

ASIAN
AMERICAN
FUTURES

Aspirational Narrative System & Audience Personas

What's inside

- **AAPI Narrative System:** We identified a set of harmful and aspirational narratives that represent the direction in which we hope to see AAPI narratives change. We hope others align their narrative work around the aspirational narratives. They were developed as a reflection of the work AAPI movement organizations are already doing.
- **Audience Personas:** We developed six audience personas representing the attitudes, perspectives and motivations held by next-gen AAPIs. We hope these personas are helpful when crafting messages, content or storytelling designed to reach and move new audiences.

Have questions? We'd love to hear from you. Please reach out to Kana Hammon, our Narrative Strategist: kana@asianamericanfutures.org

Our research process and qualitative methodology

Our research sample represented Asian American Futures' target audiences: Millennial and GenZ AANHPIs ages 15-40. While our research focused on Asian Americans, we also included NHPI interviewees.

To find interviewees, we first distributed a screener survey that collected 200 responses. Most were sourced via ads on social media. Our next step was to interview 28 survey respondents in 75-minute interviews. We prioritized hearing from underrepresented voices across a number of factors, including ethnicity, class background, location, sexuality and more. Please see the appendix for more about our survey and interview process. They also took the OBI Audience quiz to expand our understanding of their attitudes, values and cultural consumption. The four distinct audiences in the OBI segmentation have become a standard in narrative strategy and will help increase the accuracy of content testing in the future.

To guide our process, we convened an advisory circle of seven experts in research, movement building and narrative, to ensure that our research would follow sound practice and offer useful insights to the movement.

AAF is replicating this research with Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander audiences in 2023 & 2024.

If you want to learn more about our audience research, read our written [report](#).

A deep narrative ecosystem for the world we want to see

Dominant Narratives

Perpetual Foreigner: Xenophobia, White Supremacy

No matter what, Asian Americans will be considered foreign in the US. They don't deserve the attention, support or safety that White Americans receive.

Scarcity

There isn't enough room on the ladder of American meritocracy for Asian Americans and other minorities to ascend together.

Assimilation

Living up to the "model minority" stereotype will guarantee Asian Americans success, power and security in America.

Authenticity

"Authentic" Asian Americans are East Asians who maintain ties to their traditions, language and culture and fit within idealized standards of beauty and achievement.

Invisibility

Many parts of the Asian American community, and NHPI communities, especially, are rarely considered.

Aspirational Narratives

Interdependence

AANHPIs look out for each other. We work to ensure people and the environment are safe, healthy and thriving.

Solidarity

AANHPIs can connect to the struggles and experiences of people within & outside our community. We are stronger and more powerful when we act in solidarity with others.

Pride

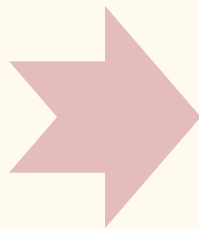
AANHPIs are not a monolith. We can be proud of our diversity in language, culture, ethnicity and experience. How we unite and build strength in numbers may depend on the issue at hand.

Belonging

AANHPIs deserve to be included, with intersectionality in mind, in politics, pop culture, news, social justice & more.

Self-Determination

AANHPI communities deserve to govern and define themselves beyond war, imperialism & violence.

