, a) inhibited intentionality, the self-contradiction and space between “I can” and “I can’t”; b) ambiguous transcendence, the way body parts are mobilized in isolation, while the rest of the body remains immobile; and c) discontinuous unity, referring to the body as an object rather than a subject. As participants described, these tensions are also experienced in diasporic identity hybridity.

As an experience of inhibited intentionality, in my autoethnography, I noted how:

“I feel like I stand out in Japan because even though I look like I’m from there, I didn’t grow up there, so I feel like a Canadian imposter in a Japanese shell.”  
Constantly treading between “I am (not really) Japanese” and “I am (not really) Canadian” often felt disorienting and influenced my self-image in contending my dual identities.

Ambiguous transcendence manifests in identity expression, as Participant H says:

“Growing up, expressing my Japanese or Canadian identity was a binary in my mind. It came from places of insecure performance and pleasing others, but the natural trajectory of growing up led me to be okay with roaming in the middle,”  
Noting how Japanese or Canadian identity blocks are expressed in isolation, neglecting one or the other. Yet, like Participant H, many participants described how they learn over time that one aspect of their identity does not have to be neglected to validate the other. Instead, it is the simultaneity of being East Asian and Canadian, though sometimes self-contradictory, that characterizes diasporic identity. However, voices like Participant G discussed how Canadian multiculturalism enables ambiguous transcendence, saying:

“I feel like when I grew up learning and seeing stuff about diversity in Canada, I felt invisible in it. I feel like it was more about highlighting different ethnic categories rather than those in between those categories.”

Negotiating multiple cultural identities evokes tension when multiculturalism is seen as an aggregate of disparate categories, and identities are expected to be expressed in isolation.

Finally, discontinuous unity in diasporic embodiment is seen in individuals' transitory self-perception from "object" to "subject" as a result of accepting ambiguity in their identity. As I noted in my autoethnography, regardless of being in Japan or Canada, the discrepancy in how others categorize me and my own perception of myself becomes challenging to grapple with because of the innate need to fit in. When categorization becomes a prerequisite for belonging and identifying, the self becomes an object, as Participant G concurs, saying:

"I've definitely felt invasiveness when I've been asked about my ethnicity or how I identify. I've redirected to sticking to what makes me comfortable and what benefits me, not for the benefit or comfort of others."

The tension between being perceived as an object in identity embodiment can be contradictory, objectifying, debilitating and invasive (1980). However, empowering transcendence from object to subject can be supported by the very instrumental identity blocks that cause ambiguous discomfort in the first place.

As the final key piece in the prosthetic-assemblage model, affect, performance, and embodiment reveal how agency, empowerment, and self-experimentation are discovered in learning and adapting through the diasporic experience. Participants have shared experiences of strategizing identity expression through deliberate context-dependent adaptations, fluid mobility in identities, and curating their self-expression in anticipation of others' perceptions in certain socio-cultural environments as an ongoing, experimental process of identity hybridity.

Navigating ambiguity through "ready answers" (Paragg, 2017), non-adherence, conscious choosing, curation, and opportunistic adaption by participants is the vitality and agency in individual and collective diasporic identity. The lens offered through the prosthetic-assemblage model may help shift perspective towards the fluid and interconnected multiplicities and

abundance in East Asian-Canadians. Adaptation, emerging from participants' affective and performative reactions as a survival mechanism, becomes embodied as a source of strength through experimental trial and error in which identity blocks (prostheses) become active and technologized in various socio-cultural or introspective contexts. Curation and embodiment transform the challenges and discomfort posed by ambiguity into opportunities for personal growth and community connection, echoing the navigation in the tension between immanence and transcendence (Young, 1980, p. 31). This phenomenological framing of the prosthetic-assemblage model underscores the importance of embracing diverse, non-conforming, and uncategorizable expressions of diasporic identities as a reimagined form of Canadian multiculturalism. Ultimately, I hope this model illustrates how East Asian-Canadian individuals become sites of hybridity by experimenting with and embodying instrumental identity blocks to navigate the ecologies of the diaspora.

### **VR Experience Analysis- Plot, Creation Process, and Implications:**

#### *Creative Explorations of East Asian Diasporic Identity in the North American Context:*

As the creative component of my project, I now delve into the background, plot, creation process, and implications of using VR storytelling to convey the prosthetic-assemblage model I have explored throughout this paper. The VR visualization provides an immersive and multi-sensory experience to embody multiple perspectives and narratives to effectively capture my paper's phenomenological and metaphorical concepts. In this pursuit, I follow in the footsteps of many artists who have responded to concerns in negotiating and embodying ambiguity in East Asian identity construction within the North American context through diverse artistic practices and means. The artists and works I closely examined are Lilian Leung's Toronto-Vancouver Chinatown VR reimagination project and Jasmine Liaw's mixed-media work on queer East

Asian diasporic ecologies. Through an exploration of these works, I discerned the following critical points of creative intervention in the topic of East Asian diasporic ambiguity a) subversion and manipulation of the medium; b) blend of the personal and political; c) challenging moralistic dichotomies and Eurocentric epistemology; and d) pondering beyond empathy as an affective response.

Through creative practice, personal experiences and broader socio-political contexts are merged to illustrate how individual narratives symbiotically reflect collective ideologies and experiences. For example, autobiographical art addresses diasporic emotional and psychological experiences, touching on themes of intimacy and identity juxtaposed with explorations of dominant socio-political norms and expectations (Liaw, 2022). Additionally, research-creation can foster an opportunity for collective ethnography, engaging personal memories of historical, long-gone locations with communal resistance against gentrification (Leung, 2019). Through creative intervention in films, performance, or autoethnography, the personal becomes a mirror for broader cultural and political concerns.

Challenging binary moralistic frameworks and Western epistemological dominance characterize creative intervention in East Asian diasporic art. Participatory methodologies in Leung's VR Chinatown reimagination project involve oral histories of diasporic Chinese communities to disrupt Western notions of representation and knowledge production by emphasizing intergenerational knowledge and blurring the past, present, and future (2019). Creative techniques such as metaphors, and playing with material textures like opacity, transparency, rigidity and fluidity (Liaw, 2022) subvert expressions of selfhood to transcend Western ideals of individuality, dichotomous morality and explicit emotional expression.

Another crucial element is the transcendence of empathy in audience reception and evocative emotion. Some works may invite diverse interpretations, emphasizing subjective

reflection in abstract, ambiguous performances (Liaw, 2022), while some aim to foster civic engagement, encouraging participants to situate their own memories and histories within the larger collective memory of the diaspora (Leung, 2019). Linear legibility is purposefully obstructed, promoting critical reflection on systemic issues and embedding the message within non-linear narratives and illegibility, symbolizing the complexities and ambiguities of diasporic identities and experiences (Liaw, 2022). As I revisit this point later, this was the critical point that I could have leaned stronger into in my VR experience. The tensions between linearity and legibility familiar to traditional storytelling and the non-linearity and illegible ambiguity in East Asian identity hybridity are difficult to mediate. Experimentation in this mediation would be a much-needed and worthy point of exploration to pursue in future iterations of my project.

#### *Background & Plot:*

I devised the plot of my VR film by organizing my autoethnography and interview data chronologically, from pre-birth to motherhood and beyond. The interview questions aimed to capture anecdotes spanning one's lifetime, delving into participants' everyday interactions and broader questions about selfhood in navigating multiple national, racial, ethnic, and cultural identities. I selected 15 moments, representing the 15 participants in my study, to emphasize that diasporic becoming is a multitudinous experience. As discussed in previous sections, identity formation involves metabolizing various big and small pieces (prostheses) of selfhood and experiences in a network (assemblage) mechanized through affect, performance, and embodiment. In my VR experience, I visualize this process through 15 levels in the form of immersive memories that trace the user's life from pre-birth, childhood, adulthood, and beyond.

