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Intersectional positionalities across gender, race, ethnicity and immigrant status in qualitative interviews

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the implications of intersectional qualitative interviews across identity categories of gender, race, ethnicity, and immigrant status. Responding to the research gap on the intersectionality in qualitative interviews and informed by the intersectionality framework, this reflective critical discourse study shares an analysis of two interviews conducted by a female minority researcher. Using the analytic methods of critical discourse analysis, the study examines how the interviewer and interviewee enacted, resisted, and negotiated diverse positionalities and power imbalance within the interview space. Particularly, the analysis demonstrates the researcher's challenges, vulnerability, and mitigating efforts in resisting the powered position taken by the interviewee in light of gender, race, and immigrant status. It also reveals how identity convergence allowed the participants to inhabit the space as collaborative insiders despite the tension in other layers of intersection. Methodological dilemmas and implications for intersectional interviews will be discussed.

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Methodological literature has recognized both the co-constitutive and conflicting nature of interview interactions in qualitative inquiry. Each interview is an embodied performance of lived experiences, orientations, and identities of the interviewer and the interviewee (Broom et al., 2009; Denzin, 2000; Manderson et al., 2006; Sandelowski, 2002). A simplistic view of interviews either as a site for egalitarian and collaborative knowledge construction or a space of antagonistic power struggle does a disservice to understanding the complex relation between interview participants and its impact on the research process and outcome. Feminist research has contributed to the examination of the researcher's positionality toward critical epistemology and analysis in relation to the systems of power (Cho et al., 2013; Lee, 1997; McCorkel & Myers, 2003; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017; Prior & Peled, 2021; Tarrant, 2014). This line of critical research has pointed to the problematic influence of the privileged position of the researcher in relation to those marginalized racially, socioeconomically, and gender-wise, recognizing that the encounter between the researcher and the participant is never neutral but is disproportionate in power around axes of similarities and differences (Tarrant, 2014). Building on the prior feminist research on power relations in interviews, more investigation is needed to better understand how varying aspects of identity such as race, ethnicity, age, and class can impact the interview process through their intersection (Broom et al., 2009). This study adds to such intersectional research by

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providing an analytic description of a female minority researcher's experience of interviewing male participants with a range of different positionalities.

As a reflective critical discourse study (Anderson, 2006; Gee, 2014), this paper analyzes my experience as a female minority, Korean immigrant researcher within the intersectional interview space across gender, race, ethnicity, and immigrant status. While the term "minoritized" is preferred in recent scholarship over "minority" to indicate how people are rendered "minorities" rather than being born as minorities (Chappell & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2013; Harper, 2013), I intentionally use "minority" in this paper as a reference to my status. Mainly, it is my personal choice to avoid the inherent connotation of lack of agency in the passivized verb form "minoritized." Coming from a historically minoritized background does not necessarily make a person "minoritized" in all contexts. The term, "minoritized," with its dichotomous connotation of the "minoritizing agent" and the "minoritized patient," can easily disregard the agency of the latter. "Minority" in this paper refers to the broader sense of belonging to the less privileged or in a less populated group as in my research context, not necessarily with the connoted passivity and victimhood, but highlighting resistance and agency reflected in my counter-stories within the interviews and in this paper (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). I also choose to use "a female minority" over" a woman of color" so that it can be more inclusive of diverse factors that locate one in the "minority" spectrum than the race factor alone. Given that experiences of female researchers from the minority immigrant background are conspicuously absent in the literature (Broom et al., 2009; Cole, 2020), the paper particularly addresses a female researcher's challenges, vulnerability, and mitigating efforts in resisting the powered position taken by the interviewee in light of gender, race, social position, and the immigrant status during the process.

This study draws on the two interviews that I conducted for a research project that explored perceptions of school leaders on the changing demography in their communities (Kim & Dorner, 2021). The analysis was guided by a reflective question: What does it mean for a female minority researcher to enter the interview space in which multiple identities are cross-layered, re/positioned, conflicting, and negotiated, complicating interview participants' positionalities? Since reflexivity is a critical strategy to ensure the analytic quality against the inevitable impact of the researcher's positionality for the study (Berger, 2015), my inquiry in this study converges on Pagan's (2018) question of how to "be and become a good qualitative researcher" when facing the risk of being stuck in the limbo of complex positionalities (p. 75).

Conceptual frameworks

Identity, positionality, and figured worlds

Identity is socially constructed, situationally shifting, and relationally positioned. While one may develop quite a durable identity over time, identity is dynamically formed as a life-long process through one's internal dialogues and interaction with the surrounding (Holland et al., 1998; Urrieta, 2007a). Identity in this sense is about *becoming* rather than *being* (Urrieta, 2007a). While this process-oriented notion of identity highlights the temporal dimension of contingent and emergent self-making over time, the notion, positionality, concerns one's location, that is, where people position themselves and are positioned by others on the spectrum of collective identification in the perceived social order (Anthias, 2002). While one may claim a certain positional location, it may not necessarily be congruent with how the person is positioned by others in the collective social order.

The notion of *figured worlds* – one's internal dialogues or maps to *figure* oneself in the *worlds* in which they participate and make relationships with others – comes useful to understand such dynamic multiplicity, complexity, and discrepancy in people's self-making and positioning over time and within the social spectrum. Figured worlds are socially constructed and impactful through people's intersubjective understanding and performance within their own framework of

how the world works or should work (Urrieta, 2007b). Figured worlds, therefore, are not merely imaginary social frames of how things work within individuals' mind, but they also shape solid social realities mediated by the existing hierarchy of power (Holland et al., 1998). In a social world where people operate with diverse and/or conflicting figured worlds (for example, of race, gender, class, immigrant status), people are offered different social positions and identity labels, whether desired or not. In other words, figured worlds are informed and intercepted by the external system of power which assigns different social agency to different groups of people (Urrieta, 2007a).

