



SHALINI SHANKAR

Northwestern University

Creating model consumers:

Producing ethnicity, race, and class in Asian American advertising

A B S T R A C T

How does Asian American advertising contribute to the construction of race and ethnicity in the contemporary United States? In this article, I consider how executives write advertising copy and create original artwork for Asian American advertisements in ways that index brand identities. I introduce the analytic of "metaproduction," a process of material and linguistic signification that uses metacultural and metalinguistic values to connect microlevel signification of language and culture with broader social meanings and values. Analysis of ethnographic data from New York City advertising agencies shows how racialization occurs through the transformation of Asian Americans from model minority producers into model minority consumers. [*advertising, Asian American, class, ethnicity, language, media, race, semiotics*]

Fortune, wealth, luck, you know, those are all common themes. You know, I could go to a marketer [and] he may not know the Asian American market well. I could say to him, "You know, Chinese love the color red and the number eight and the number nine and gold, and so here's our ad." And the client would think, "Oh wow! I'm really touching this Asian American market now, because I've got all the cues that resonate with them, right? You know, I got the red, I got the dragon, I got the eight, I got the nine." And then when I see it, it's just this cliché thing, you know? It doesn't say anything to me.

—Steve, account executive, Asian Collaboration Advertising and Marketing Agency, New York¹

Sitting in his modern, minimalist, loft-style office on Madison Avenue, Steve conveyed a central tension in the creation and development of advertising aimed at Asian American audiences. He and his client bring conflicting notions to bear on the creative process, in that each believes a different set of signs will be most appealing to Asian audiences in the United States. According to Steve's performance of his client, the latter is drawn to signifiers that are neither American nor Asian American per se; they are perhaps best understood as icons that signify Asia in the broad U.S. imagination. Although icons such as dragons and numerology certainly could conjure images of Asia for Asian Americans more particularly, Steve indicates that he, like his audiences, would find them simplistic and ineffective. Executives like Steve pride themselves on avoiding icons that might diminish the complex subjectivity of Asians in the United States. They approach their creative work on a "meta" level that reveals their knowledge of broader historical and cultural narratives about Asian Americans, their familiarity with language varieties and uses of speech, and their ability to create indexes for different Asian ethnic groups. All the while, they aim to please clients who expect to maintain brand identity and to see evidence of Asian American language and culture that will reach this emerging market.

In this article, I examine the ideological underpinnings of racial and ethnic formation while also foregrounding the processes and practices of media production. To connect numerous levels of development and production and draw attention to the impact of finished ads on mass-mediated racial and ethnic formation, I introduce the concept of “metaproduction.” As an analytic, metaproduction offers a way to understand how Asian American–niche advertising executives transform census and marketing data into representations suitable for commercial consumption by populating them with indexes of ethnicity and class. Executives’ goal in this media production is to compel corporate clients wishing to reach this niche market to look beyond iconic signs that conjure Asia in mainstream U.S. culture and to opt instead for those signs that index ways of being Asian American. Through metaproduction, executives like Steve are remaking the racial category of “Asian American” and the ethnic groups it encompasses in the neoliberal United States. Neoliberal notions of success and diversity invite a theoretical framework that can connect broader public-sphere ideologies with the microlevel cultural and linguistic work of advertising development and production. One outcome I trace here is a shift in the perception of Asian Americans from model minority producers in the U.S. economy to sophisticated, upwardly mobile model minority consumers.

In what follows, I flesh out the theoretical underpinnings of metaproduction, present two case studies drawn from my ethnographic research in ad agencies, and offer an analysis of racial and ethnic formation in media production. I analyze discussions among “creatives” who are responsible for generating concepts, original artwork, and writing copy for ads; agency executives’ interactions with clients, those corporate entities who commission advertising; and the activities of other industry personnel, including account executives who oversee the entire process, producers responsible for casting, directing, and postproduction of print, TV, radio, and Internet ads, and media buyers who place ads in various media.

Metaproduction and message

Metaproduction is a process of material and linguistic signification that uses values already deemed “meta” in some sense, specifically, those that are metacultural and metalinguistic. Metaculture, or reflections about culture, and meta-language, talk about language and its use, tend to be routine parts of advertising production, but the creation of racially and ethnically specific communications requires a heightened degree of reflexivity. Just as the metalevel has been useful in theorizing the consumption of media, it is also quite relevant to understanding how signs are generated, vetted, and put into circulation in the production of

commercial communications (see also Davila 2001; Foster 2007; Kemper 2001; Mazzarella 2003; Moeran 1996a).² As an analytic, metaproduction connects microlevel cultural and linguistic signification with broader categories of brand identity and racial meaning. The notion of “meta” is well suited to capture the time–space compression of late capitalism characterized by the acceleration of communication and the circulation of cultural forms in the neoliberal era (Harvey 1989; Jameson 1991). Greg Urban observes that the metacultural “focuses attention on the cultural thing, helps to make it an object of interest, and hence, facilitates its circulation . . . metaculture is a supplement to culture” (2001:4). Also remarking on the metacultural dimensions of advertising development and production, Daniel Miller (1997) contends that, in the Trinidadian case, “metasymbols” such as Coca-Cola should be considered not simply material culture but also the debate about it. The metalevel is especially revealing because it involves the coordination of different moments of signification (Lee 1997:201). Nowhere is this more evident than in language, in which the metalinguistic is a level at which speakers express socially informed assessments of their own utterances and those of others. Building on Roman Jakobson’s conception of the “metalingual,” the ways in which speakers reflect on language, Michael Silverstein’s (1993) discussion of “metapragmatics” links the relevance of talk about language use to broader social formations. Metaproduction uses such assessments of language and culture as a starting point for the creation of racial and ethnic representations.