The narrative is intentionally not structured around a specific user persona, leaving the user's ethnicity, race, gender, and sexual orientation ambiguous. This suggests that the

experience represents many people's stories rather than an individual's. As the user navigates through the 15 episodic immersive memories, colourful, nondescript characters representing the 15 participants interact as guides for the user to complete each level of the story. The user's interactions and actions within each episodic level manifest in a prosthetic that becomes embodied. Through this progression, the user experience can be traced in the following plot:

First, the user familiarizes themselves in the virtual space. The user, represented by a grey, nondescript body, sees their reflection in the mirror placed in the lobby room. Soon after, 15 colourful individuals scurry towards the user, halting right behind the mirror. Before the user is inclined to approach them, the colourful people disband and vanish towards the left and right. Then, a single colourful blob appears in front of the user and glides towards the left side of the screen as if beckoning the user to follow. The user follows the tracks of the blob, where one of the colourful people of the same colour from earlier enters the lobby. The person wants to share a memory, and when the user reaches for the blob to interact with it, they are transported to a flashback of their time in their mom's belly. Immersed inside their memory, the user is prompted to experience the song through on-screen directions, and they hear the mother speaking to her baby in her belly as she plays a Korean song in anticipation of the baby's birth. The user emerges from the colourful person's memory and is transported back to the lobby, where they face their reflection in the mirror again. The user is then prompted to "embody" the memory, and the blob morphs into the user's ears. Curious about what prosthetic the next blob will become and what memory will be experienced next, the story continues.

In this trajectory, the user experiences 15 immersive flashbacks introduced by 15 colourful people and embodies 15 pieces of themselves, literally in the form of prostheses. By the end, the user would have experienced being held by a mother for the first time, reading picture books after school, going to Saturday Chinese language school, making dumplings with

grandma, leaving Canada for the first time and learning to navigate having dual passports, first time in South Korea, helping an elderly Chinese woman with subway directions, karaoke with friends, paddling a dragon boat, listening to old Japanese pop hits on a date night with a partner, shopping for East Asian medicinal herbs at a T&T, pitching a *Feng Shui* interior design project at work, throwing a pre-wedding dinner at a Korean fried chicken restaurant, and finally holding their own baby for the first time. Through each of these flashbacks, the user gains a body part representing the sensory memory: ears, hair, eyes, mouth, hands, mind, feet, legs, shoulders, throat, arms, heart, stomach, skin, and nose.

Throughout the experience, the user would have experienced and gained 15 life stories of the colourful people representing my 15 participants. Upon completion of the levels, the user reflects on their new appearance in the mirror, starkly different from their original grey form at the beginning. The VR experience ends with the 15 colourful people all gathering behind the mirror, celebrating the user's journey by enveloping the user and filling the screen with colour while the credits roll. The full script can be found in Appendix B at the end of this document.

#### *Creation Process:*

The process of this VR experience began by arranging anecdotes from my participants' interviews and my own autoethnographic fieldnotes chronologically by life stages. This illustrated a timeline of a multicultural and trans-generational visualization of diasporic upbringing captured in a single narrative.

Then, I began writing a script based on this chronological timeline. The exact stories shared by the participants were reinterpreted into a semi-fictional storyline outlining a multitudinous yet cohesive story of how identity blocks of childhood memories, travels, social relationships, and everyday routine in the form of prostheses accumulate and become sparks of

cultural expression through feeling, performance, and embodiment. The script emphasizes the profoundness of mundanity, with the message that diasporic identity is an assemblage of people, songs, food, routine, adventures, familiar places, brief encounters, seasonal festivities, and once-in-a-lifetime experiences all taking place not only without the multicultural environment of Canada but transcending space and time.

This VR experience is, most importantly, intended to be a visual representation of the prosthetic-assemblage model I have explored throughout this paper. The prosthetic component of the model is most clearly represented throughout the script and in the visual world-building, where, after each of the 15 episodes, the user gains access to the potential powers of identity blocks represented by the colourful blobs. The user experiences the 15 episodes first-hand, learning and experiencing instrumental and ecological pieces of the 15 participants' East Asian identity and completing the post-level embodiment process when the user holds the blob close to their body. After this action, the piece morphs into the body part representing the sensory memory of the episode and becomes, literally, a part of the user. Each body part gained becomes an incentive for the player to continue in the experience, eventually accumulating a body full of colourful prostheses. This point of the scriptwriting process is where I could have considered how to integrate the mechanism of assemblage into the narrative structure. The mechanisms I could have explored are elements of non-linearity, trans-spatial and temporal connections, porosity, random and rogue links of instrumental and ecological identity blocks, and the malleable, shape-shifting nature of assemblage networks of identity.

The VR experience relies heavily on visual metaphors of prostheses to convey the message of my prosthetic/assemblage model. Other creative choices include the representation of ambiguity through physical user discomfort and duality. For example, through each level, the user is purposefully directed to physically alternate between facing left and right at a slightly

uncomfortable bodily posture to symbolize the affect of being “in-between.” This positionality also represents the physical embodiment of the hyphen between identity categories. The mirror, which is used to observe the embodiment process of each prosthetic between levels, is directly centred in front of the user, showing that despite the discomfort of alternating between the two angles, the reflection of self and process of embodiment is always in between.

The user is visually represented as a grey-coloured, faceless body, which is a creative choice to highlight the contrast with the colourful prostheses the users gain throughout the experience. There are 15 “colourful people,” each with a designated colour, corresponding blob, and body part in the same material, pattern, and colour. The user interacts with one of the 15 colourful people at a time and gains a prosthetic in the same colour. Subjectively, the colours and patterns may not necessarily seem aesthetically complementary and may “clash” with each other, but they also can be complimentary depending on the user’s subjective perceptions. This choice symbolizes how the hybridity of identity blocks may not always seem complimentary. Still, unique combinations reveal their purpose and utility depending on context and circumstance.

The materials selected for most of the visual pieces in this experience are composed of origami papers torn through a traditional Japanese paper-art technique called *chigiri-e*, or hand-tear art. Learning that this technique exists in other East Asian art as well, I felt that this technique and the philosophy behind it suitably resonates as an homage to this project. This technique celebrates the spontaneity in the behaviour of human muscle with paper and the beauty in non-uniform results through an uncontrollable process. I purposefully used this technique to manipulate the origami paper medium because of its association with my heritage and the implication of rejecting predetermination and inherentness through the *chigiri-e* technique. When tearing each character, blob, and prosthetic part by hand, depending on factors like how much force I put in, my fingers’ positions when pinching the paper, and the angle of my fingers and

wrists contextually impact the results. The nature of this technique became another reflection that, despite the original form of the material, contextual factors play a significant role in its manifestations, a metaphor for the non-linear, non-inherent process of identity hybridity.

Finally, the origami objects, people, blobs, body parts, and the 15 hand-drawn coloured-pencil memory flashbacks were imported to my virtual world on a game software called Unreal Engine 5. The lobby and level backgrounds and the actors in the scene were animated on the software's platform. The gameplay was then programmed, placing pauses and triggers where actions were required to proceed with levels, interact with the actors and objects, and embody the prosthetics. Once the voice acting recordings for the scenes, soundtrack, sound effects, subtitles and visual signage were prepared, the VR experience was ready for playtesting.

In hindsight of this creation process, I have identified the disconnect between the project that was unfolding and the logic behind my prosthetic-assemblage model. I found that the singular narrative that I tried to amalgamate the 15 participants' stories into contradicted the non-linearity of identity blocks I described in my theoretical analysis. As a prototype form, the final result of the VR experience was a frustrating journey that revealed the shortcomings of my skill set as a 3D modelling artist and animator in paralleling my theoretical framework and the VR experience. First, the rogueness of identity blocks and the porosity of selfhood were difficult to visualize within the thresholds of my technical skills. When designing the storyboard, I originally wanted to illustrate a story that captures the non-linear, circular, game-like experience where the user has agency in navigating which identity blocks. However, the result of this attempt of this project ended up becoming self-contradictory.