With these dynamic implications of identity, positionality, and figured worlds in relation to power and privilege, this paper examines how the diverse identities/positionalities of the interviewer and interviewee are complexly entangled, both intra-personally (within the person) and inter-personally (between people/groups), thus complicating the interview process. For example, my identities with multiple layers as a female, Asian/Korean, and wife and parent became problematic when they were lumped into a stereotypical mix by the white male interviewee with a presumed higher social rank.

Beyond dichotomous view of interview as co-fielding or battlefield

The constructionist approach to qualitative research highlights how the researcher and the researched co-construct the (re)interpretation of experiences under investigation (Finlay, 2002; O'Connor & O'Neill, 2004). Research is framed as an interpersonal project with the goal of co-producing new knowledge (Rapley, 2001). As a verbal replay of lived experiences (Denzin, 2000), interviews provide a performative space where the interviewer and the interviewee make contingent decisions about the topic, interpretive frame, details of the account, and depth of reflection, while concomitantly enacting particular identities (Manderson et al., 2006). Holmgren (2011) conceptualized such cooperative meaning-making processes as "co-fielding" with "overlapping positions and discursive closeness" between the interviewer and the interviewee (p. 366). In this frame, collaborative construction of knowledge occurs with a shared understanding of the context, positionality, and ideological concepts of the topic (Kauffmann, 2014).

However, interviews do not always occur as a consensual interaction. Interviews are also viewed as a unilateral dialogue in which the interviewer has the steering power to set the agenda and lead the conversation whereas the interviewee has only limited countering power, for example, by refusing to answer the question, deflecting the flow, or presenting only polished narratives (Hoffmann, 2007; Kizlari & Fouseki, 2018; Kvale, 2006; Råheim et al., 2016). The interviewee may feel vulnerable and anxious for the uncertainty of what is ahead in the conversation (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2002). Due to the asymmetrical power, the notion of interviews as collaborative dialogue is challenged as misguiding or naïve (Atkinson, 1997; Silverman, 1993). The act of interviewing is seen as manipulative and instrumental at best to serve the researcher's agenda (Hoffmann, 2007; Kvale, 2006). The "battlefield" metaphor reflects such conflictual aspects of interview interactions arising from the imbalanced power relation and different positionalities (Tanggaard, 2007).

In this power struggle, however, interviewers do not always occupy a powered or privileged position (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). Interviewees have an inherent share of power since they have the desired information that would fulfill the researcher's agenda and can decide the amount and depth of information to be shared (Hoffmann, 2007). Gender often plays in creating a power shift particularly when the male interviewee performs his masculinity by sexualizing and minimizing the female interviewer (Arendell, 1997; Lee, 1997; Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2002). Studies have reported on cases in which the male interviewee positions himself as a patriarchal teacher who tests the knowledge of the female interviewer, frequently detracting from the proposed research agenda (Arendell, 1997; Deutsch, 2007; Pini, 2005; Vähäsantanen & Saarinen, 2013). The researcher's position as a "learner" willing to acquire new information from the

interviewee may shift the power to the interviewee, taking a greater emotional toll on the female interviewer (Hoffmann, 2007). Such emotional labor needs attention to understand the multidimensional power issues within cross-gender interview interactions. In other scenarios, the female interviewer may either perform traditional heteronormative gender identities such as "sexual being, friend, feminist and respectful listener" or defy taking up such stereotypical feminine identities (Pini, 2005, p. 202). These cases of "doing gender" in interview interactions (Deutsch, 2007) demonstrate how gender or more accurately, the gender-binary norms constructed in the heteronormative world may mediate the power relationship in the research process, particularly when women interview men. Referring to these heteronormative performances is not to reaffirm gender binaries, but to recognize how such gender norms may affect the interviewer-interviewee relationship, especially when women interview men, by denoting the sociocultural influence of gender norms to which the interviewer and interview are not completely immune.

Other attributes also complicate qualitative interviews. Identities associated with race, ethnicity, social status, age, sexuality, or citizenship status mediate in shaping the interview flow, power hierarchy, and knowledge construction (Broom et al., 2009; Byrne, 2003; Lundgren, 2012; Manderson et al., 2006; Narváez et al., 2009; Windsong, 2018). In a cross-cultural interview, the interviewer and the interviewee coming from groups in conflict may face barriers from the sociopolitical tension from the perceived power dynamic (Roer-Strier & Sands, 2015). If the interviewer is viewed as coming from a privileged group in terms of race, gender, and religious belief (e.g. a White male Christian) in conflict with the interviewee's (a Black female Muslim), the interviewer's positionality may be construed as an oppressor, troubling the relation (Roer-Strier & Sands, 2015). Thus, issues of intersectionality are often framed as the insider-outsider problem (Ryen, 2002). The lack of insider knowledge and experience may impact data collection and interpretation in ways that limit access to the research site or cause discomfort in the interaction (Buford May, 2014). However, an insider researcher may fail to bring insightful interpretation to the known insider experience whereas an outsider researcher's immunity to such assumed familiarity can afford new perspectives (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

Toward the intersectionality framework

Despite its usefulness in examining the relational dynamics in an interview, the insider/outsider frame is restrictive by locking the positionality in the polarizing either/or dichotomy (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). The binary framework of insider/outsider may not serve as a relevant analytic tool for interviews where participants' positionalities are complexly intersecting. For example, Mullings (1999) described the temporary nature of a shared insider space that her racial identity as a person of color with an African lineage had created since, at other times, her gender, race, and class evoked stereotypical assumptions which influenced the interviewees' responses and attitudes toward her as an outsider. In other words, interview space is unstable with shifting and blurry boundaries of positionalities and cannot be fully owned by one fixated identity marker.