Metaproduction here attends not only to the deployment of linguistic and material signs in advertisements but also to the political economy that underpins Asian American advertising production. In industry parlance, the term category “niche market” includes agencies that create and produce advertising and marketing for specific segments of the U.S. population. Asian American advertising is considered niche market because it is expected to contain cultural and linguistic signs that appeal to Americans of Chinese, Korean, South Asian,³ Filipino, and Vietnamese descent—a complicated assumption that I investigate here. Contrasting yet overlapping with niche markets, the category of “general market” (GM) ostensibly encompasses all groups in the United States. The “in-language” and “in-culture” ads that Asian American executives produce differ from general market advertising in terms of language, culture, media placement, and, sometimes, overall creative approach. As talent for hire, executives are asked to generate complex indexes within narrow constraints of time and budget. Managing and furthering brand identity certainly play a role in this process, as I discuss to some degree here, but what metaproduction reveals most clearly is the formation of mass-mediated representations of ethnicity and race through the manipulation of signs.⁴

In the medium of advertising, metaproduction is not only focused on content but also on form. Jane H. Hill (2000) develops Roman Jacobson's concept of "poetics" to consider "message" in ways that draw attention to nonverbal communication along with the "word." She elaborates on the concept of "message" as it pertains to the performance of politicians: "Message includes talk and text, but it is dominated by the poetic function, with thematic material encapsulated in sound bites and slogans. The construction of message lies in the realm of art, with colors, lighting, music, costume, posture, and a variety of other signaling media at least as important as text itself" (Hill 2000:264). Also interested in message, Silverstein discusses "creativity in the poetics of advertising" (2005:12) by emphasizing the affective dimensions of the propositional claims of ads, what Richard Parmentier (1994) has described as "puffery." Aspects of message, poetics, and beyond are integral to metaproduction. In my case, metacultural and metalinguistic levels work in tandem because Asian American advertising is marked both culturally and linguistically. Language, already a rich site of inquiry in advertising (Lefkowitz 2003; Silverstein 2006), is dynamically intertwined with visual elements to signify additional levels of meaning.

Creatives do not simply reflect existing values about race and ethnicity but approach the process of signification as one in which they generate new indexical values or recontextualize existing ones for particular purposes. The meanings speakers associate with the indexical values of utterances create tiered levels of meanings, or "indexical orders" (Silverstein 2003). In indexical orders, metaprismatic assessments and other types of metalanguage shape indexical values about language use, such that each subsequent order builds on a previous one (Silverstein 2003:196). Utilizing the concept of "indexical orders" allows one to consider cultural indexes alongside linguistic ones and how they interact to create message. Accordingly, message and metaproduction consider both material and linguistic elements in the creation of semiotic meaning (see Cavanaugh 2005; Keane 2003; Moore 2003; Shankar 2006, 2008). Metaproduction thus offers a lens through which to understand the complex interplay of linguistic and material signs as well as their success and efficacy in advertising.

Creating the genre of Asian American advertising

Executives aspire to reach Asian American consumers through specialized communications that transform general market brand identities into ethnically and racially specific communications for Asians in the United States. Ethnographic studies of advertising have illustrated the localized ways in which this industry does not simply reflect existing values but actively formulates and creates them (Mazzerella 2003; Miller 1997). Likewise, executives

make the category of "Asian American" and the five most profitable ethnic groups it encompasses—Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Filipino, and South Asian—meaningful and recognizable among themselves, their clients, and their audiences. Understanding regional ideologies, values, and norms specific to a target audience is paramount to effectively constructing consumers and markets (Davila 2001; Foster 2007; Kemper 2001; Malefyt and Moeran 2003; Moeran 1996a). Asian American executives make ads that are "in-language," meaning they include an Asian language or Asian variety of English, and "in-culture," meaning they include nonlinguistic signs that represent one or more Asian American ethnic groups.

Advertising agencies that cater exclusively to the Asian American market emerged in the mid-1980s and are concentrated in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. These ten or so major agencies offer a range of services that include producing advertisements for print (ethnic newspapers and magazines), television (local access cable and satellite channels), the web, and social media platforms (Twitter and smartphone applications). Additionally, they do direct marketing and e-mail blasts (commonly known as junk mail and spam, respectively) as well as community-level event sponsorship and public relations. Goods and services categories such as automotive, telecommunications, liquor, insurance, banking, casinos, and fast food have been especially invested in marketing directly to Asian American consumers. The majority of executives working at these agencies are themselves first- or second-generation Asian Americans, and many are fluent in one of the languages used for writing advertising copy (Hindi, Korean, Mandarin, Tagalog, or Vietnamese). This ethnolinguistic heritage forms a major part of the expertise these advertising executives project, a point I develop in greater detail elsewhere (Shankar n.d.).

The two case studies below are based on observations and audio recordings I collected during four months of research conducted in 2009 at "Asian Ads." Asian Ads is a 75-person pan-Asian advertising agency that was co-founded in 1986 by three first-generation Chinese Americans and is currently owned by one of them. On a daily basis, I observed and audio-recorded creative brainstorms, account status meetings, production activities, client calls, and industry events. This work was part of a multiyear, multisited research project I began in 2008 that includes fieldwork in Asian American ad agencies and their industry events and more limited fieldwork in general market agencies. As a university professor, I found my way into Asian American advertising agencies with relative ease. I used the Asian American Advertising Association's website to contact major agencies in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Eight of the leading Asian American agencies were exceedingly gracious in inviting "the professor" to visit them and conduct interviews. At some, my visit was brief,

involving an extended interview with a single representative and viewing an “agency reel” of the firm’s best work. At others, I spent several days observing meetings, production sessions, and interviewing numerous executives. New York City-based Asian Ads allowed me to conduct longer-term fieldwork and to audio-record meetings, and I have included transcripts from that research here. I was required to sign nondisclosure agreements at every agency in which I spent an extended period of time, and I have adhered to their terms by using pseudonyms and omitting information deemed proprietary. I believe people allowed me access to their rarified corporate world because very little work has been done on this relatively new niche in U.S. advertising and because my research is funded by the National Science Foundation, is for educational purposes, and has no commercial affiliation. As a South Asian American conversant and literate in Hindi, I best understood communications made for this audience but closely followed all accounts I was permitted to observe. This was feasible because in this multilingual workplace, meetings were conducted in English and English back translations (verbatim translations of phrases originally in English but now in-language) were provided for clients and coworkers.

“Allied Country Dividend” print ad

Brief 1. Allied Country Dividend brief.

Creative Agency Brief	
<i>Client</i>	Allied Country
<i>Agency</i>	Asian Ads, New York, NY
<i>Brand managers</i>	Mike and Janet
<i>Project</i>	Dividend Ad: In-language, in-culture print ad for Chinese, Korean, and South Asian American segments.
<i>Overview</i>	This is a campaign for financial services that emphasizes monetary dividends.
<i>Objective</i>	We want to increase brand presence among target segments so that they use Allied Country for their financial service needs.
<i>Target audience</i>	Primary target will be men, 35–64-year-olds, with household incomes of \$80k+.
<i>Reasons to believe and buy</i>	Allied Country is a trusted company that can help build and plan your financial future.

Note. The briefs that appear in this article are simulations of the originals, per the terms of my nondisclosure agreement with the agency.