The biggest challenges were in the technical recreation of the assemblage network visual (as metaphorized by the Blokus analogy, see Figure 10) on the game engine software. The original choose-your-adventure game blueprint was technically difficult to work around within

my skill level, and the project began to lean towards a linear, collect-and-proceed progression. Thus, I have come to realize that I unconsciously gravitated towards a linear narrative despite intentions of non-linearity. This made me see that I may have subconsciously leaned towards a linear story structure due to familiarity and convenience, which stems beyond my inexperience in visual storytelling but further emphasizes the complexity of conceptualizing phenomenological experiences and the unpredictable nature of selfhood in a visual, virtual format. Not only is the lived experience of diasporic hybridity individualized and complex, but the visual representation of it was proven to be that much more difficult during the research-creation process.

Reflecting on these challenges harkens back to Nakamura's (2020) critiques of VR's difficult relationship with racialized storytelling. Linear storytelling may be an archetypical narrative structure that is not only easy to follow but also intuitive to construct. Despite my efforts not to, Unreal Engine's design interface and my natural world-building process conveyed a potential inclination I may hold towards linear, singular storytelling. Much like the criticisms of unintentional self-contradiction in Haraway's cyborg model discussed earlier, I wonder if ambiguity and neitherness are difficult to depict in tangible form because of its ambiguity and neitherness. Had I leaned into an even more visually abstract representation of the prosthetic-assemblage model in my thesis, such as Jasmine Liaw's exploration of diasporic and gender fluidity and ambiguity, I may have been able to emphasize the porosity and network-based imageries of the assemblage system of my theoretical analysis.

Being an initial prototype, I hope to revisit this project in the future to capture the prosthetic-assemblage model more closely with the mechanics of the theoretical framework, emphasizing the process of the hybridity process, rather than the tangible trajectory of diasporic identity hybridity. Although my VR experience does capture the sensory characteristics of identity blocks as prosthetics shared through my research, I realize that the experience only

captures one side of the process, while my paper thoroughly examined the ambiguous and invisible dimensions of the prosthetics in the assemblage networks, the mechanics of diasporic hybridity. The proof of concept of the VR experience attached as a supplementary file is the creative project component associated with this research-creation submission.

*Implications:*

VR represents a burgeoning yet contested medium for racial, ethnic, and cultural storytelling. This medium offers a transcendent experience that bridges imagination and reality. VR's unique capabilities extend visions of imagined diasporic utopias and dystopias, inviting contemplation on the embodiment of multiple identities and the dichotomy between active and passive learning. This nature of VR also resonates with the diasporic experience of trans-spatial and temporal embodiment of cultural heritage, as discussed earlier by participants, where the knowledge of the homeland is often mediated through others. Despite these promising implications of VR, its ethical effectiveness as a pedagogical tool remains contested. There is a need to address VR's limitations as automated empathy machines (Nakamura, 2020), which risk reinforcing bystander positionalities and necessitate critical reform for educative storytelling.

Critiques of VR reveal urgent issues in representations of marginalized communities, audience engagement, and the perpetuation of prejudice and bias. Calls for authentic representation and equitable participation in the VR industry stress the importance of inclusive designers and projects and gendered accessibility in hardware ergonomics (Lee, 2022). Optimistic perspectives, as considered by Farmer and Maister, highlight VR's potential to foster empathetic transcendence and reduce prejudice by blurring the cognitive boundaries between self and other (2017). However, critical viewpoints caution against the commodification of VR by major tech companies, marketed as a tool for empathy, particularly for gendered and racialized

experiences (Nakamura, 2020). These contentions encourage VR to promote responsibility and solidarity rather than performative empathy.

In VR production, the ethical use of this technology hinges on both producers and consumers. Echoing other diasporic East Asian-American/Canadian artists I discussed earlier, I aimed to subvert VR as a medium, particularly because of its origins as a tool for techno-capitalist empathy automation (Nakamura, 2020). In my VR experience, I consider its potential as a forum for immersive and participatory knowledge production in diasporic storytelling, fostering a sense of agency and collectivity in exploring identity hybridity.

Art is personal and political, and the positionality of the creator, participants, and the user politicizes the project and extends the prosthetic-assemblage model through broader perspectives. I intended this project to be a form of collective storytelling considering East Asian-Canadians, East Asians in the homeland, and Euro-Canadians as audience-users. I designed this VR experience not to prioritize evoking sympathy or empathy. Instead, I intended to showcase diasporic empowerment, agency, and solidarity through shared experiences and active participation rather than grief and empathy through spectating pain and suffering.

In this worldbuilding of my VR experience, I also consider the concept of the pluriverse, as articulated by theorists Marisol de la Cadena and Arturo Escobar, which challenges the dominance of a single, unified world imposed by modern (Western) epistemologies. The pluriverse concept centers on the coexistence of multitudinous worldviews, envisioning marginalized and Indigenous realities in holistic heterogeneity (Escobar, 2017). This framework enriches my VR experience by fostering collective storytelling practices that challenge dominant reductive narratives, centring oral histories, personal memory, subjectivity, and lived experiences (De La Cadena, 2018), offering a robust theoretical framework for racialized storytelling in VR. My project embraces this perspective, allowing users to immerse in the prosthetic-assemblage

model's multiplicity and interconnectedness physically. This lens also reimagines Canadian multiculturalism as pluriversal rather than disparate, singular, and self-contained.

Embracing ambiguity is a crucial objective of my research and is also a theme in the work of other East Asian diasporic artists. Subversive mediums, hybrid storytelling methodologies, and metaphorical narratives question binary storytelling and perceptions of nuanced, complex experiences. Nakamura criticizes VR as a “virtuous” empathy tool marketed towards a morally binary storytelling experience (2020). This flattens and dehumanizes users and subjects within the dichotomy of “good” or “bad.” Instead of facilitating passive bystander participation, my VR experience emphasizes active participation, narrative ambiguity, and decision-making agency. This emphasizes that the personal is political and that the diasporic experience embodies accountability, relatability, and solidarity in ambiguity. The design principle of my VR experience encourages the user to embody the stories of 15 participants, becoming protagonists rather than bystanders. Therefore, the user's positionality, shaped by their background, adds a crucial aspect of agency and solidarity. The result of playtesting this VR experience would be a worthwhile future iteration to explore this positionality further.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

Exploring my identity within the East Asian diaspora has been a balancing act of understanding socio-political perspectives of race, ethnicity, nationhood, and generational trauma on the one hand, but also the personal, mundane experiences of simply growing up as a Japanese person in a small Canadian town on the other. When I unpack all the “little” pieces of identity: the Japanese children’s book I read a million times, trading mom-made lunches with my Korean friends in elementary school, the bilingual imaginary friend I created with my siblings, I realize that I unconsciously and consciously have *always* played and negotiated with my multicultural identities. These pieces of selfhood are the core of this project, to understand diasporic hybridity through personal, instrumental, and ecological ways. Through my 14 interview participants, myself in my autoethnography, and my VR experience, this objective was explored through my five research questions, examining (1) emotional and psychological responses in navigating conflict and discomfort of ambiguity, (2) mediation and modification of contradictory multitudinous identities, (3) markers of selfhood that become instrumental in adaptation to diasporic socio-cultural environment, (4) defining, discovering, and embodying agency in East Asian-Canadian identity, and finally, (5) the affordances of VR for diasporic storytelling.

These interrogations were navigated through a theoretical framework exploring ambiguity in hyphenated identities, race as technology, the phenomenological hybridization of Haraway’s cyborg prostheses and Deleuze and Guattari’s assemblage, and finally, the pedagogical and representational limitations and affordances of VR. This theoretical framework defined my analytical scope of diasporic hybridity, highlighting the instrumental and ecological manifestations of multicultural identities imagined through a prosthetic-assemblage model.

Finally, I contemplated my VR film's creative philosophy and experience design, visually exploring my phenomenological analysis.