The dialectical approach (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Enosh & Ben-Ari, 2010) transcends simplistic binaries, perceiving the interviewer-interviewee relation as contingent and shifting across the continuum of cooperation and conflict. It acknowledges the diverse positionalities one may inhabit and aims to examine the multifarious complexity of human experience and identities that are conflicting, overlapping, and intersecting. Such an approach conceptualizes qualitative interviews as a contested field of interlacing identities (Crenshaw, 1991; Hancock, 2007; Harris & Leonardo, 2018; Narváez et al., 2009; Robert & Yu, 2018; Tefera et al., 2018). Identity is at the core of analyzing how the intercrossing dynamics of social, cultural, and political factors affect the interaction of people with different backgrounds. The approach is particularly suited for examining the impact of varying intersections across individual and group identities on power, privilege, and marginalization (Tefera et al., 2018). For example, Henry's study (2015) on her experience as a black female faculty member in higher

education contributes to understanding how gendered racism operates in academia, providing insights in reshaping the institutional knowledge of how to engage with minoritized female faculty.

Various identity categories such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation have long been examined as isolated or independent variables or as parallel constructs in research (Narváez et al., 2009; Stewart & McDermott, 2004). The intersectional effect of different identity categories is measured as a quantitative sum of separate analyses of each category, leaving the complexity underexplored when they intermingle. For example, the research on women's experience of discrimination based on their race and gender may result in interpretive bluntness or ambiguities by choosing one aspect or another or through a mechanical synthesis of each experience when in fact, no single label, such as Black, female, or poor, can fully explicate her experience (Stewart & McDermott, 2004). The complex dynamic resists essentialism and requires a layered understanding. The intersectionality framework recognizes such complex experiences by examining how multiple positionalities operate as "a site of their simultaneity" (Harris & Leonardo, 2018, p. 15). As an important framework for critical feminist research, intersectionality has examined the dynamics in which various identity categories concomitantly operate while perpetuating and/or challenging the existing power relations (Cho et al., 2013). As such, feminist approaches have contributed to the intersectional understanding of how race, gender, class, and sexuality are not just personal identity traits but also creating an interlocking system of power and oppression (Cho et al., 2013; Cole, 2020; Crenshaw, 1991; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). In other words, intersectionality is a useful framework to illuminate the implications of multi-layered and intercrossing identities as important conditions of one's life as they are socially constituted and impacted by the power structure (Cole, 2020).

However, given the challenge in fully unraveling the interactional process across multiple axes of identities and power systems, researchers are warned against confining their agenda to "what can be neatly described, counted, measured, and clearly defined" for generalized claims but encouraged to "embrac[e] the challenges of conducting research that accepts the irreducible multiplicity of intersecting dynamics of educational contexts" (Tefera et al., 2018, p. xv). Likewise, the goal of this reflective inquiry is not to reach a definitive clarity on how positional intersectionality operates in the interview space. Instead, it presents a reflective account of how the multiply intertwined positionalities of the interviewer and interviewee may complicate their interaction, particularly from the less examined perspective of a minority female researcher.

Methods of examination

Context and participants

The two interviews for this paper were conducted for a multi-case study project that explored perceptions of school leaders, particularly school board members, on the changing demography of their community in six school systems in a Mid-western state (Kim & Dorner, 2021). As a larger context, studies on school board operation indicate that school board meetings can serve as a democratic space by acknowledging and incorporating voices from minoritized communities into districts' policies (Sampson & Horsford, 2017; Khalifa et al., 2014). However, according to National School Board Association's report (2018), board members are predominantly white (78%), disproportionately representing the demographic makeup of their districts, and may work against equity agendas and "reify whiteness as property" (Sampson & Bertrand, 2022, p. 227). The school boards of the six school systems we studied mirrored a similar predominance of white board members with only one Asian and a few black board members across six districts.

For the project, I initiated contacting the school board presidents of two school districts to arrange participant observations of school board meetings as well as interviews with individual board members. Out of 14 school board members (seven in each district), I interviewed nine members in total including five females and four males, among whom eight were white and one was Asian. Using a semi-structured interview protocol, each interview addressed three main

topics: the personal context of serving the school board, school board operation, and changing community. Interviewees were also invited to share additional comments and ideas.

Among the project data of 24 interviews and two focus groups with 25 school board members and administrators, this study describes my interview interaction with two male school board members in one suburban school district. The two interviews were selected for analysis due to their unique interactional patterns which were both perplexing and analytically intriguing to me as a qualitative researcher. Bob (pseudonym) was a white American male and a medical doctor in his middle age and had been serving the school board for 15 years. Jason (pseudonym), a second-generation Asian American male in his middle age, was a financial advisor, serving the school board for a year with previous experiences in other capacities like Parent-Teacher Organization chair and community liaison.

Overall, my other interviews proceeded with a similar structure of alternating between me questioning and following up for elaboration and the interviewee responding and occasionally asking for clarification. The flow was consistent with these alternating roles with few unexpected turns. Likewise, my position remained relatively stable as a researcher and parent in these interviews. This was not the case with Bob and Jason. The two interviews were marked by moments of tension, abrupt turns in the topic and tone, subverted roles with an audible rivalry for the conversational lead, and emotional exhaustion on my part. My efforts to perform the interviewer role were often encumbered by the interviewees who challenged my qualification as a researcher and/or deflected the intended topic. Particularly, the interview with Bob might well be categorized as a "failed" interview in the sense that the interviewee, Bob, kept deviating from the research agenda, provocatively referring to my race, ethnicity, and gender, while I was not successful in redirecting the focus of the conversation (Jacobsson & Åkerström, 2013). After these two interviews, I engaged in a retrospective inquiry of how our different positionalities intersected, affecting the interview dynamic and shifting positionalities.