In a print ad campaign for Allied Country Insurance and Financial Services (hereafter, AC), the client asked Asian Ads to produce versions of a general market ad for the Chinese, Korean, and South Asian American market “segments,” as they are called in this industry. Asian

Ads had an excellent relationship with AC, which regularly commissioned ads and even sent representatives to the annual Asian American Advertising Federation conference to demonstrate its investment in Asian American marketing. In some AC campaigns, those on the account team had been given free rein to generate original concepts for the layout, message, and style of the ad, provided they maintain brand identity—an evaluation reserved for the client. For this campaign, however, AC had requested Asian Ads to make versions of a general market print ad for each segment. Once the account supervisor received the agency brief from the client (see Brief 1), head of creative An Rong delegated the job to three members of his department. On this job, Jun Yi, a first-generation Taiwanese American man, Esther, a 1.5-generation Chinese American woman, and Andrew, a first-generation Filipino American man, worked together on a creative brainstorm. Presenting the “concept” of the ad, or what would be communicated, was an important step in the Asian Ads creative process. After creatives Esther and Jun Yi worked independently to generate ideas, they met with copywriter Andrew to discuss them. The team convened in a casual meeting area in the front of the office, their ideas and sentences punctuated by the chimes of approaching elevators, which opened directly into the loft-style office.

In their meeting, the team searched for the most relevant ways to represent Chinese American ethnicity while also preserving the message of the general market print ad. They began by distilling the key messages of the GM ad and considering how they might tailor them for Chinese Americans. The broader aim was to generate creative concepts that could later be adapted for Korean and South Asian American segments, but the work at hand was to create a winning Chinese American version of what the client called the “dividend ad.” The very notion of “dividends” signals a level of financial security and well-being that might be a distant memory for many Americans in the current economic climate, but the task was to present this idea as a natural and unquestioned part of everyday Chinese American life. Both Jun Yi and Esther had studied the GM print ad, which featured a cheerful white father and son dressed in matching white oxford shirts and rolled-up khakis, walking on a log of driftwood at the beach with their arms outstretched for balance. They brought several hand-sketched concepts that conveyed the main themes they associated with the notion of “dividend,” including security, prosperity, and empowerment. Each concept also featured a round visual element that would allow for the incorporation of AC’s circular logo—an innovative flourish that the clients loved in Asian Ads’ previous work.

At this stage of the metaproduction process, Esther and Jun Yi presented concepts that reflected the themes of the GM ad in ways that would resonate with Chinese Americans. For instance, “risk and reward” was

represented in one image by a rock climber ascending a cliff, a large circular knot holding him steady, and in another by whitewater rafters in circular rafts holding their paddles triumphantly up in the air, signaling their safety. Another theme, "skill and accomplishment," was conveyed by two ice skaters "making a figure eight on the ice and signifying infinite peace of mind," Esther explained. Jun Yi added to this category by offering sketches of a father teaching his son how to hit a golf ball out of a sand trap, a hand holding Chinese exercise balls against pressure points to build strength, and a gymnast balancing on a beam and exhibiting agility. A third set of images that directly addressed the theme "benefit" included a child eating an ice cream cone, a woman in a difficult yoga pose, and a father and son peering into a bird's nest filled with three small eggs. The team agreed that all of these had strong potential and that it was time to call in creative director An Rong to narrow down the list.

As in other metacultural and metalinguistic assessments, evaluation and judgment constitute an integral part of metaproduction. In this case, a critical discussion ensued about which ads would have the greatest resonance with a Chinese American audience. Andrew, the copywriter, reminded the team that they needed to find a concept that "works across different Asian segments and conveys security without signaling insecurity." As they waited for An Rong, Esther cycled through the short list of concepts by embodying a Chinese American consumer and voicing engagements with each creative idea. She mused, "The rock presents risk, but the knot is security, so I choose [AC]." Narrating each concept, she tested the efficacy of her metaproduction work by assessing whether the correct reading of signs led to the "choice" of AC. Throughout, the team offered critical feedback to one another about select concepts, such as the ice cream and yoga, which showed end results but not how one could achieve them. Esther asserted that the idea of yoga could work for all three segments, but Jun Yi countered that it was irrelevant to financial services and did not address the notion of "dividend." When creative director An Rong finally arrived, he preempted Esther and Jun Yi's presentation with his own reading of the general market ad, which he called "the sea." Remarking that the sea is dangerous and unstable, but one can still enjoy it, he strategized, "we need to show some unpredictable environment but the family still enjoying it." The quizzical expressions on Esther's and Jun Yi's faces suggested that their reading of the GM ad had been somewhat different than that of their creative director, but they nonetheless proceeded with the presentation. After taking in the concepts, An Rong was sharp and focused in his critique. Arguing that rock climbing offered little cultural insight, he challenged, "Is this in-culture? Why not just use the general market ad?" Jun Yi conceded that it did not have any apparent significance for Chinese American audiences and, unlike the GM

ad, it did not meld notions of family and security. They all agreed, however, that golf would provide an ideal concept because of its popularity among Chinese and Korean Americans.

With Asian Ads's initial stage of the metaproduction process completed, the team faced the task of obtaining client approval for two print ad concepts on their short list. On a conference call with AC, account executive Sunil began by priming his client: "They are gonna sell their concept to you today, if you will buy it!" Asian Ads cycled through the concepts the team had sent to AC in advance, beginning with the golf idea. The client swiftly and politely declined, explaining that it had already been done too many times in AC's GM ads. A wave of disappointment was palpable in the Asian Ads conference room, especially as the team had found this message to be particularly apt for Chinese American and Korean American audiences. The bird nest concept, however, seemed to hold the client's imagination longer, and Jun Yi seized the opportunity to narrate the concept's indexical value: "All their hard work for the family, for their loved ones, the bird nest is protection. First-generation immigrants want to make a good future for their children. The father and son look at the bird nest, and [AC] gives you the benefit and strength to protect your family." Approval of a second concept followed the client's acceptance of the bird nest concept: The team agreed to the client's recommendation to use a graphic design program to modify the general market "sea" ad by splicing Asian American faces onto it. In conjunction with the Chinese copy, the client thought the visual would suffice, and the ad could be produced on schedule and within budget.

In this campaign, executives chose signs to represent Chinese Americans in sophisticated, cosmopolitan ways that also convey the essence of the AC brand. Like the general market ad that features a middle-class man who is able to reap the benefit of financial dividends by spending leisure time with his son at the beach, the nest signifies a lifestyle in which Asian Americans already flush with capital would be well advised to manage this wealth effectively. Similar to the now-Chinese American father walking with his son on the beach in oxford shirts and rolled-up khaki pants, the Chinese American father who takes time to explore the wonders of nature with his son is pleased with the boy's reaction to the perfect robin's eggs they find. Also notable in this case of metaproduction is the partial success of the agency's creative strategies. For instance, the client rejected the golf concept on the grounds that it had already been used in the GM ads. The need for differentiation in the Asian American ads, then, is reflected both in the inclusion of individuals who index particular Asian American ethnic groups—in this case, Chinese Americans—and in scenarios that will resonate with the ads' audiences. Although the rejection of the golf ad was something of a setback, the

Polysemy of the bird's nest allowed for multiple indexical readings.