The findings from my interview and autoethnography informed my application of the prosthetic-assemblage framework. By analogizing instrumental and ecological identity blocks as prostheses, I illustrated how a network of prostheses in an assemblage model reveals how the hybridity of multicultural identities manifests within an individual. Through this exploration, I discovered that first, instrumental and ecological identity blocks, or prostheses, are non-hierarchical and ephemeral, and their utility is revealed contextually. Second, prostheses are constantly in flux with each other in the fluid, trans-spatial and temporal assemblage, not only within an individual but also in movement with others, because assemblages do not exist exclusively but as a network. Third, the morality and utility of prostheses are ambiguous; they can be a source of Othering, discomfort and dissonance but also a vessel for agency, empowerment, and resonance with others, characterizing the nature of diasporic ambiguity. Fourth, I argued that identity blocks and their mutual connections are continuously in a transitory cycle of discovery, experience, expression, and embodiment through sensory and emotional experience (affect), bodily and behavioural reflection (performance), and circumstantial integration (embodiment). Finally, through my creation of the VR experience, I demonstrated that instrumental and ecological prostheses, as conceived in Haraway's cyborg model, a) "technologize" diasporic identity and b) augment categorical binaries of selfhood. Through the VR experience, I explored this metaphorical interpretation of prostheses as embodiments of identity and agency and that diasporic identities are collectively constructed and hybridized.

Overall, as another hyphen in this project, I had the opportunity to reflect on the contested pedagogical definition of the term research-creation itself. Some scholars define research-creation as an expansion or disruption to traditional qualitative paradigms in social

science research (Leavy, 2009 and Barrett & Bolt, 2010; as cited in Chapman and Sawchuk, 2012). However, by simply contrasting research-creation as an experimental counterpart to “traditional” academic methods, once again, binary categorizations are ironically reinforced. This may hinder the potential to generate new forms of knowledge as a hybrid methodology, as indicated by the hyphen between research-creation (Chapman and Sawchuk, 2012).

Rather, in research-creation, research and creation are defined by the conjunctive points between the two terms, as a *mutually constitutive entity*, accessing a larger range of audiences, and contexts of dissemination. Thus, as Loveless discusses, the components of a research-creation are not mutually exclusive, but rather a unity, a situated complexity to communicate knowledge experimentation beyond the rigid categories of practice and theory (2010; as cited in Chapman and Sawchuk, 2012). Like how East Asian and Canadian identities are mutually constituted, hybrid, and meaningful because of the very process of its becoming, I felt that despite my dissatisfaction with the tangible “result” of my own research-creation, blending my prosthetic-assemblage theory and VR storytelling revealed new meanings by experimenting with abstract paradigms through visual expression. The creation process itself revealed elements of my theoretical framework beyond what words or visuals alone offered.

As Chapman and Sawchuk describe

“Research-creation operates in contrast to the dominant academic paradigm. But paradigms are mutable and have the potential to grow, shift, or even be overturned when alternative technologies, practices and anomalous discoveries accumulate to the point where new epistemological and ontological foundations present themselves in flashes of insight.” (2012, p. 24).

I hope this project, as a research-creation was able to fulfill meaning-making not only through material or textual deliverables, but a multi-planar exploration, inducing affect and mediating technological, creative, theoretical, subjective, and objective perspectives in a form bridged by yet another powerful hyphen.

*Limitations:*

While my prosthetic-assemblage model effectively sheds light on the multidimensional ontologies and expressions of diasporic identity, I acknowledge its limitations, particularly my metaphorical use of Haraway's cyborg model and imagery of prostheses. It is essential to recognize the rhetorical boundaries of drawing from cyborg theory as a metaphor for diasporic empowerment to consider its implications in other fields, particularly disability studies and crip theory. Alison Kafer's chapter, "The Cyborg and the Crip" (2013) informs the interdisciplinary navigation of Haraway's contested manifesto, where I learn how to engage with this body of work without disavowing the cyborg altogether.

Approaching the cyborg from a crip theory perspective allows disability studies to join dialogues surrounding the cyborg in a critical yet reinventive way (Kafer, 2013). Despite being published almost 40 years ago, Haraway's manifesto or its reiterations have continued inspiring provocative, rich, and creative scholarship. Kafer concurs that to incorporate the cyborg into disability studies for innovative frameworks of inclusivity and empowerment, we must not only read Haraway's work but also expand through its critiques and reinterpretations deviating from Haraway's original ideas (2013). This deviant reinterpretation is something I attempted through my prosthetic-assemblage model by engaging critically, ironically, and heteroglossically with Haraway's cyborg to consider new framings of diasporic hybridity and empowerment.

One of Haraway's long-standing critiques has been her neglect of material realities, where her focus on the cyborg as a metaphor for hybridity and boundary-breaking overlooks the realities of human-technological reliance in disabled communities and discourse where cyborg motifs are appropriated from (Kafer, 2013). Therefore, developing a non-ableist cyborg politics, or "cripping the cyborg" (Kafer, 2013, p. 120), must recognize disabled people as cyborgs not due to their physicality or dependence on aids like prostheses, ventilators, or attendants but

because of their political actions and practices (Kafer, 2013). This call is a valuable turning point for future reiterations to take accountability in the rhetoric inherently tied to disabled bodies. My prosthetic-assemblage model illustrates diasporic identities as fluid interfaces intertwined with prosthetic aids negotiating multicultural ambiguities. But beyond that, these metaphors also politicize the diasporic experience and ambiguity as subversive, blasphemous, dialogic, utopian, and even dystopian in resistance against binary categorizations and reductive essentialism to escape monolithic perceptions. Nonetheless, as a non-disabled scholar, I acknowledge my positionality as someone engaging with cyborg theory and that I share responsibility in this form of knowledge production accredited significantly to disabled bodies and crip theory.

Haraway emphasizes from the outset that the cyborg is inherently dangerous, non-innocent, and complicit (1985). Kafer's invocation of ironic blasphemy, "turning the cyborg figure against its origins" (2013, p. 128), resonates with my reclamation of the cyborg in exploring diasporic identities. This exploration is fundamental to continuing to approach the cyborg critically and constantly "turning it against its origins" in reference to not only Kafer and others' critiques but, in a way, in the very spirit of the Cyborg Manifesto itself.

In addition to these theoretical limitations, or better stated as a delineation of parameters surrounding the rhetorics of cyborg theory, I also reemphasize limitations in my methodology. Although my sample size of 15 participants is relatively small, the demographic was diverse: individuals of Korean, Chinese, and Japanese descent of mixed-race, ethnic, and generational identity. This small yet diverse sample reduces the study's statistical power, making it difficult to detect significant generalizable differences or correlations. Furthermore, while the diversity within the sample provides breadth, it may not capture the full spectrum of experiences and cultural nuances specific to each ethnic group. I hope I did not mislead this heterogeneity to an oversimplifying illustration of East Asian diasporic identities as a monolith but rather to

highlight shared feelings and perspectives across distinct unique experiences while celebrating the collectivity in multiplicity. Individual differences within such a small and mixed sample can significantly impact the findings, as personal experiences and contextual factors may vary widely. Consequently, the study's external validity leaves room for improvement, making generalizing findings to larger populations or specific contexts challenging.

To address these limitations of generalizability, I definitely could have aimed for a larger sample size or specific ethnic groups to provide deeper insights. However, because a core objective of my project was to highlight particularities and shared experiences in the broad category of “East Asian-Canadian,” being the third largest pan-ethnic group in the country (Statistics Canada, 2022), this sample size served as a sufficient set of data for my specific research objectives. I did not want to focus on a particular ethnic group within the East Asian diaspora because, as I accounted in my autoethnography, my identity as an East Asian-Canadian is not only through my own Japaneseness but as a result of connecting, learning, experiencing, and embodying the greater East Asian diasporic community through other ethnic groups. Finally, many mixed-race or ethnic participants in my recruitment process identified as East Asian. Thus, it would have been an injustice to the ethos of my project if I excluded these participants.