Researcher positionality

At the time of this study, I served the research team as a post-doctoral fellow and co-project director. I was a parent of two children, each attending an elementary and a middle school in the district where the two interviewees served as school board members. I was aware that my visible and audible identity markers such as a female, Asian and English as an additional language speaker would affect the interviewees' preconception of me although I did not know yet what roles such markers would play in the interview process. I did not disclose my other identities related to my nationality and immigrant status. As Peshkin (1998) noted, since the subjectivity of the researcher is inevitable, I made my efforts to maintain "enhanced awareness" of such subjectivity and its potential impact on the work. Such efforts are documented in this paper as my strife not to instantly react to the interviewees' biases but to retain the researcher voice. Failing to do this, however, eventually pushed me to reflect on the critical questions about the interviewer's roles, especially when her agenda and identities are compromised by those of the interviewee as I will further discuss in the conclusion of this paper.

Data analysis

Data analysis employed methods of critical discourse analysis to examine the intricate relation among language, identity, and power (Rogers, 2011). I drew from Gee's (2014) approach to language use framed as *building tasks analysis*. According to Gee (2014), people "make or build things in the world through language" (p. 32), that is, people use language to make certain things significant (significance building), to get recognized as a certain kind of a person (identity building), to enact social relationships (relationship building), or to render certain social goods more valuable than others

(politics building). Analyzing in what ways people build, for example, *significance* of meaning, *identities* as particular kinds of a person, *relationships* with others, and *politics* or perspectives on the distribution of what counts as social goods, can reveal a network of meaning in the discursive data like interview conversations. As an analytic guide, Gee (2014) also proposed a set of tools of inquiry. The identity building task, for example, can be encoded within one's *social language* that signals the person's social role and positionality (e.g. a social language of a teacher, a scientist, or a gangster). Drawing from the conceptualization of Holland et al. (1998) and also referred to as an "analytic tool of inquiry" by Gee (2014), the concept of *figured worlds* was employed for analysis. According to Gee (2014), *figured worlds* are "simplified, often unconscious and taken-for-granted theories or stories about how the world works" (p. 95). Such prototypical storylines of one's simplified worlds affect and demonstrate how the person positions oneself and others with an assumed clarity, which may dismiss the actual complexities of the world. Social languages and figured worlds, signifying particular building tasks, then, are manifested through linguistic devices such as word choice (lexicalization), sequencing of text, cohesive devices, voice, tone, mood, etc. (see Table 1 for details).

For this paper, I focus on the building tasks of *significance*, *identities*, and *politics* to examine the diverse positionalities that were enacted, assigned, or resisted by the interview participants. As the supportive tools of inquiry (Gee, 2011, 2014), I attended to the participants' *social languages* or specific ways of using words and structures and *figured worlds* or particular frames of construing the world.

Table 1 illustrates guiding questions for each chosen tool of inquiry to help understand how different building tasks can be accomplished through a range of linguistic manifestations. For example, one can engage a particular social language (tool of inquiry), embedded within a declarative tone and imperative mood (linguistic devices), to ascertain a position of power (identity building task). Also, the person's particular framework about the world (figured world), encoded in his repeated lexical choice (linguistic device), can build a particular value statement about distributing resources and support (politics building task). Through this building tasks analysis, the findings below present how interview participants engaged with intersecting positionalities across categories of gender, race, ethnicity, and immigrant status while building *significance*, *identities*, and *politics* around issues of education, diversity, and equity.

Interview: liminal space of intersecting positionalities

I started all nine interviews with the question of how and when the participant began to serve the school board followed by the question about general school board operation. Participants'

Table 1. Tools of inquiry and linguistic resources for building tasks analysis (Adapted from Rogers & Wetzel, 2014).

Tools of Inquiry Analytic tools for how people use language to accomplish social goals	Linguistic Resources Linguistic devices to explore tools of inquiry and building tasks	Building Tasks Aspects that people build with language structures and meanings
Social Languages How do words and grammatical structures signal and enact a particular social language? **Figured Worlds** Frames that people have about how the world works; what typical stories or figured worlds the words and phrases are assuming and inviting listeners to assume?	**Lexicalizations** (what kinds of words are being used) **Sequencing** (how is the text arranged? e.g. foregrounding/backgrounding) **Cohesion** (how does the text hang together? e.g. pronouns, determiners, tenses, lexical cohesion, and repetition) **Voice/Tone** (active/passive; personal/public) **Intonation/Pause** **Mood** (e.g. interrogative, conditional, imperative)	**Significance** Use language to make things mean something, significant **Identities** Use language to get recognized as taking on a certain identity or role; to build identity here and now **Politics** Use language to build and destroy social goods (what counts as social goods)

voice was mostly official as a representative figure of the district to project their board in the most accurate terms and reliable manner, whereas they added a personal voice for their educational history and personal motivation to join the board. In such personal contexts, interviewees used the first-person pronoun "I" instead of "we," often accompanying the emotive verb "feel" for evaluative remarks on delicate issues such as the community's resistance to inclusive policies to indicate that they were cautiously presenting their personal stance rather than a representative position for the district. The following section presents how the two interviews with Bob and Jason presented challenges and opportunities for me to reflect on the intersectional positionalities in the interview space.

"You are wrong": disempowerment and resistance

Unlike other interviews, Bob did not respond to my opening inquiry about the general operation of the school board. Instead, he asked me back the same question as if checking on my knowledge:

> What is the board role? *You tell* me what the board, what's the board's role? *I'm asking you. I'm asking you. Tell me.* You're interviewing all these people. You've got five people's questions. What do they say? … *I'm asking you … I'm asking you the question.* I know what I'm gonna say. *I'm listening.* (*Emphasis* added)

Upon his repeated requests, I shared my understanding of the school board. Bob further interrogated, "what does that mean? What else?" Using the social language of an authoritative teacher figure typically found in the classroom teacher-student dyad, Bob subverted the interviewer and interviewee role and enacted himself as an education professional, while treating me as an inexperienced learner on the topic. Although his demanding social language was disturbing, I managed to keep my voice as a researcher, reminding myself that interviewees often willingly assume the "expert" position (Vähäsantanen & Saarinen, 2013).