The genre of Asian American advertising

The AC case illustrates several processes, including the emergence of Asian American advertising as a genre. If one considers general market advertising in the United States and Chinese advertising in China as genres with conventional characteristics and features that both resonate, to an extent, with Chinese Americans, then Asian American advertising targeting that group fills an intertextual gap; that is, it emerges between these two well-defined genres and draws from them to produce a third. Intertextuality, a process by which elements from one text are referenced in another in ways that index the former and may be resignified as a result, contributes to the creation of genre in this way: "By choosing to make certain features explicit (and particularly by foregrounding some elements through repetition and metapragmatic framing), producers of discourse actively (re)construct and reconfigure genres" (Bauman and Briggs 1992:584). Producers of Asian American advertising, likewise, select and showcase features from advertising genres in Asian countries, the United States, and other relevant sources.

Conventions and content from general market advertising cannot be altogether overlooked, as brand identity must be preserved across genres. Chinese representations of family, security, and financial planning are signified in ways that dovetail with AC's general market brand identity. Recall the rejection, for instance, of the golf idea that Asian Ads thought would work well for Chinese Americans but that AC thought had already become overdone in its general market campaigns. Creating representations that are in-culture, as An Rong pointed out, in this case led to the use of certain ethnically marked signs, such as Chinese American actors and Mandarin text. It also meant re-creating genre features from the general market campaign, such as fathers and sons exploring nature. In other executions for AC, Asian Ads created far more marked indexes of ethnicity, such as a traditional Indian wedding scene and a jade pendant handed down between generations of women. In those ads, as in the AC ad, the genre of Asian American advertising is most effective when executives are able to find the right indexical references to convey general market brand identity.

The use of ethnically marked signs, as in advertising elsewhere (see Bhatia 1992; Piller 2001), is indeed an important way in which the genre of Asian American advertising is distinguishable from general market advertising. Arlene Davila (2001) skillfully demonstrates how Latino executives downplay key ethnonational and linguistic differences in favor of a more uniform cultural and linguistic identity, and she makes a compelling case for the remaking of the Latino

for marketing and consumption. In her research and mine, clients value the inclusion of recognizable emblems of ethnicity in ads because it enables them to justify spending advertising dollars to reach niche audiences, but executives note the shortcomings in this approach. Steve put it to me like this: "How can you touch them in this 'Asian' way, but be relevant, not cliché, and not overdone?" The AC ad offers an example of how this process worked smoothly for the most part and demonstrates how the client, like the customer, is always right. Even though executives would prefer to stay with their creative strategies, they change course as a matter of survival.

Reflexivity is thus a central part of the metaproduct process, among creatives, between creatives and their director, and between agency and client. Assessments about culture, language, and what constitutes ethnicity are articulated, and choices are made about the efficacy of representations. The political economy of the advertising process contributes to the conditions by which creatives sometimes rely on indexical shortcuts, and metaproduction allows for this type of shorthand for particular values. In this sense, the messages produced fall somewhere on a continuum between essentialist and antiessentialist representations. In the AC case, creativity and originality that are prized in general market advertising are openly curtailed by constraints imposed by clients with limited advertising budgets and established brand identities. The ads should exhibit the right sensibilities—material and linguistic—of Asian American culture and language but also the correct brand message, one that correlates with the general market brand identity. To produce the genre of Asian American advertising, then, executives deentextualize and reentextualize elements from genres of general market and Asian advertising.

Executives additionally define the genre of Asian American advertising through their promotion of it as a vital and effective way to reach Asian American consumers. For instance, many were quick to explain to clients, and to me, that ads created for audiences in Asia do not resonate with Asian audiences in the United States, even though they may feature faces, voices, and ways of speaking and interacting that index a degree of familiarity. They also pointed out that general market ads lack the cultural and linguistic markers that are signature elements of Asian American niche advertising and are, accordingly, less effective forms of communication. On the one hand, this disposition is typical of agency executives who want to convince their corporate clients that only specialized communication will effectively reach consumers (see Mazzarella 2003; Miller 1997 for similar arguments). On the other hand, the link between racialized representation and consumerism is so fundamental to niche marketing that there is something substantive to be learned from the process of creating a marketable semiotic link between ideas, texts, and the Asian American

consumer's wallet. The Chinese American case I discuss here, as well as the South Asian American case I discuss next, further contribute to the emergence and definition of the Asian American genre in advertising.

Creating model consumers

Ad executives do not simply use racialized identities but actively create them through the process of making advertising. If, in fact, "we do not yet know all that is involved in the essentialization process whereby such a metadiscursive category—a category of contingently achieved role inhabitance—is projected onto the world" (Silverstein and Urban 1996:8), then metaproduction can contribute to understanding how this essentialization is accomplished. What is at stake, then, is the "continual back and forth interplay between the metadiscursive category and the actual instances of discourse that are used to categorize and interpret it" (Silverstein and Urban 1996:8). As a fairly new category that has been featured in media since the mid-1960s, Asian American advertising is playing the double role of inhabiting the category as well as projecting it into society. Executives use earlier discourses of racialized capitalism along with current ideologies of neoliberalism to shape representations of the Asian American consumer. Numerous insights have been offered about the rise of neoliberalism and its attendant cultural shifts (see di Leonardo 2008; Goldberg 2009; Harvey 2005); here I am most concerned with the remaking of public discourse that results from the production of racial representation. In neoliberal discourse, meanings of race and ethnicity that are rooted in political economy are recoded simply as "differences" that can be considered equal (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001). Neoliberalism especially idealizes the notion that individuals can thrive in capitalism without state assistance and that market deregulation creates opportunities for unlimited financial growth and accumulation (Harvey 2005).