Finally, my VR experience prototype resulted in an incomplete representation of the prosthetic-assemblage model I explored throughout this paper. This disconnect stems from my limited technical skillsets in Unreal Engine and storytelling emphasis on the sensory experiences of diasporic hybridity which disproportionately pronounced the prosthetics component over the assemblage component. Therefore, the ambiguity, non-linearity, and fluidity explored through my theoretical analysis became lost in what ironically resulted in a linear and singular representation. I sincerely look forward to future iterations of the VR experience to challenge myself in exploring the intangible and complex experiences of selfhood.

### *Directions for Future Research*

With these limitations in mind for future iterations of this project, I ponder the benefit of a larger sample size to illustrate a more holistic picture of the diasporic community, perhaps with alternate inclusion criteria such as an older or younger age range, specific ethnicities, or a focus on mixed-race participants. Further, I consider a possible extension of this project by focusing specifically on RQ5, the affective responses and the playtest results of my VR experience. Still in its novel form and with a controversial mainstream reputation, this potential direction in VR studies may lead to interesting findings. Finally, I look forward to future forms of the VR experience, as I experiment with heavier leanings on visual representations of the abstract phenomenology presented in my prosthetic-assemblage model.

I further consider future iterations of the project as an opportunity to explore other possible theoretical interpretations, by emphasizing the intersections of crip theory and the cyborg entity, or revisiting particular sub-themes of the diaspora that arose in my findings. As I briefly discussed in my VR implications section regarding the pluriverse worldview concept, and mentions of trans-spatial and generational knowledge production by my participants, the lens of diasporic futurism is another alternative perspective that may be a worthwhile exploration in the future. The epistemological movement of ethno-futurist perspectives draws on trans-generational knowledge encompassing ancestors, self, and children, reimagining multiple potential futures, presents, and pasts centring the literacies of minority communities (Abril-Gonzales et al., 2021). This approach demonstrates how a futurist lens can envision collectivity and empowering futures for the East Asian Canadian diaspora, a community I hold personally and deeply.

Futurist perspectives, particularly in the East Asian diaspora are a crucial direction to consider, as Zhang (2021) explores through concepts of ethno-futurism and ethno-pessimism. In a similar yet distinct way from its other ethno-futurist siblings, Zhang argues that Sino (Chinese)

futurism, relevant to East Asian diasporic futurism in general, emerges as a critical self-negation of its influences from Western imaginations of the East (Zhang, 2021), as highlighted earlier by Chu (2015) describing East Asians in the West as “uncanny” entities. Simultaneously, ethno-pessimist perspectives question possible futures through spectres of colonialism embedded in solidarity, not as a negation of collective diasporic futures but to ground socio-political histories and realities in envisioning them (Zhang, 2021). This is important in the context of my project, as mentioned by participants about how ancestral and political knowledge of their homelands become integrated into networks and beliefs in the diaspora. Because of the complex socio-political and colonialist dynamics amongst East Asian countries themselves, as mentioned earlier, its collective futurisms must not be monolithic but collective through self-acknowledgement of our own histories and tension while seeking mutual solidarity.

This is more a reason for East Asian futurism to be participated in and created by and *for* its own community, rewriting Western spectacles and epistemologies of what diasporic collectivity and futurism could be. Looking forward, East Asian diasporic hybridity through the lenses offered by prosthetic-assemblage theory, immersive storytelling, crip theory, and ethno-futurism/pessimism reminds us to envision futures responsive to our communities' nuances and complexities. With recent memories of anti-East Asian hate during the COVID-19 pandemic, the fact that East Asian communities represent Canada's fastest-growing population group (Statistics Canada, 2022), and the increasing digitization of the diaspora in virtual spaces, this perspective becomes ever more relevant. Through this project, my wish is to contribute to inventing the ever-so-complicated and beautiful East Asian diasporic future as an individual and as a collective.

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## Appendix A: Participant Application Survey and Consent Form

### Participant Application Survey and Consent Form

Hello! My name is Kaede Ashizawa (she/her). I am a graduate student in the Joint Communication and Culture Program at York University. Thank you for expressing your interest in participating in this research-creation project entitled:

**“Best of Both Worlds: A Phenomenological Exploration of East Asian Diasporic Identity Through Virtual Reality”**

**Project background:**

This project will explore multicultural, diasporic identity building through cyborg/cybernetic (robotic, futuristic) perspectives and VR/virtual reality (first-person, interactive storytelling experience). I hope to investigate how different pieces of your cultural background and identity can be imagined as prosthetics (mechanical aids to support mobility) of what makes you *you* as an East Asian-Canadian woman.

Participants must:

- be between 19-30 years old
- self-identify as an East Asian-Canadian woman (e.g., Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Taiwanese, etc.)
- be willing to discuss topics and share stories and/or feelings about their ethnic/cultural identity

**Purpose of the research:**

In addition to an autoethnographic (autobiographic) study of my own Japanese-Canadian identity, I am recruiting 10 East Asian-Canadian women to participate in interviews for my study. I hope to learn about the experiences of other East Asian-Canadian women to capture the diverse, yet collective identities of our community through cyborg analysis in both an academic paper and a VR film. Turning the hardships and joy of living as a multicultural individual into a symbol of power through cyborg/prosthetic metaphors, I hope this research paper and film will convey the empowerment, liberation, and acceptance that goes into coming to terms with who you are.

**What you will be asked to do:**

The procedures throughout your participation in this project are to:

**Step 1:** Fill out this 10-minute survey

**Step 2:** Read the consent form attached to question 8 (10-minute read) to understand the terms of your participation. Please download or print the consent form for your records.

**Step 3:** Provide your name, signature, and date to consent to the terms of your confidentiality and anonymity in this project.

**Step 4:** Submit this Google Form

**Step 5:** If selected to participate in this study, the primary researcher will contact you to schedule a 45-to-60-minute interview

**Step 6:** Participate in a 45-to-60-minute interview with the primary researcher

Your responses to this survey will be viewed only by the primary researcher (myself). If you have issues accessing the consent form attached to question 8, please email me and I can send you the form directly.

**Deadline:**

Please submit this Google Forms Application by March 30, 2024

Contact: Kaede Ashizawa, Primary Researcher

Email: kaedeca@yorku.ca

Question 1: Please provide your preferred name and pronouns (e.g., Jane, she/her) \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Question 2: Please state your age \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Question 3: Please describe, **in your preferred way**, your ethnic/cultural background (e.g., Japanese-Canadian, half Chinese half German-Canadian, Korean-Canadian mixed, Taiwanese living in Canada, etc.) \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Question 4: Please provide your email contact \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Question 5: Are you willing to share some of your personal experiences and feelings about your ethnic/cultural identity during the confidential interview? \*

yes

Question 6: Would you like to know the interview questions before the interview takes place? (The researcher will email you the questions if answered "yes".) \*

Yes

No

Question 7: Are there any accommodation requests the researcher should know about?

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Question 8: This final task has two parts: \*

(1) Read through the linked consent form [here](#) to review the terms of confidentiality and your rights as a research participant.

(2) Provide an electronic signature consenting to the project terms of confidentiality and to the audio recording of interview below (e.g., Jane Doe mm/dd/yyyy).

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Appendix B: VR Experience Screenplay

Written by:  
Kaede Claire Ashizawa

Project Paper, 2024

1 THE USER ENTERS LOBBY

The User glances at immediate surroundings, scanning the environment to comprehend their situation.

There is a mirror in the distance. The user approaches the mirror, and two blurry groups of colourful people emerge from behind the mirrors to the foreground.

2 COLOURFUL BLOB 1 APPEARS IN FRONT, SLIGHTLY BELOW EYE LEVEL

The user reaches for the blob, but before they can touch it, the item moves, in a swinging motion, toward the left side of the room.

The user follows the blob, facing to the left.

3 PERSON 1 WALKS UP TO THE BLOB

PERSON 1 ASKS IF THE USER WANTS TO WATCH THEIR MEMORY

The user reaches for the blob and is transported into a vision of Colourful Person 1's moment before birth.

4 INSIDE PERSON 1'S PREGNANT MOM'S BELLY

The user recognizes that they are inside blob-person 1's mom's pregnant belly.