This performed poise as a researcher, however, became difficult to maintain as Bob started projecting his figured worlds of diversity and education onto my identities as a female, Asian/Korean immigrant parent through stereotypical notions. His view of diversity was implied in the story of the navy school he attended, which he described as the "most diverse in the neighborhood" with "both black and white generals and officers enlisted" although without "a *significantly educated* Asian" or "*oriental* community or Indian community" (*emphasis* added). As will be discussed below, the modifying adjectives of "significantly educated" and "oriental" foreboded his figured world that positioned Asian parents as privileged outsiders with higher social statuses, resources and power but exercising an undesirable parenting style.

Bob's conception of diversity was mainly based on race ("black and white" "Asian") and ethnicity ("Indian"); later, he expanded to include the socioeconomic and linguistic dimension only in a negative connotation. To Bob, the student population from lower socioeconomic and linguistically diverse backgrounds meant a burden to the entire education system, as he described how the previous school district of his children failed to adequately support "general" (read as "middle-class English-speaking") students due to its struggle to serve the disproportionately large population of underachieving students. He labeled these students as "kids from the city" (read as "kids from poor urban neighborhoods") and "kids with English as a second language" for whose description he added, apparently minding my background as an English as a second language speaker, "but their IQs were brilliant since their parents were *like you and your husband, very educated*." My identities as a parent and non-native speaker of English, were abruptly summoned, then, conflated with my phenotypic identity as an Asian. He stated his figured world of Asian parenting style using my case as a stereotypical example in a declarative tone:

> You are a *high-powered, high-pressured parent*. You push your kids farther than anyone else … You want your child to go into academics, be a lawyer, a doctor, an engineer, a mathematician. You don't want your

> – you'd be shocked, disappointed if your daughter became a school teacher. You would. Your husband would be disappointed, period.

He continued to hypothesize, boldly but falsely, that my husband with a Ph.D. and would yell if my daughter received a B grade, jokingly adding that he would "talk to him [your husband]" not to since "he's got a lovely wife and two lovely kids." He further conjectured that my parents must live in a rich suburban neighborhood, attend a Korean presbyterian church, and must have wanted me to "meet a nice Korean boy." This fictitious story of my family seemed framed by the stereotypical *model minority* myth (Museus & Kiang, 2009) as his figured world of Asian (more particularly, Korean) parents and submissive Asian women. This racialized and gendered stereotype of Asian women also served to confirm his figured world of Asians as "silent" and thus the "least engaged parents" in school agendas only "because their kids are highly successful. Your kids are successful." The negative connotation in the phrase of "highly educated" Asian parents as success-driven, operating within the "oriental" familial hierarchy, and "least engaged" and thus indifferent to the public good supported his internal theory of Asian – more precisely Korean – immigrants as *privileged outsiders* who should not ask for additional support. In his figured world, they do have an equal status as that of mainstream "white" Americans.

I was surprised at Bob's intrusive language that carried his biased assumptions and racist ideas. Still, I decided to take advantage of the moment as a researcher to further probe his perspective on the "silent" or "less heard voices from immigrant parents," referring to the well-quoted challenges in school engagement due to their cultural and linguistic barriers. He instantly confronted,

> What immigrant parents? *The Asians aren't Korean*. Where are the Asians from? Where are the *poor Asians* from that come to the city? You tell me. Are they from Korea?

In this short statement, a series of forced conflations of identity categories occurred. Immigrants in general were bluntly reduced to Asians. Then, a false association between ethnicity and socioeconomic status was made through a dichotomous division between "Koreans" and "poor Asians" reinforcing his model minority myth. Koreans, who he placed under the pan-Asian category in his earlier statement (e.g. "educated Asians"), were now singled out from other Asian nationals, but only to be submerged again under the mainstream "American" category as he opposed my positionality as an immigrant parent. I finally decided to engage as an immigrant parent rather than an interviewer (S is my initial in the transcript below):

S:	*As an immigrant parent*,
Bob:	*You're American*, don't give me this immigrant parent thing. You're *American like me*. You have the *same* interests.
S:	*No, I am not an American*.
Bob:	*You are American. Don't* tell me that. You are here, you want the best for your kids, *just like I* want. *What makes you different?*
S:	Just to give you a perspective as *a parent of international children, immigrant children*. A lot of parents from different cultural backgrounds, language backgrounds, may want to voice their concerns. *I am speaking here not as a researcher, but as a parent*. Sometimes, they don't find the route, channel to do that or they don't find comfortable doing it because of their language and cultural barrier.
Bob:	*I don't believe you* for a second, because you're an educated parent who cares. If you're someone who doesn't have money, that doesn't have the culture, doesn't have the Ph.D., to do a postdoc, you're right, whether you are white, black, it's a step back. I have no doubt every educated parent in the district is not afraid to speak up for their kids.
S:	Some parents are not fluent in English.
Bob:	*I don't believe it. I think you're wrong*. [Bob repeated "you're wrong" five times]

At the moment, I felt an inevitable urge to challenge his dismissive stance on immigrant experiences. Assertively injecting my perspective "as an immigrant parent," I advocated for immigrant perspectives, using explicitly confrontational social languages ("no, I am not American," "I

am speaking here not as a researcher but as a parent" "their cultural and linguistic barrier"). Bob did not bother to negotiate our different perspectives nor recognize my claimed positionality as an immigrant. He repeatedly said, "I don't believe you" and "you're wrong." Critiquing my stance, he added his final comment, "I think you are set in your mind in certain things. You're not open enough, but that's okay." Determining that the gap was not to be negotiated, I recollected myself as a researcher, appreciated his time, and concluded the interview.