Neoliberalism is a contemporary logic in a racialized capitalism that has long positioned Asian Americans as ideal, especially compared to other racial minorities. Introduced in 1966 by the *New York Times* and *U.S. News and World Report*, the model minority stereotype portrayed Asian Americans as self-sufficient, good citizens at a time when the state was looking to cut social services overall. Asian Americans were lauded as productive members of U.S. society, whereas other minority populations, especially African Americans, were unfavorably depicted for their reliance on state welfare (Kim 1999; Prashad 2000). Attributes such as strong familial ties, educational attainment, good citizenship, and economic mobility meld easily with market research and with executives' use of 2000 and 2010 census data to show that Asian Americans have the highest per capita income, are a rapidly growing population with

spending power in the billions, and have been less affected by the economic downturn than the average American. In other words, they are ideal consumers to target through specialized advertising. Account supervisor Suzie, a first-generation Chinese American woman at a New York City agency, underscores the importance of contemporary Asian American representations that reflect these ideologies:

Our clients always want us to have cultural nuances in the ads, but we don't want to do it too much. You want to think about your audience as modern customers that are really in sync with today's appeal and today's look. You don't really want to put too much of these so-called cultural nuances in there, but rather, something that speaks to the family, because Asians are very family-centric and they really focus on their kids' education. It could still be very modern and not outdated. We don't want to seem outdated.

Suzie's comments, like Steve's, suggest the existence of competing representations based on different signs that ad executives and clients each promote for different purposes. To best reach their Asian American audiences, executives avoid obvious icons of Asia, what Suzie calls "so-called cultural nuances," such as numerology or Chinese characters, that might index outdated notions of what it means to be Chinese in China as well as in the United States. By contrast, the model minority stereotype offers the potential to provide a modern narrative from which to create indexical signs that valorize family and education. In the AC ad, the model minority stereotype allows for the depiction of second-order indexical meanings (Silverstein 2003). For instance, the nest egg featured in the ad fits perfectly with the neoliberal ideology of self-sufficiency and financial wherewithal. Likewise, the sea ad also indexes class mobility and leisure through its tasteful depiction of beach activity. These representations reinforce the model minority stereotype while they also affirm the current success of Asian Americans. As refined, cultured individuals who are connected to nature and the corporate world, these Asian Americans are able to enjoy upper-middle-class life in ways that still prioritize family. These are not huddled masses of immigrants simply yearning for a better life; rather, they are middle-class professionals who are being shown the value of financial planning. Ad executives expect their clients to appreciate the complex subjectivities indexed through these signs, but clients can counter with their own signs of what they believe will work better.

The Deluxis "Winter Sales Event" print ad

Creating a South Asian American print ad for the "Deluxis Winter Sales Event" should have been a fairly smooth process, considering the Asian Ads team had done

Brief 2. Deluxis Winter Sales Event brief.

Creative Agency Brief	
<i>Client</i>	Deluxis Automobiles
<i>Agency</i>	Asian Ads, New York, NY
<i>Brand managers</i>	Mike and Josie
<i>Project</i>	Winter Sales Event: In-language, in-culture print ad for South Asian American segment.
<i>Overview</i>	This is a campaign for the December holiday sales event.
<i>Objective</i>	We want our South Asian American consumers to buy a Deluxis car during a season they may not associate with holidays or car buying.
<i>Target audience</i>	Primary target will be 35–59-year-old men, with total household incomes of \$100k+. The audience is familiar with the luxury car market and may already own one.
<i>Reasons to believe and buy</i>	Deluxis is a high-performing luxury automobile. We want them to know about our new financing options and cash back incentives.

a number of well-received Deluxis ads for Chinese American and South Asian American audiences. Asian Ads had been working with Deluxis for about a year and a half and was very familiar with the luxury automaker's brand identity and style of advertising. Asian Ads worked in tandem with Latino and African American agencies to promote Deluxis cars to a broad multicultural market. For the winter sales event, each multicultural agency was asked to create in-culture and in-language copy for a print ad sent by Deluxis's general market agency—a glamour shot of two silver cars on an icy surface in front of a bright blue sky, large snowflakes, and trees with ice-coated fronds (see Brief 2). The GM ad read, "This holiday season, celebrate two decades of inspired performance," and the multicultural agencies were asked to keep this message as consistent as possible in their in-language versions. Of the three versions Asian Ads was commissioned to make—Chinese Mandarin, Chinese Cantonese, and South Asian—I focus on the third, both because I understand Hindi and because it was the most contentious. The executives on the account included creative Stanley, a first-generation Chinese American man; account executive Joyce, a first-generation Chinese American woman; and freelance copywriter Jayshree, a South Asian American woman who had previously worked on Deluxis ads. The account team also asked Priya, a South Asian American account executive, to assist because Asian Ads did not then have a creative from this ethnic group.

Because the visuals were predetermined, the team focused on writing copy with metalinguistic connotations that would work well with the featured imagery. Jayshree admitted to me that it was a formidable challenge to find suitable terms for certain concepts and words in the GM ad, including snowflakes and a winter "holiday season." Of

course, many South Asian Americans had experienced winter in the United States, but snowflakes are not a preferred indexical sign for this audience. Moreover, the December holiday season is not one that most Hindu or Muslim South Asian Americans associate with celebration in South Asia. Nonetheless, some culturally relevant sign was required to compel this group to embrace the consumerism of the Judeo-Christian holidays. On Monday of the week the ad copy was to be submitted to the client, Jayshree remarked to account executive Sunil and me that the Deluxis copy had " vexed her all weekend." She explained that car companies rely on their winter sales events and that a seasonal promotion was a perfectly natural idea for Deluxis but that she was having trouble generating a catchy phrase that closely resembled the GM copy and that also had the right cultural resonance. Her copy, "*Dhoon machao, jashn manao! Yeh hai* two decades of inspired performance," which she translated as "Have a blast, celebrate! This is (here's to) two decades of inspired performance," was sent to the client for review.

In a conference call with the client, the indexical meanings of this utterance came under intense scrutiny and debate. About 28 minutes into the call, when the client had already approved the Latino concept as well as the two Chinese concepts, he voiced hesitation and concern about the English back translation of the South Asian American copy. In the following excerpt, Stanley, the creative, has just finished reading the transliterated Hindi copy for Mike, the client, and after a sizable pause, Mike responds. Priya, the only Hindi speaker on the call, attempts to address Mike's concerns.⁵

Excerpt: "Have a blast!"

