

Interviewee: Louie Vital

Phone Number: (425) 330-5787

Interviewee Title: Political Chair for the Filipino American Student Association

Role: Works with the Washington State Commission of Asian Pacific American Affairs

How We Know Her: Benneth's friend through FASA

Louie Vital is currently working at the Washington State Commission of Asian Pacific American Affairs, where she is passionate about serving marginalized communities through non-profit work. Louie and her organization are related to our social issue because they are dedicated to providing services, such as Education, Healthcare, and Economic Development, to Asian Americans that need it. Louie, who is a Fellow at Commission on APAA, is in charge of researching and analyzing public policy, tracking legislations, organizing community events, and assisting in constituent services and communications. Louie's area of research is in Political Science, Communication, and Comparative History of Ideas. She was able to win a Mary Gates Research Scholarship where she researched swine flu and xenophobia. She graduated from the University of Washington with a B.A. in Political Science and Communications. She's passionate about grassroots movements and inspired by solidarity.

Louie is a recent graduate from the University of Washington, where she studied Political Science and Communications with a double minor in Diversity and Comparative History of Ideas. She is now working as a Fellow for the Washington State Commission of Asian Pacific American Affairs, where she researches the data disaggregation pertaining to Asian/Asian-American communities in various areas of society. As a Filipino American, Louie is also on the officer board as the Political Chair for FASA Sa UW, the Filipino American Student Association at the UW. She uses her position to educate other young Filipino American college students about the social issues that they face as minorities (including data disaggregation). Inspired by solidarity, Louie is passionate about grassroot movements and wants to continue serving marginalized communities through non-profit work.

Louie understood how important the role of information was for accurately representing Asians in the media. Popular media represents Asians in stereotypical roles, such as perpetual foreigner or nerd, which has a tremendous effect on the representation of Asians in our society. We discussed this issue with Louie and she emphasized how Asian stereotypes were extremely apparent in the media. She also commented on the differing attributes when discussing these

stereotypes by gender. She explained that Asian women were seen as docile, obedient, and hypersexualized while Asian men were seen as the complete opposite. Asian men were typically seen as de-masculinized, unattractive and nerdy. Asians are unable to be portrayed accurately because popular media continues to use these stereotypical roles. These stereotypes are constantly being used in popular media, which makes it difficult for Asian Americans to find relatability within these characters. Louie mentioned that although there are some Asians in America that are foreign-born, many Asians are second generation, third generation, and so on, which leaves a huge gap in the media for a majority of Asian Americans.

In the interview, Louie also talked about the use of information in her work with data disaggregation – trying to break down the “Asian” category in statistics into different communities. Learning about data disaggregation helped us see that censuses that did not differentiate between different communities within the Asian/Pacific-Islander category perpetuated stereotypes. This inaccuracy gathers all the data from a wide variety of communities and compiles them into one image and creates a stereotype for every kind of Asian. An example of this is when we see Chinese, Japanese, and Korean actors being cast for one another’s roles - like how Randall Park is a Korean-American actor playing the role of the Chinese father in *Fresh Off the Boat*. This “blending” of stereotypes keeps people from learning about each different culture and perpetuates the idea that it is acceptable to put all Asians under one category.

Our conversation with Louie helped us realize that the spread of information in popular media and censuses creates a misrepresentation of Asians, and Louie reaffirms that whatever is portrayed in the media is what people will see or think of Asians. People do not see race as an issue because they do not collect and spread information that examines it. Louie displayed a great understanding of the role of information in our social issue and how the information produced in the media contributes towards the representation for minorities.

Louie provided us with a number of insights into the issue of Asian portrayal in mainstream media through her personal experiences and her involvement in the Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs. As a “small Asian woman”, she has encountered first-hand the consequences and limitations that come with a poor and inaccurate representation of Asians. Because of the submissive and passive nature of the typical Asian female stereotype, Louie expressed how she felt she had to “overcompensate” for being a “small Asian woman” in order to be seen as competent and assertive as a white straight man might be

assumably seen in a professional setting. She also gave an example of how these stereotypes affect Asian American opportunities within the workforce. At a conference for the Washington State Commission, Louie met a Korean American actress. Due to the lack of non-stereotypical roles for Asian women, the Korean American actress felt discouraged and eventually gave up on acting. This example demonstrates how being Asian American limits a person's opportunity in the acting world, a bigger consequence of stereotyping Asians in media.

Louie mentioned that it's evident gender plays a big role in Asian portrayal in media, as it's almost polarized: females are sexualized while males are demasculinized. The stereotypes that are held against Asian actors are limiting the roles they are able to play; this brings in the question of how can we eliminate or reduce the stereotypes that are put out amongst Asians? Is it possible to debunk these stereotypes so that Asian actors are not limited to certain roles? Louie mentions that she feels disgusted and sad about Asian roles being played by White actors. Why is it that directors and role-casters are unable to see the problem with misguided portrayals? Louie talks about how Hollywood is controlled by the majority culture which is presumably white, and with this we see a problem of why whitewashing in films happen. Many times, Asians themselves are not writing the stories about Asians in the media; instead, we see a trend of white writers and producers writing the stories, which enables more of a potential for stereotyping and the misrepresentation of Asian cultures.

Throughout the interview, our original questions inspired new questions, as well as new areas of research our group didn't specifically consider before talking with Louie. One new follow-up question was if she had witnessed how stereotyping affected aspiring actors or actresses, which led to her story of the Korean American woman who gave up acting due to a lack of non-stereotypical roles for Asian women. Because of her close connection to the Asian American community, Louie was able to provide us with many perspectives on our issue, so our conversation led to a new area of research we didn't cover in our original interview questions: microaggression towards Asians. This topic is very relevant to our issue as it talks about how subtle comments made towards minorities can be offensive. Louie also mentioned that we should look into the eight most common Asian character archetypes, as it shows how Asian Americans are boxed into categories in media instead of portrayed as unique individuals.