The umbilical cord is present, and the steady sound of the mother's pulse and faint Korean pop song plays distantly.

5 THE USER EMERGES OUT OF PERSON 1'S MEMORY, BACK IN THE LOBBY

Blob 1 is now in the User's hand.

The directions on the screen prompt the user to 'embody' the memory.

When the user selects yes, the screen prompts the user to hold the blob close to the user's body.

Blob 1 is now equipped onto the User's body, as reflected in the mirror.

Blob 1 becomes the User's ears on their body.

6 BLOB 2 APPEARS IN FRONT, SLIGHTLY BELOW EYE LEVEL

The user reaches for the blob, but before they can touch it, the item moves, in a swinging motion, toward the right side of the room.

The user follows the blob, facing to the right.

7 PERSON 2 WALKS UP TO THE BLOB

PERSON 2 ASKS IF THE USER WANTS TO WATCH THEIR MEMORY

The user reaches for the blob and is transported into a vision of Person 2's first hours in the human world.

8 THE USER IS A NEWBORN INFANT, MINUTES AFTER BIRTH

The user recognizes that they are now Person 2 as a newborn.

Person 2's Mom holds the user's head, dad is by the bed.

PERSON 2'S MOM (IN CHINESE):

I think she looks like you

PERSON 2'S DAD (IN CHINESE):

Do you think she'll like beer and pizza  
like me?

PERSON 2'S MOM (IN CHINESE):

Beer and pizza?! I only feel like eating  
good old Chinese food.

I just had a kid in a foreign country, I'm  
so tired.

PERSON 2'S DAD (IN CHINESE):

Let's get some proper food later at home,  
there's only a Denny's or lame hospital  
food here.

PERSON 2'S MOM (IN CHINESE):

Wow. Our daughter is officially a  
Canadian. Isn't that crazy?

PERSON 2'S DAD (IN CHINESE):

No matter what her experience in the world  
is like, we will always love her, and so  
many people will too.

9 THE USER EMERGES OUT OF PERSON 2'S MEMORY, BACK IN THE  
LOBBY

Blob 2 is now in the User's hand.

The directions on the screen prompt the user to 'embody'  
the memory.

When the user selects yes, the screen prompts the user to  
hold the blob close to the user's body.

Blob 2 is now equipped onto the User's body, as reflected  
in the mirror.

Blob 2 becomes the User's hair on their body.

10 BLOB 3 APPEARS IN FRONT, SLIGHTLY BELOW EYE LEVEL

The user reaches for the blob, but before they can touch  
it, the item moves, in a swinging motion, toward the left  
side of the room.

The user follows the blob, facing to the left.

11 PERSON 3 WALKS UP TO THE BLOB

PERSON 3 ASKS IF THE USER WANTS TO WATCH THEIR MEMORY

The user reaches for the blob and is transported into a  
vision of Person 3's early childhood years.

12 THE USER IS SITTING AT HOME WITH PERSON 3'S MOM

The User reads a Japanese children's book with Mom.

PERSON 3 (IN JAPANESE):

What is *non-tan* (character) saying, mom?

PERSON 3'S MOM (IN JAPANESE):  
Did you learn this character at a Japanese  
school?

It says when *non-tan* was on the swing,  
he saw a mouse run past him like -squeak!-

PERSON 3 (IN JAPANESE AND ENGLISH):  
What kind of animal is *non-tan*?

PERSON 3'S MOM (IN JAPANESE):  
*Non-tan* is... probably a cat?

I guess he doesn't look like one (while  
laughing)

PERSON 3 (IN JAPANESE AND ENGLISH):  
*Non-tan* looks like a rice ball

PERSON 3'S MOM (IN JAPANESE AND ENGLISH):  
(laughing)  
That's true!

And don't you think this sausage looks  
like an octopus?

13 THE USER EMERGES OUT OF PERSON 3'S MEMORY, BACK IN THE  
LOBBY

Blob 3 is now in the User's hand.

The directions on the screen prompt the user to 'embody'  
the memory.

When the user selects yes, the screen prompts the user to  
hold the blob close to the user's body.

Blob 3 is now equipped onto the User's body, as reflected  
in the mirror.

Blob 3 becomes the User's eyes on their body.

14 BLOB 4 APPEARS IN FRONT, SLIGHTLY BELOW EYE LEVEL

The user reaches for the blob, but before they can touch it, the item moves, in a swinging motion, toward the right side of the room.

The user follows the blob, facing to the right.

15 PERSON 4 WALKS UP TO THE BLOB

PERSON 4 ASKS IF THE USER WANTS TO WATCH THEIR MEMORY

The user reaches for the blob and is transported into a vision of Person 4's elementary school years at a Chinese school.

16 THE USER IS SITTING IN A CLASSROOM

Another student is sitting in front of you.

You hear some English and Japanese chitchat in the background.

CHINESE TEACHER (IN CHINESE):

Okay guys partner up and tell each other  
how your weekend was in Chinese

STUDENT (IN ENGLISH):

I feel so awkward when I have to speak in  
Chinese because it's easier for us to  
speak in English

PERSON 4 (IN ENGLISH):

It's okay, we can try to speak in Chinese  
but it's okay if we mix some English for  
words we don't know!

17 THE USER EMERGES OUT OF PERSON 4'S MEMORY, BACK IN THE LOBBY

Blob 4 is now in the User's hand.

The directions on the screen prompt the user to 'embody' the memory.

When the user selects yes, the screen prompts the user to hold the blob close to the user's body.

Blob 4 is now equipped onto the User's body, as reflected in the mirror.

Blob 4 becomes the User's mouth on their body.

18 BLOB 5 APPEARS IN FRONT, SLIGHTLY BELOW EYE LEVEL

The user reaches for the blob, but before they can touch it, the item moves, in a swinging motion, toward the left side of the room.

The user follows the blob, facing to the left.

19 PERSON 5 WALKS UP TO THE BLOB

PERSON 5 ASKS IF THE USER WANTS TO WATCH THEIR MEMORY

The user reaches for the blob and is transported into a vision of Person 5's grandma's kitchen in her elementary school on Chinese New Year.

20 THE USER IS AT THE KITCHEN COUNTER WITH GRANDMA

The user looks around, there are bowls of dumpling ingredients and Person 5's grandma to the left.

PERSON 5'S GRANDMA (IN CHINESE):

Baobao, you need to make sure you don't put too much filling in the skin because it's gonna be too big and explode when you boil it! See, like this.

Person 5's Grandma shows you a perfect dumpling.

PERSON 5'S GRANDMA (IN CHINESE):

Okay, now you try.

Person 5's Grandma hands you a dumping skin.

The user attempts to fold it into a dumpling.

The user shows Grandma the dumpling.

Grandma takes it from your hand, judging it.

PERSON 5'S GRANDMA (IN CHINESE):

Hmm, not too bad. We're gonna make these  
together every year, and you're gonna get  
better and better! Like me.

My grandma taught me too, and your mommy's  
grandma taught her.

21 THE USER EMERGES OUT OF PERSON 5'S MEMORY, BACK IN THE  
LOBBY

Blob 5 is now in the User's hand.

The directions on the screen prompt the user to 'embody'  
the memory.

When the user selects yes, the screen prompts the user to  
hold the blob close to the user's body.

Blob 5 is now equipped onto the User's body, as reflected  
in the mirror.

Blob 5 becomes the User's hands on their body.

22 BLOB 6 APPEARS IN FRONT, SLIGHTLY BELOW EYE LEVEL

The user reaches for the blob, but before they can touch  
it, the item moves, in a swinging motion, toward the right  
side of the room.

The user follows the blob, facing to the right.

23 PERSON 6 WALKS UP TO THE BLOB

PERSON 6 ASKS IF THE USER WANTS TO WATCH THEIR MEMORY

The user reaches for the blob and is transported into a  
vision of Person 6's first trip to Japan.