1. Mike: Okay, so the: have a blast, celebration, is that,
2. what is the context in which that term would typically
3. be used?
4. (Team looks to Priya, who takes it as a cue to speak)
5. Priya: Um, typically for Indians, celebration and
6. festivity is larger than life, it means a punch line.
7. So "Dhoon machao! Jashn manao!" it's not as if you're
8. **going partying** and you're saying "Have a blast!"
9. It's more the background for have a blast, it's more
10. celebration, festivity. It's an expression, it's an
11. emotion, it's larger than life, happy. Being Indian
12. myself, I relate. When I read the line, I relate to it very
13. well. I think it is happy. It's happy thoughts, and
14. you read the line, and you immediately connect it
15. to what the message is, even in the body copy.
16. Mike: So it's basically saying "celebrate this, this event"
17. cele[brate, come celebrate with us]
18. Priya: [yes, right. Yes, celebrate the winter sales event.
19. Be a part of it, have a blast.
20. Mike: And this is kind of arguing with that, but I guess

21. I shouldn't.
22. Many: ((Laughter))
23. Mike: My question is more content as I don't really
24. understand, the content feels a little over the top.
25. (Team looks to Priya again)
26. Priya: It's actually not **too** over the top. The actual
27. general market headline is "This holiday season,
28. celebrate two decades of inspired performance."
29. The Indian line is actually very similar to that, in fact
30. it's almost the same, it's just a little happier. Indians
31. are a little, it's a very common expression,
32. many Bollywood movies have this expression, it's
33. actually very common. I mean I- even in India
34. you see this line very commonly used, so I don't
35. think it's **very** over the top.

In this excerpt, Mike and the Asian Ads team introduce different indexical values for "Dhoom machao, jashn manao!" Even though Mike politely prefacing his disapproval with "and this is kind of arguing with that, but I guess I shouldn't" (line 20–21), he nonetheless cannot reconcile the back translation of "Have a blast!" with the Deluxis brand identity and calls it "a little over the top" (lines 24). In response, Priya defends the phrase's relevance and offers a justification for the choice. As a smart young executive with a newly minted marketing degree from a prestigious U.S. university, Priya seems to understand that what Mike is getting at is context: Is the phrase in question too irreverent or déclassé for this luxury brand? She attempts to clarify the connotations of the phrase in lines 5–15 though in doing so betrays her recent college graduate status: "It's not as if you're going partying and you're saying 'Have a blast'... it's more celebration, festivity." Additionally, she makes linkages with Bollywood and downplays the idea that the phrase is "over the top," but Mike remains skeptical. The call ended with Mike indicating that he will again consult his Indian American colleagues at Deluxis (who work in information technology, not marketing) to see how they respond to the copy. Asian Ads was soon notified that the client's colleagues did not respond favorably and that revised copy was required as soon as possible.

In this instance of metaproduction, Asian Ads' message was deemed potentially incongruous with the Deluxis brand and the identity of the intended consumer. Asif Agha's (1998, 2007) extensive investigations of the ways in which people make sense of speakers' identities offer another way to consider this outcome. He asserts, "Since our ideas about the identities of others are ideas about pragmatic phenomena, they are in principle metapragmatic constructs. In particular, such ideas are metapragmatic stereotypes about pragmatic phenomena" (Agha 1998:151). As values that are openly reportable, contestable, and consciously grasped, metapragmatic stereotypes of Asian

American speakers are used to imagine audiences. What the average consumer sounds like and how he or she would respond to the talk of others are at stake here. Even though the Asian Ads team did not perceive a disconnect between their message and the brand identity, the client did. So did Sunil, the other Hindi speaker in the office. After learning that the client had rejected the team's idea, he joked quietly with Priya and me that for the summer sales event, "Jashn manao!" should be reworded "Garmi banao!"—"Make heat!"—which, of course, would be even more inappropriate for Deluxis because of its lewd connotations.

The case was particularly vexing for Jayshree because the client loved the copy she had written for earlier ads. For instance, in an ad for the G-series sedan fall sales event, the client had approved the playful phrase "G is for *josh*." A Hindi-Urdu speaker reading this ad may appreciate the clever play on the phoneme /j/ and its bivalent meaning in both English and Hindi. In the ad, the English *G* refers to the featured sedan model, and the same phoneme begins the word *josh*, which means "excitement." In this successful use of a metalinguistic sign, the second-order indexical value connotes sophistication and literacy. The intended consumer is not only wealthy enough to purchase a luxury sedan but is also educated enough to be lured in by the wordplay in the ad. The message is refined, and the consumer is expected to be the same. To get to this place in the winter sales event, Jayshree offered a new version in which she removed "dhoom machao" and retooled the rest of the copy to read "Jashn manao! This is two decades of inspired performance," and translated it as "Celebrate! This is two decades of inspired performance." She also offered a second option, both of which were sent to the client for review.

During the next conference call, the Asian Ads team and client were finally able to agree on a metalinguistic sign that offered pleasing indexical meanings to both parties. Stanley described revisions made to the first option, "jashn manao," and then moved on to the second: "Additionally we also came up with **another** option, which if we pair with the visual, this would be an elegant visual, and that line reads '*Is haseen mausam*, celebrate two decades of inspired performance.' The back translation is 'This beautiful, festive season, celebrate two decades of inspired performance.' And also with this I think we feel like we captured the [Deluxis] brand."

Stanley underscored those qualities indexed by the new copy and linked them to the visuals and the Deluxis brand identity. His use of the adjectives *elegant* and *beautiful* stands in stark contrast to "have a blast." To a Hindi-Urdu speaker, the poetic value of "*Is haseen mausam*" is indisputable. *Haseen* is an Urdu word conveying stunning beauty, and *mausam* is a word for weather with positive connotations of harvest, fertility, and traditional celebration. Both work well with the notion of a well-educated,

wealthy, and discerning South Asian American consumer. The client ultimately approved this copy, and the Asian Ads team was pleased with and relieved by the outcome.

In this example of metaproduction, executives and clients clashed over the metaprismatic meaning of signs. Asian Ads considered the phrase “Dhoom machao, jashn manao!” to be an apt signifier of the wealth and refinement connoted by a luxury car. Hindi-Urdu speakers might positively associate it with weddings, lively festivals such as *holi*, in which colored powder is thrown on passersby, or even the short-lived Disney Channel India children’s show whose title bears part of the phrase (*Dhoom Machao!*). But in this instance, the client countered with its own second-order indexical meaning based on the English back translation and internal opinions to which the Asian Ads team was not privy.

Noteworthy here is the process by which the genre of Asian American advertising is created through the continuity it forms with ongoing representations of Asian Americans as model minorities. Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs note the “leakiness” and contingency of genre and argue, “Some elements of contextualization creep in, fashioning indexical connections to the ongoing discourse, social interaction, broader social relations, and the particular historical juncture(s) at which the discourse is produced and received” (1992:585). Drawing on Silverstein (1993), they add that metapragmatics must be considered when seeking to understand the production and reception of genre and that such a process may suppress some forms of intertextual variation and expand others (Bauman and Briggs 1992:586–587). In keeping with the elegant, refined identity of Deluxis, the Hindi phrase ultimately chosen offers second-order indexical values of education and sophistication. As Stanley’s comments suggest, these are attributes of the modern identities the team wished to portray. Moreover, the ad offers new indexical meanings about seasons and holidays that are distinctly South Asian American.