Overall, Bob's social language was confirmatory and judgmental from a position as an experienced education professional which he had carved into his earlier biographical narrative as a long-time seasoned school board member and parent of three different-aged children in varying school systems. He endorsed, although implicitly, a discourse that the racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic diversity of students are challenges for schools in providing appropriate education for the rest of the students. Although in Bob's figured world of education, the achievement gap among students mirrors the structural issue "everywhere" as the "socioeconomic" gap, this reasoning was appropriated only to excuse schools of the responsibility for closing the gap. He claimed, "it is not our [school's] role to solve the achievement gap" since it's a "global" structural issue, while at the same time, alluding that students' academic outcomes are more dependent on the individual family's circumstances and efforts than school intervention. Accordingly, he ascribed underachieving students' academic failure to both ends of the larger system and individual students and families only to absolve schools of the responsibility.

Asians and Koreans, the main agents in these dissonant discourses, were initially reduced as *racialized immigrant others* (Li & Nicholson, 2021). A poignant narrative about my family through the model minority myth was created to justify his perception of Asians as being highly successful and over-resourced. Their cultural and linguistic challenges as immigrants, however, were dismissed since they were now equated as the "same American." Through multiple contrastive frames, Bob drew dichotomous lines between the global (system) and the local (school), between self-complacent Asian parents and other engaged parents, and between "Korean" and "poor Asian" immigrants, thus performing a problematic *politics* building task of assigning inconsistent social values and evaluative notions for different racial/ethnic groups. Through divisive and conflating frames, for instance, he ascribed equity gaps to the structure but attributed the responsibility to the individual race, ethnicity, and student/family.

Throughout the interview, Bob appropriated my intersecting identities to build the significance of his figured worlds about Asian, Korean, female, and immigrant identities, any of which he was not a part. In his figured worlds, I was essentialized as a "high powered" Asian and Korean parent, a "lovely wife" with an authoritarian Korean husband, and the "same American" without sociocultural challenges of adaptation. Bob employed a patronizing tone to assign me these misaligning identities. What was more problematic was that while he was *othering* racial and ethnic minority groups, discourses about his own racial (white), gender (male) and socioeconomic (wealthy, suburban) positionalities were completely absent in all his claims as if he belonged to the default group entitled to own and dominate the discursive space without being identified. I confronted his many false assumptions through assertive positioning without much avail and left the space feeling vulnerable, dismissed, and exploited.

This interview turned out a "battlefield" (Tanggaard, 2007) with antagonistic building tasks countering each other's figured worlds. In this battlefield, I felt my positionality as a researcher was undermined when my other identities were appropriated for Bob's agenda. Bob explicitly occupied a powered position to dominate the conversation as a white male professional with a social reputation and rank. Apparently, he did not seem reflective enough to consider the implication of such intersecting positionalities. Partly, my researcher positionality allowed such imbalance in power dynamics to document his response without interjecting mine although finally I decided to intervene to challenge his misconception. Retrospectively, I asked myself, "should I have not reacted at all to minimize the impact of my perspectives even when my identities and experiences were exploited for the discriminatory agenda of the interviewee?" This has remained

a challenging question until now as it is directly related to my professional mission as an educator-scholar who advocates for culturally and linguistically diverse students and families' identities and agency.

"Represent our voices": positional convergence and affinity

The interview with Jason, the only Asian board member among 42 members in six school systems, demonstrated a very different interactive dynamic, revealing how the implicit power hierarchy across categories of gender and social rank can shift when identity convergence occurs around other categories, allowing the participants to inhabit the space as collaborative insiders. During the first half of the interview, Jason's responses were brief, nearly blunt, and mostly fact-based in a dispassionate and guarded tone. The identity Jason put forward in this phase was his social position as a "data-driven" "business guy at high levels" who was not easily approachable. In a patronizing manner, he cautioned that "you need to ask good questions. You've got my time so you better do it" since "you saw how difficult it was to get this [interview] to happen." He also asked who is in charge of the research, what is the relationship between the university team and the state agency (school board association), who I report the results to, and why the project title does not match the proposed interview topics I shared the previous day. Verbally, tonally, and with facial looks, Jason's social language marked his evaluative stance toward me as an unsophisticated novice researcher who should have been more deliberate and accurate in communicating the purpose and details of the research. On the contrary, he positioned himself as a high-ranked businessman and a representative of the school district, both of which emphasized his position as a public figure operating with accurate data.

I instantly acknowledged my oversight in what Jason pointed out and proceeded to the interview questions. Despite some tension in this opening exchange, our conversation progressed with typical turn-taking through questioning, answering, requesting clarification ("with respect to what?"), and elaborating on the given topic. Unlike Bob, Jason did not refer to my identity markers – visible or not – unless I chose to bring them up (e.g. being a parent in the same district) as a relevant context. Instead, he focused on his own identity building task through a reflective narrative of how his initial position as an *outsider* in the district was both a challenge and benefit in winning the board election. He said,

> In this particular election, I was essentially the *outsider*. I think here people tend to not move. People stay here forever. They live in the same neighborhood as their parents, their grandparents, their siblings … I was the *outsider* because I'm in my sixth year here in the district. I was the *underdog*, right? It was an uphill battle for me to try to be elected … one of the reasons I was elected I think is *I bring an experience from outside* which I think is important.