24 AT THE AIRPORT DEPARTURE GATE, PERSON 6'S MOM SEES YOU OFF

Two passports, one Japanese and one Canadian, in each of  
Person 6's mom's hands

PERSON 6'S MOM (IN JAPANESE):

Okay, listen carefully.

When you arrive in Tokyo, make sure you show the security people your Japanese passport.

Grandma and Grandpa will be waiting for you.

When you're coming back to Canada, make sure you show the security people your Canadian passport.

Mommy and Daddy will be waiting for you when you come back.

You can do it!

You take the passports and put them safely in your bag.

25 THE USER EMERGES OUT OF PERSON 6'S MEMORY, BACK IN THE LOBBY

Blob 6 is now in the User's hand.

The directions on the screen prompt the user to 'embody' the memory.

When the user selects yes, the screen prompts the user to hold the blob close to the user's body.

Blob 6 is now equipped onto the User's body, as reflected in the mirror.

Blob 6 becomes the User's skin on their body.

26 BLOB 7 APPEARS IN FRONT, SLIGHTLY BELOW EYE LEVEL

The user reaches for the blob, but before they can touch it, the item moves, in a swinging motion, toward the left side of the room.

The user follows the blob, facing to the left.

27 PERSON 7 WALKS UP TO THE BLOB

PERSON 7 ASKS IF THE USER WANTS TO WATCH THEIR MEMORY

The user reaches for the blob and is transported into a vision of Person 7's first steps in South Korea.

28 INCHEON AIRPORT ANNOUNCEMENTS IN THE BACKGROUND

The User exits from Incheon Airport, South Korea and takes her first steps in a new country.

You breathe the new air and step foot on new ground in a country you've heard of many times but have never been to.

Person 7's aunt is here to pick you up.

PERSON 7'S AUNT (IN KOREAN):

Welcome to Korea! It's so nice to finally meet you. I'm gonna tell your mom that you've made it to Korea safely. Your cousins are waiting in the car. Let's go!

Person 7's aunt takes you by the hand and walks with you to a parked car.

PERSON 7'S AUNT (IN KOREAN):

Here, you must be hungry! I made you some kimbap because it's gonna be a long drive home.

You look up at the foreign landscape.

29 THE USER EMERGES OUT OF PERSON 7'S MEMORY, BACK IN THE LOBBY

Blob 7 is now in the User's hand.

The directions on the screen prompt the user to 'embody' the memory.

When the user selects yes, the screen prompts the user to hold the blob close to the user's body.

Blob 7 is now equipped onto the User's body, as reflected in the mirror.

Blob 7 becomes the User's feet on their body.

30 BLOB 8 APPEARS IN FRONT, SLIGHTLY BELOW EYE LEVEL

The user reaches for the blob, but before they can touch it, the item moves, in a swinging motion, toward the right side of the room.

The user follows the blob, facing to the right.

31 PERSON 8 WALKS UP TO THE BLOB

PERSON 8 ASKS IF THE USER WANTS TO WATCH THEIR MEMORY

The user reaches for the blob and is transported into a vision of Person 8 with her friends at Karaoke.

32 CHATTERING OF GIRLS IN A KARAOKE ROOM, CHOOSING SONGS

The user is sitting with a group of other girls in a Karaoke room.

There is a variety of East Asian snacks and drinks on the table in front of you as well.

PERSON 8'S FRIEND 1 (IN ENGLISH):

Oh my god, can anyone sing this song?

It's from my favourite anime!

Person 8's friend 1 waves the mic around and looks around the room.

USER:

I can sing it if you can sing this song,

It's from my favourite K-pop group right now!

PERSON 8'S FRIEND 1:

Okay, deal. My Korean's not that good but I've heard my cousins sing it before when I was in Korea.

Person 8's friend 1 hands you the mic.

The user takes the mic from them and cues up the anime song she requested.

The song begins to play.

33 THE USER EMERGES OUT OF PERSON 8'S MEMORY, BACK IN THE LOBBY

Blob 8 is now in the User's hand.

The directions on the screen prompt the user to 'embody' the memory.

When the user selects yes, the screen prompts the user to hold the blob close to the user's body.

Blob 8 is now equipped onto the User's body, as reflected in the mirror.

Blob 8 becomes the User's throat on their body.

34 BLOB 9 APPEARS IN FRONT, SLIGHTLY BELOW EYE LEVEL

The user reaches for the blob, but before they can touch it, the item moves, in a swinging motion, toward the left side of the room.

The user follows the blob, facing to the left.

35 PERSON 9 WALKS UP TO THE BLOB

PERSON 9 ASKS IF THE USER WANTS TO WATCH THEIR MEMORY

The user reaches for the blob and is transported into a vision of Person 9 waiting at a TTC station.

36 DUNDAS TTC STATION PLATFORM, SOMEBODY TAPS YOUR ARM

The user is waiting at the platform.

An older Chinese woman approaches you.

CHINESE WOMAN (IN CHINESE):  
Hello, do you speak Chinese?

PERSON 9 (IN CHINESE):

Yes, a little bit.

CHINESE WOMAN (IN CHINESE):

Oh, I'm so relieved.

I'm visiting my daughter, who lives  
downtown, but I'm not sure which station  
to get off.

Could you help me navigate?

The Chinese woman shows you a Google Maps address on her  
phone screen.

PERSON 9 (IN CHINESE):

You can get off at Union Station.

When you exit, keep going straight.

On this street, you turn right.

CHINESE WOMAN (IN CHINESE):

Oh good, I would've been so lost without  
you! Thank you.

The Chinese woman lightly taps your arm assuringly.

37 THE USER EMERGES OUT OF PERSON 9'S MEMORY, BACK IN THE  
LOBBY

Blob 9 is now in the User's hand.

The directions on the screen prompt the user to 'embody'  
the memory.

When the user selects yes, the screen prompts the user to  
hold the blob close to the user's body.

Blob 9 is now equipped onto the User's body, as reflected  
in the mirror.

Blob 9 becomes the User's arms on their body.

38 BLOB 10 APPEARS IN FRONT, SLIGHTLY BELOW EYE LEVEL

The user reaches for the blob, but before they can touch it, the item moves, in a swinging motion, toward the right side of the room.

The user follows the blob, facing to the right.

39 PERSON 10 WALKS UP TO THE BLOB

PERSON 10 ASKS IF THE USER WANTS TO WATCH THEIR MEMORY

The user reaches for the blob and is transported into a vision of Person 10 sitting on a dragon boat.

40 ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF A DRAGON BOAT, PADDLING WITH OTHERS

The User, as Person 10, is one of the dragon boat paddlers.

Crowds are standing along the coast, and you are one of the paddlers on the boat.

You hear an announcement:

EMCEE OF DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL (IN  
ENGLISH):  
Hi all! Welcome to this year's Vancouver  
Dragon Boat Festival!

Boats take off at the count of  
3...2...1...

You hear the whistle, and you, alongside the other paddlers begin paddling the boat.

You paddle rhythmically with the paddlers in front of you, you hear drumming and cheering.

41 THE USER EMERGES OUT OF PERSON 10'S MEMORY, BACK IN THE LOBBY

Blob 10 is now in the User's hand.

The directions on the screen prompt the user to 'embody' the memory.

When the user selects yes, the screen prompts the user to hold the blob close to the user's body.

Blob 10 is now equipped onto the User's body, as reflected in the mirror.

Blob 10 becomes the User's shoulders on their body.

42 BLOB 11 APPEARS IN FRONT, SLIGHTLY BELOW EYE LEVEL

The user reaches for the blob, but before they can touch it, the item moves, in a swinging motion, toward the left side of the room.

The user follows the blob, facing to the left.

43 PERSON 11 WALKS UP TO THE BLOB

PERSON 11 ASKS IF THE USER WANTS TO WATCH THEIR MEMORY

The user reaches for the blob and is transported into a vision of Person 11 on a drive date.

44 THE USER IS SITTING ON THE PASSENGER SEAT.

Person 11's partner is driving.