The genre of Asian American advertising thus comprises the numerous campaigns and ads aimed at specific ethnic groups within the larger category. Here, the Deluxis ad offers a media-based representation of the ethnic group South Asian American as wealthy luxury-automobile drivers. The final copy the client chose is arguably the more refined of the two options presented and indexes a more prestigious consumer. Likewise, the AC ad presents Chinese Americans as cultured, wealthy consumers. Taken together, these ads, along with scores of other campaigns, reflect the emergence of the genre of Asian American advertising as well as the racialization of Asian Americans. Metacultural and metalinguistic signs together index a new generation of powerful consumers and bring broader questions of racialization, metaproduction, and message to the fore.

Linking metaproduction and racialization

The above examples of metaproduction and message illustrate how executives create indexes for Asian American ethnic groups and, in turn, create the broader advertising genre. The work of Asian American ad executives raises questions of where Asian Americans fit in the sliding scale of U.S. racialization and what to make of the broader political-economic framework that governs ethnic advertising production. By observing their open discussions of negative stereotypes in agencies, at their annual conference, and in casual conversation, I came to believe that many who work in niche advertising are acutely aware of mass-mediated stereotypes of Asian Americans and the role advertising has played in perpetuating them. They are not only proud of the work they do but also see it as a counterpoint to past and current racist imagery of Asian Americans. For instance, during the early 20th century, xenophobic sentiment crystallized in an ideology referred to as the “yellow peril” that at once characterized Asian Americans as dangerous invaders who required containment and as licentious, amoral, and infantile individuals in need of patriarchal control (Okihiro 1994). “Orientals,” as they were called, were depicted on business or “trade” cards and their representations thus circulated through this mass-produced form of advertising (Matsukawa 2002; Metrick-Chen 2007). These earlier racializations underlay Asian exclusion acts and anti-Asian sentiment, ranging from anticitizenship and antimiscegenation laws to the World War II internment of Japanese Americans, and they continued to contribute to subsequent waves of hostility due to U.S. military conflict in Korea, Vietnam, and, most recently, the Middle East and Pakistan in a post-9/11 era.

The representations executives produce through metaproduction enable them to circulate a more modern and complex Asian American subjectivity than that tied to the anti-immigrant sentiment prevalent in previous generations of ads as well as in some contemporary general market advertising. Their work certainly differs from mainstream advertisements that have been critiqued for racist imagery that furthers xenophobic and anti-immigrant sentiment (Chávez 2001; Steele 2000), especially general market advertising that still features racist representations of Asian Americans (see Kim and Chung 2005; Knobloch-Westerwick and Coates 2006; Ono and Pham 2009). Just as in other studies that have demonstrated advertising to be an effective arena for cultural production that challenges dominant social meanings (Moeran 1996b), here metaproduction plays an important role in remaking the racial category of Asian American by countering simplistic racializations.

Through the genre of Asian American advertising, executives remake core elements of the model minority stereotype into contemporary narratives of the economic

solvency championed by neoliberalism to depict Asian Americans as refined professionals with sophisticated identities and tastes. The hardworking Asian American model minority producer, a staple of capitalist rhetoric and public policy since its 1960s introduction, emerges in a new form as the sophisticated model minority consumer. Executives use census and market research data to illustrate Asian Americans' high per capita income and willingness to spend money—even in the current recession. Their overall purchasing power outstrips their numbers—they make up a mere 5 percent of the total U.S. population. The newly minted version of the model Asian American enables ad executives to enter the marketplace of multicultural advertising and work alongside agencies that target the Latino and black markets in the United States. In this sense, neoliberal logics make this version of the Asian American appear new for marketing purposes, but it can also be considered another version of the same model minority stereotype that emerged from racialized capitalism. In this sense, this genre may be “no more than the re-entextualization of what a different metadiscourse recognizes as an old text” (Silverstein and Urban 1996:13; cf. Bauman and Briggs 1992).

In attempting to counter negative general market representations of Asian Americans while also reaching target audiences, Asian American advertising is delimiting this category to include a far more elite subsection of the population than the original model minority stereotype. In her astute analysis of the myriad gaps and erasures in the creation of the Latino category for advertising and marketing, Davila (2001) demonstrates how ethnonational history, varieties of Spanish, postcolonial histories, and numerous other inequalities are subsumed to make “Latinos Inc.” Inasmuch as executives might like to make an analogous Asian Americans Inc., this unified category does not allow them to emphasize the very cultural and linguistic specificities that they must stress to reach individual Asian American ethnic groups. Apart from the occasional public-service ads for health issues or the U.S. Census, for instance, it is rarely beneficial for them to combine Chinese, Korean, South Asian, Filipino, and Vietnamese American populations under a single cultural and linguistic rubric. Language differences are a concern even within ethnic groups, as South Asian Americans may speak one of 15 major languages and Chinese Americans may have strong ties to either Mandarin or Cantonese. Because the range of nations encompassed in the category “Asian” is so wide, and because different languages are needed for each, executives and their clients know that Asian American marketing almost always involves making several versions of an ad, each in-culture or in-language for a particular ethnic group. Despite admitting the impossibility of subsuming all of these specificities into a larger group, executives know that to win accounts alongside Latino and African American niche agencies, they have to convince clients that the cat-

egory of Asian American, despite its myriad differences, is viable.

Through metaproduction, executives shape individual ethnic groups as they make campaigns, but they also conceive of and present the broader racial category of Asian American as a unified entity to survive in an industry that struggles with ethnic differentiation. In their everyday work, executives embrace this category by performing it for clients and to one another (see Shankar n.d.). As Asian Americans, they participate in complex social and economic networks, such as outsourcing aspects of media production to colleagues in Hong Kong, Taipei, Mumbai, Manila, and Shanghai; using contacts with agencies in Asia to find jobs in the United States, and collaborating with other Asian American ad agencies on various projects and objectives. Although they rarely used the term *diaspora*, the types of connections they maintained, the networks they leveraged, and the global nature of their work all confirmed the role of Asian diasporas in the creative and economic aspects of their industry. Especially at a time when clients are looking to commission fewer ads that reach more people, managing the somewhat unruly ethnolinguistic diversity of Asian Americans is critical for capitalist success.