Through this statement and afterward, Jason was establishing the *significance* of bringing perspectives and "experience from outside" to the community which he described as a self-complacent "bubble" where "legacy means something" and people resist change (significance building). Simultaneously, he was presenting his *identity* as a resourceful "outsider" with professional expertise in community engagement and data-based business management for effective school board operation (identity building). For the *politics* building task, Jason attributed students' achievement gap to the global socioeconomic disparity "across the country" similar to Bob, however, reached a different conclusion about the school's role. Using an analogy of a "track race," Jason pointed out how children who start their race at the back of the line would get further behind in the race with time, arguing for early school intervention and equitable support through partnering with parents at home. In his figured world, schools need to play a critical role in closing the gap by attending to each home's circumstances and providing extra support and resources in addition to improving school practices.

During this phase, Jason's tone was dry and official for the most part as a school representative with some personal touch in his identity building as an expert outsider. Despite the earlier tension from his "domineering" and "condescending" manner (as I recorded in the fieldnote), we started to jointly build on each other's comments to expand the conversation, occasionally drawing on our shared identity as parents of children attending the district schools. My parental identity appeared to create a more reciprocal and personal turn in our interaction particularly when he responded to the topic of how the school board identified and responded to the community issues. The turn-taking became smoother with fewer questions like "with respect to what?" from Jason. We interacted not just as a researcher and a respondent but also as school community members with a shared interest in our children's education. Until this point, the impact of my other identities was still minimal in comparison to the interview with Bob in which I had little control over the way Bob interpreted my racial, ethnic, gender, and immigrant identities to support his figured worlds.

When I had only one interview question left, which was about his perception of diversity in the community and the board, a shift in Jason's tone occurred. So did with our interactional dynamic. Jason first asked me a rhetorical question, "is there [diversity]?" and continued:

> I am the *only non-white person* on the board. You tell me if you think that's a diverse board. What percentage of our community is *white versus nonwhite*, and is that represented in the board? That kind of answers it, right?

From this point forward, Jason pronounced his racial identity as the critical layer of his outsider positionality (identity building). The personalized narrative of how he had battled through various racial discriminations both at the individual and societal level from his childhood served to solidify the value of his outsider perspective (significance building) in the predominantly white community. He then claimed that his identity as the "only non-white" board member was an indispensable social good to the community (politics building). Through his lived experiences in the racialized world, he argued why diversity matters:

> What diversity offers is a perspective. *No one else on that board has the perspective* I have of going through elementary school, high school as a minority. *They can read* about it, right? *They can try* to empathize, *but they don't really know* that perspective because you haven't walked in those shoes. Does that make sense?

By using the third person pronoun ("they") and contrastive sequencing ("they can try"/"but they don't really know"), Jason highlighted the unfinished struggle of the racial minority who have been structurally marginalized in comparison to the white ("they") who may try but can't understand the predominant racism in society. At the same time, he was establishing the validity of his figured world that diversity challenges the taken-for-granted, "underlying, pervasive" ideology about race in U.S. society with new perspectives. Jason continued to expand his figured world of how society in general and the media in particular have typically portrayed Asians as "negative" who "never make it to the end," affecting both adolescent and adult Asians' identity construction and social interaction. I chimed in, as a parent of immigrant children and a fellow racial minority at this moment.

S:	Still my kids are hearing the word, chink, sometimes. From those little boys who don't even understand what it really means … So probably you can represent *our voices* in the board.
Jason:	*Of course*. It's a perspective too, right? Which is pervasive in how you view all things.
S:	*Sure*. Would you be probably then interested in the education of immigrant children, not only Asian but also those from other ethnic, racial backgrounds?
Jason:	*Yeah, of course*.
S:	Because you know what could be the challenge for their identity formation, who they are, where they belong. My children went through that stage because we're not officially American citizens or permanent residents … my first one now in high school went through a crisis, as an Asian and foreigner when she was in fifth grade.
Jason:	Well, that's the age where you start trying to discover yourself and who you are, right?
S:	*Right*. As a racial minority, it's more difficult.
Jason	It's very difficult. The stereotype of the Asian is, oh, they're passive. How active would you be if you didn't feel like you were really a part of it? That's not necessarily talked about or seen or understood. It's, oh yeah, Asians are passive.

As seen in the flow, Jason and I resonated at the personal level by sharing individual and familial challenges in combating daily racial discrimination such as derogatory racial slurs and pervasive imagery of Asians as forever foreigners. The reciprocity is reflected in the discursive devices, including the similar length of speech turns, affirmation ("of course" "sure" "right"), inclusive first-person plural pronoun ("our voices") as a sign of solidarity, and cohesive theme of recognizing the marginalized status of Asians ("stereotype of the Asian"). He no longer asked me "with respect to what?" in a blunt tone.

The racial matching (Pompper, 2010) based on our shared experience as minoritized immigrants seemed to open Jason further up to shift the conversational gear toward a mode that was personal, emotional, and reciprocal from the previously dry, official, and guarded mode. We concluded the official part of the interview with a discussion on the future prospect for Asians by mobilizing our voices in the political landscape. After the audio-recording stopped, an informal conversation continued for about an hour. The person who presented himself as a high-positioned, unapproachable businessman in a nonchalant manner turned into a completely different person who willingly shared, for a lengthy amount of time, numerous personal episodes of racism he experienced, his parenting style, and his daughters' love of Korean pop music. He even complimented my proactive attitude as a female researcher beyond the stereotype of a "passive Asian woman" by not giving up reaching out to him despite his initial unresponsiveness. He made an advisory comment that the personal experiences I shared with him during the latter part of the interview should have come earlier since it would have changed the flow to be smoother and richer. I wrote in my fieldnote "what a change from A to Z!" to describe the dramatic shift in his ways of interacting with me. With the topic of diversity, the insider moments were generated which concurrently allowed us to cross other frictional boundaries such as gender, social position, and generation through an increased willingness to discuss and express personal experiences and their deeper meanings (Buford May, 2014).