Japanese 80's pop song blasts on the car speakers.

PERSON 11 (IN ENGLISH):

Hey, how do you know this song?

This is like, from my mom's generation.

PERSON 11'S PARTNER (IN ENGLISH):

I know, right?

It's such an iconic song, though.

I think my parents said this song was popular in China too when it came out.

PERSON 11 (IN ENGLISH)

That's so funny.

I'm gonna tell my mom this.

She'll love it.

Person 11's partner's hand is on Person 11's leg, smiling.

45 THE USER EMERGES OUT OF PERSON 11'S MEMORY, BACK IN THE LOBBY

Blob 11 is now in the User's hand.

The directions on the screen prompt the user to 'embody' the memory.

When the user selects yes, the screen prompts the user to hold the blob close to the user's body.

Blob 11 is now equipped onto the User's body, as reflected in the mirror.

Blob 11 becomes the User's legs on their body.

46 BLOB 12 APPEARS IN FRONT, SLIGHTLY BELOW EYE LEVEL

The user reaches for the blob, but before they can touch it, the item moves, in a swinging motion, toward the right side of the room.

The user follows the blob, facing to the right.

47 PERSON 12 WALKS UP TO THE BLOB

PERSON 12 ASKS IF THE USER WANTS TO WATCH THEIR MEMORY

The user reaches for the blob and is transported into a vision of Person 12 introducing her friends to Chinese medicinal herbs at T&T.

48 AT T&T GROCERY STORE

You hold a T&T grocery cart with your friends, taking them to the medicinal foods section.

PERSON 12 (IN ENGLISH):

Trust me, when you're on your period, it's good to get stuff from here to make your cramps feel better.

You smell the familiar Asian grocery store smell of seafood, vegetables, and preserved Asian roots and herbs.

You direct your friends to the medicine foods section.

PERSON 12 (IN ENGLISH):

Here, you need these red dates for sure and this ginseng ginger tea you drink in the morning.

You put a bag of red dates and a box of ginseng tea in the cart.

PERSON 12'S FRIEND (IN ENGLISH):

Oh my god, my Korean grandma tells me to drink this tea too!

It's kind of stinky, but it works.

This smell is so nostalgic.

PERSON 12 (IN ENGLISH):

I know, right?

We just gotta plug our noses and wash it down, haha.

49 THE USER EMERGES OUT OF PERSON 12'S MEMORY, BACK IN THE LOBBY

Blob 12 is now in the User's hand.

The directions on the screen prompt the user to 'embody' the memory.

When the user selects yes, the screen prompts the user to hold the blob close to the user's body.

Blob 12 is now equipped onto the User's body, as reflected in the mirror.

Blob 12 becomes the User's nose on their body.

50 BLOB 13 APPEARS IN FRONT, SLIGHTLY BELOW EYE LEVEL

The user reaches for the blob, but before they can touch it, the item moves, in a swinging motion, toward the left side of the room.

The user follows the blob, facing to the left.

51 PERSON 13 WALKS UP TO THE BLOB

PERSON 13 ASKS IF THE USER WANTS TO WATCH THEIR MEMORY

The user reaches for the blob and is transported into a vision of Person 13 pitching a design idea at her company meeting.

52 AT A CONFERENCE ROOM, DISCUSSING A NEW INTERIOR DESIGN PITCH

TEAM LEAD (IN ENGLISH):

Hey, so let's go around the pitches for this project.

The client wants an atmosphere of calm and easy-to-navigate interior layout.

PERSON 13 (IN ENGLISH):

Here is the design pitch.

PERSON 13 hands everyone a copy of the pitch deck.

PERSON 13 (IN ENGLISH):

I incorporated some *feng shui* elements in the spatial organization.

This floorplan emphasizes the idea of energy flow and imagines where people feel comfortable gathering.

53 THE USER EMERGES OUT OF PERSON 13'S MEMORY, BACK IN THE LOBBY

Blob 13 is now in the User's hand.

The directions on the screen prompt the user to 'embody' the memory.

When the user selects yes, the screen prompts the user to hold the blob close to the user's body.

Blob 13 is now equipped onto the User's body, as reflected in the mirror.

Blob 13 becomes the User's brain on their body.

54 BLOB 14 APPEARS IN FRONT, SLIGHTLY BELOW EYE LEVEL

The user reaches for the blob, but before they can touch it, the item moves, in a swinging motion, toward the right side of the room.

The user follows the blob, facing to the right.

55 PERSON 14 WALKS UP TO THE BLOB

PERSON 14 ASKS IF THE USER WANTS TO WATCH THEIR MEMORY

The user reaches for the blob and is transported into a vision of Person 14 with her friends at a Korean restaurant for her pre-wedding celebration.

56 AT A KOREAN RESTAURANT, SURROUNDED BY FRIENDS

Subtle restaurant chatter and faint K-pop is playing in the background noise.

Person 14 and friends surround a round table celebrating the night before Person 14's Wedding.

PERSON 14'S FRIEND (IN ENGLISH):

Toast!

Congrats to my best friend.

Let's drink today!

PERSON 14 (IN ENGLISH):

Thanks guys!

Alright, we gotta drink the Korean way.  
You drop the soju shot in the beer and  
pair it with this chicken.

What a way to celebrate the night before  
my wedding, eh?

PERSON 14'S FRIEND 2 (IN ENGLISH):  
I've always wanted to go to this  
restaurant, it's so famous.

PERSON 14:  
Oh yeah, this is a classic spot.

*Geon-bae!* ("cheers" in Korean)

57 THE USER EMERGES OUT OF PERSON 14'S MEMORY, BACK IN THE LOBBY

Blob 14 is now in the User's hand.

The directions on the screen prompt the user to 'embody' the memory.

When the user selects yes, the screen prompts the user to hold the blob close to the user's body.

Blob 14 is now equipped onto the User's body, as reflected in the mirror.

Blob 14 becomes the User's stomach on their body.

58 BLOB 15 APPEARS IN FRONT, SLIGHTLY BELOW EYE LEVEL

The user reaches for the blob, but before they can touch it, the item moves, in a swinging motion, toward the left side of the room.

The user follows the blob, facing to the left.

59 PERSON 15 WALKS UP TO THE BLOB

PERSON 15 ASKS IF THE USER WANTS TO WATCH THEIR MEMORY

The user reaches for the blob and is transported into a vision of Person 15 holding her baby.

60 THE USER, AS PERSON 15, IS HOLDING THEIR NEWBORN INFANT

There is a hospital band on the baby's left wrist.

The rhythmic beeps and buzzes of the hospital hum faintly in the background.

Gently rocking the baby, Person 15 speaks.

PERSON 15 (IN ENGLISH):

I'm gonna cook so much yummy food and show  
you all of my favourite songs and watch  
all my favourite movies with you.

Your grandma, your *ba-ba* is gonna drop off  
some books and toys that she showed me  
when I was a baby.

So many people love you. I love you.

61 THE USER EMERGES OUT OF PERSON 15'S MEMORY, BACK IN THE LOBBY

Blob 15 is now in the User's hand.

The directions on the screen prompt the user to 'embody' the memory.

When the user selects yes, the screen prompts the user to hold the blob close to the user's body.

Blob 15 is now equipped onto the User's body, as reflected in the mirror.

Blob 15 becomes the User's heart on their body.

62 THE USER TAKES A GOOD LOOK AT THEIR REFLECTION IN THE MIRROR

The 15 colourful people emerge to both sides of the mirror.

They bounce and twirl in joy.

Each body part the User acquired from the experience lightly shakes on your body to indicate its presence.

63 THE 15 PEOPLE APPROACH TO GATHER AROUND THE USER

QUEUE- sound montage of family and friends speaking, laughing, and singing music in various languages

The VR environment becomes gradually saturated with all the colours of the characters and the User's own colourful body.

64 FADE IN TITLE: BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

The sound montage continues in the background.

The title is presented in bold letters, with the colourful people joyfully moving in the background.

65 THE END

CREDITS ROLL