The second-order indexical values used in metaproduction offer insight into another dimension of racial refashioning: making model minority consumers that are so idealized that they obscure the diversity that this group includes. Executives capitalize on depicting immigrants of Asian descent as good citizens and good consumers by focusing on family, consumption, and other favorable attributes, but these emergent racial and ethnic definitions are detached from the politics of globalization that engender their conception. The complexity of the ever-shifting geopolitical relationship the United States has with different Asian nations is exactly what this type of advertising (and, to be fair, advertising anywhere) wants to sidestep altogether, and neoliberal discourses of individual economic success enable them to do this with considerable ease. Indeed, everyday realities of outsourcing jobs and production to Asia, the rising dominance of China and India in the global economy, and other indicators that draw attention to the powerful production capabilities of Asia, and, by extension, many members of its diasporas, are here dramatically downplayed.

In niche advertising, only the five most profitable Asian American ethnic groups are included; others are excluded either because they are too small, such as Pacific Islanders, or because they are considered too assimilated, as in the case of Japanese Americans. Even within the five major groups, populations that are currently targets of political and social tension, including Muslims in a post-9/11 United States, tend to be avoided (see also Rana 2011). Working-class Asian Americans who may not be succeeding economically or socially or are otherwise not performing up

to model minority expectations also fall through the cracks of this racial refashioning process. Of course, this “spin” is what disengages these representations from the political economy that underpins them, as Davila (2008) argues in the case of the “whitewashing” that occurs with Latinos. A significant point of contrast to note here between Latinos and Asian Americans is that the model minority stereotype seems to have addressed the issue of “whitewashing” already. Indeed, the notion of Asian Americans as “part of a solution,” as Vijay Prashad (2000) puts it, has prevailed in popular media (see also Jun 2011; Lee 1997; Tuan 1998). In these ways, niche advertising is creating a racialized identity for Asian Americans that is distinct from that of white Americans but nonetheless positions them as good racial minorities and, of course, as good consumers.

From media margins to the U.S. mainstream

I have offered metaproduction as a way to understand how messages created by niche advertising and marketing play a central role in creating and circulating neoliberal meanings of race and ethnicity. A move from productive workers to neoliberal consumers can only be fully understood through a metaproduction framework, which illustrates how these values are created, negotiated, and put into circulation. Metaproduction relies on both metaculture and metalanguage, and message is hewn of linguistic and material elements. In this way, metaproduction can be seen as an example of “language materiality,” a framework that draws attention to the ways in which the intertwining of the linguistic and material enable particular types of commodification and circulation in capitalism (Shankar and Cavanaugh 2012). As an analytic, metaproduction may also be useful to anthropological studies of cultural production more broadly, especially of art, festivals, and other types of media.

As the United States continues to diversify and move toward the “majority minority” paradigm predicted by demographers, several points arise that constitute an agenda for further inquiry in this nascent niche industry. Longitudinal issues to consider include the question of language use and the second generation as immigration patterns shift. If the large-scale post-1965 professional immigration from Asia and subsequent waves are not to be repeated, and immigration is now curtailed in a United States gripped by the Patriot Act and the outsourcing of service and production work that previously drew new immigrants, what will become of the ethnic-language periodicals and satellite television stations? Will these media continue to be relevant to second- and third-generation Asian Americans, and will the need for niche advertising continue to grow? Equally pressing is the general market’s treatment of ethnic and racial difference. As general market advertising struggles to keep pace with demographic shifts, such as the more than 100 million minority individuals counted in the 2010 census,

who make up a third of the nation’s population, will it turn to Asian American, Latino, and other niche executives for their expertise? There is already some evidence of this, as ads created for the Asian American niche market cross over into the mainstream.

Indeed, even though Asian American executives are making ads for ethnic television stations, print periodicals, and Internet sites, these ads are beginning to shape broader racial and ethnic formation as they cross over to and circulate in mainstream media. Several of the campaigns I observed have at least one spot that executives identify as having “crossover potential,” meaning it could effectively communicate brand identity to Asian American as well as mainstream audiences. Robert, a creative director at a prominent Los Angeles-based Asian American ad agency, confirmed this aspiration: “We really want to have creative strong enough to be used in the general market.” He referred to a spot his agency had filmed just the day before our conversation, one that features a flirtatious dance battle between a male hip-hop dancer dressed in yellow and a female modern dancer dressed in red. Each does a dance in his or her own style to a steady bass backbeat and the occasional twangs of a Chinese stringed instrument, but ultimately the red and yellow come together, as they do in the featured product, “blended strawberry lemonade.” Robert remarked that the client loved the spot and was considering running it in the general market, and that is precisely what happened. During spring 2011, this ad for McDonald’s aired during prime time on NBC and other major West Coast television stations.

In this skillful execution of metaproduction, executives cast attractive Asian American dancers, used music that blends hip-hop and a classical Chinese instrument, and set the spot in an airy, loft-style dance studio in downtown Los Angeles. The absence of dialogue in the ad makes it ready for general market consumption, and the result is an ad that easily appeals to youth, urban audiences, and, of course, Asian Americans. Comments posted on the YouTube page for the spot (see *victorvictorkim* 2011) reveal viewer excitement about seeing this ad on NBC, MTV, and several local and digital Asian channels and offer praise for the execution of the ad. Examples like these demonstrate that, as niche advertising crosses over into mainstream media, it reshapes ethnicity and remakes race according to commercial agendas. These refashioned racializations, which may well be decontextualized from the political economy of the ethnic groups they feature, become embedded in that same neoliberal political economy as they circulate.

Notes

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1. I have replaced the names of individuals, agencies, corporate clients, and brands with pseudonyms. Names of places have not been changed.

2. Deborah Spitulnik's (1996) ethnographic analysis of how Zambian radio discourse is reentextualized in everyday talk has paved the way for understanding many such mediatized encounters. One of the key points of departure between metaproduction and mediatization is that the former addresses how individuals (in this case, ad executives) use metacultural and metalinguistic values in the process of production, whereas the latter investigates the generative capacity of mediated forms to shape local ideologies and identities through consumption. See *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 2010 and Agha 2011 for a variety of case studies about language and media consumption.

3. For consistency with other academic literature, I have chosen to use *South Asian American* rather than *Asian Indian*, the census term commonly used by executives. The latter designates a U.S. Census category that has since been refined to differentiate between Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans, and others in the South Asian diaspora.

4. Elsewhere I examine the creation and development of brand in greater detail (Shankar n.d.). See also numerous recent works that offer critical insights on the production and management of brands (Arvidsson 2006; Lury 2006; Manning 2010; Moore 2003; Schroder and Salzer-Morling 2006).

5. Transcription key: "[] overlap; "**bold**" speaker emphasis; "?" rising intonation.

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- Shalini Shankar
 Northwestern University
 Department of Anthropology
 1810 Hinman Ave
 Evanston, IL 60208
 sshankar@northwestern.edu