Discussion: challenges of navigating intersectional interview space

The two interviews were unique in my trajectory as a qualitative researcher and interviewer. Even before these interviews, I was aware that my identities, both visible and undisclosed, would potentially affect the dynamic of the conversation whether desired or not. However, interviews with Bob and Jason led me to reflect on such identity intersection in all its complexities. I tried to remain relatively stable as an attentive interviewer and researcher not because I believed in the neutrality of a researcher but because I wanted to focus on the interviewee's perspectives. Nonetheless, I encountered moments where I actively or reactively engaged in the conversation to either challenge or build on the interviewee's agenda. At times, I felt I had little control over the interviewee's stereotypical perceptions and bluntly biased statements that encroached on my racial, ethnic, gender, and immigrant identities in their problematic conflation. The clashing note from our dissonant identifications was disturbing during and after the interview, leaving me doubting my qualification as an interviewer. In retrospect, I recognize that I experienced extensive emotional drain from the discomfort, agitation, and resistance to being forcefully reduced to fixed attributes based on a few visible or known identifiers. The antagonistic performance of our building tasks created a limbo for my positionality as a researcher. With Jason, I experienced a different kind of limbo where our identities converged through shared experiences of living as racial minority immigrants in the U.S. In this insider space, I took an ally position with the risk of the interview process and its interpretation being skewed with an excessive sense of affinity.

In both interviews, the parent identity provided a common ground, at least partially, for us to readily enter into the research topic of school board operation in the district. With regards to the gender category, my female identity seemed to evoke both male interviewees' stereotypical assumptions about a gendered power relationship that I, as an Asian woman, would make in my

household and professional field as a submissive, passive, less vocal, and inexperienced female figure, whether a mother, wife, or researcher. These assumptions were subtly and outwardly captured in their condescending manner in addressing my various roles as well as their lexical choices that conveyed their figured worlds of Asian women. Among all, the most impactful identity intersection occurred when our racialized immigrant positionalities clashed or converged in combination with other identity categories, such as in the projection of a gendered and racialized parenting style or immigrant experience as a racialized minority. Especially, Bob associated my racial (Asian) and ethnic (Korean) identity to reinforce his framed views of education and diversity, which were contradictory and conflicting with my lived experiences. The intensity of such intersectional moments was overwhelming and thus my attempt to perform a listening researcher failed either through resistance to or resonance with the interviewee's perspective. It is notable that the sense of affinity with Jason was predicated more upon our shared experience as racialized minority and parents of Asian immigrant children than merely from our shared Asian phenotype. Race was only a remote indicator of a shared positionality until actual experiences were shared, listened to, and built upon.

In turn, there were methodological dilemmas in light of data collection and knowledge construction because such intersectional dynamics accompanied assumptions and stereotypes that possibly influenced ideas, perceptions, and feelings of the interview participants. Emotional tension, power shift, and vulnerability that I experienced as a female minority researcher within the perceived and performed hegemonic space in terms of gender, race, and/or social position, may also have influenced the process of accessing, gaining, and interpreting the interview data. Conversely, I also recognize that despite such disempowering moments during the interview, I, as the researcher, have the monopolized power in interpreting and presenting the interview experiences as I document them in this paper (Mullings, 1999).

Given these methodological limitations and challenges, it is beyond the scope of this paper to make a definitive claim on the exact ways in which the multiply intertwined positionalities of the interviewer and the interviewee affect qualitative interviews. Likewise, it is beyond my analytic capacity to neatly measure the impact of each positionality within different contexts. Instead, this personal account aims to enrich the intersectional research across gender, race, ethnicity, and professional and immigrant status to recognize the complexity, multiplicity, and challenges in qualitative interviews and their interpretations (Buford May, 2014; Roer-Strier & Sands, 2015; Tarrant, 2014). The scarcity of intersectional research on the experiences of female researchers from the racial minority and immigrant background indicates that females from such backgrounds have mostly been in the position of the researched rather than the researcher (Buford May, 2014) or that their researcher positionality has not been given proper attention. Even within the women's study literature, it is critiqued that women of color have been lumped into the category of universal womanhood or requested to focus either on gender or race (Windsong, 2018). From this study, I was reassured that my experiences as a female, transnational immigrant researcher of color defy any fixated identifiers due to the liminal nature of my positionality across national, racial, ethnic, gender, cultural, and linguistic lines in my daily relationships and research agenda along with their socio-politically charged implications.

Conclusion

This paper ends with more questions than answers to the initial question of how to be a "good" qualitative researcher in the liminal space of qualitative interviews, which has now become a poignant and nuanced question. While the power imbalance is mostly ascribed to the inherent privilege of the interviewer, how do we account for the minority researcher's experience of disempowerment and counteractive efforts in the interview space? While the under-explored realm of the participant's resistance in the deviant or "failed" interview can be valuable data for new

insights (Kizlari & Fouseki, 2018), wouldn't it be also critical to explore the researcher's resistance to the marginalizing experiences within the interview space? How can she (or should she) prioritize the researcher stance when her other positionalities are at risk? Are these positionalities preceding the interview event or being constructed and reflected because of the encounter? What methodological antidotes, if any, should be employed to mitigate the impact of intersectional positionalities (whether inter-personal or intra-personal) for the interview? Would post-reflexivity be sufficient to address the ethical dilemmas arising from research relationships that are troubling, antagonistic, and against the researcher's professional goals such as ensuring voices for the marginalized? I ask these reflective questions, because, after all, the researcher is not just a neutral instrument but she is a critical part of the research process who makes both professional and personal choices to act and interact as a particular kind of agent in each context. The inevitable intersection of positionalities, therefore, is a critical issue to re-search ("search again").

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