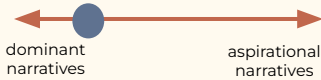


Our personas show audiences with depth & complexity



Pragmatic Strivers

Hard workers who lean into immigrant sacrifice and want representation



scarcity, perpetual foreigner, belonging



Compassionate Peacekeepers

Big-hearted helpers who yearn for belonging in dominant culture



assimilation, belonging



Independent Skeptics

Young people seeking validation of their unique identities & experiences



authenticity, interdependence



Inclusive Optimists

Proud AANHPIs who strive for inclusion and equity for all people, AANHPI or not

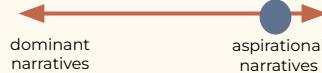


authenticity, inclusion & pride



Cultural Experimentalists

Progressives shaping an inclusive AANHPI culture in the diaspora

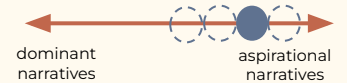


authenticity, community care, solidarity, belonging



Rooted in Heritage

People reconnecting to their heritage and keeping culture alive



scarcity, perpetual foreigner, & belonging

Source: Pikisuperstar - Freepik.com

Detailed Personas

Pragmatic Strivers

We show our pride in being AANHPI by honoring our parents' sacrifices through hard work and achievement. We feel disconnected from our culture or heritage and instead bond over shared experiences of immigrant sacrifice. We are skeptical of pan-AANHPI unity but value AANHPI representation. We are still working through the difficulties of not belonging and deeply feel the pain of anti-Asian violence.



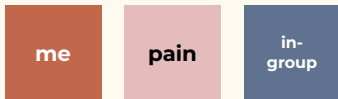
Dominant narratives

Aspirational narratives

Most-susceptible dominant narrative: **scarcity, perpetual foreigner**

Most-developed aspirational narrative: **representation & belonging**

Orientation to AANHPI:



Conservative

Progressive

Demo: **skew male, late 20s+**

OBI audience: **if you say so, don't tread on me**

Values: **security, achievement, hedonism, stimulation**

Aspirational AANHPI future: AANHPI people have equal opportunity to achieve whatever they wish. Their effort and accomplishments are celebrated and recognized.

Our strengths: we work hard to meet our goals, no matter how big. We are protective of those close to us and never lose sight of how far we've come.

What will alienate us from AANHPI work: prioritizing other communities or issues over our own.

Attitude toward issues: For those of us who lean liberal, progressive ideas could be appealing, but they just aren't realistic in today's climate. The issues facing our community aren't getting the attention they deserve, especially anti-Asian violence. Addressing this gap in attention is a big priority. We may have room to move if our basic need for security and validation are addressed.

Compassionate Peacekeepers

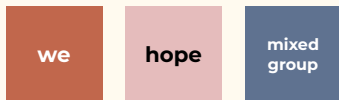
We are proud of being AANHPI when we show-off the best parts of our community. We love sharing our culture and being good role models for others--in our community and externally--so that we can be accepted and seen in a positive light. We see a path to prosperity and belonging through individual effort and treating one another with kindness.



Most-susceptible dominant narrative: **assimilation**

Most-developed aspirational narrative: **belonging**

Orientation to AANHPI:



Demo: **late 20s+, suburban**

OBI audience: **tough cookie, people power**

Values: **part of a group, power, stimulation, helping others**

Aspirational AANHPI future: AANHPI people fully belong in dominant culture, free of stereotypes or the pressures of being an immigrant in America.

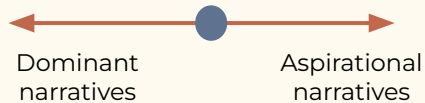
Our strengths: we have big hearts and live to help others, especially individuals with whom we can build strong relationships or serve as mentors.

What will alienate us from AANHPI work: dismissing our good intentions to support our community.

Attitude toward issues: inequality and racism are real, and have painful consequences. Things would be better if we all had an open mind, love for one another and a willingness to listen and celebrate our cultures. It's unfortunate how divided politics have become. We care about issues and prefer to get involved where interpersonal relationships and individual actions shine, like volunteering.

Independent Skeptics

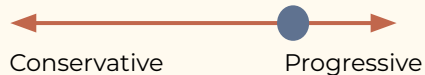
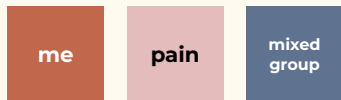
Being AANHPI means being disconnected from our heritage *and* from people who share our unique experience. We *want* to feel proud and celebrate diversity but we never quite feel like we belong, because belonging is still dictated by people in dominant White and/or AANHPI culture. We may feel more comfortable with people with another one of our intersectional identities.



Most-susceptible dominant narrative: **authenticity**

Most-developed aspirational narrative: **interdependence & community care**

Orientation to AANHPI:



Demo: **teens - mid 20's**

OBI audiences: **If You Say So**

Values: **part of a group, hedonism, stimulation, helping others**

Aspirational AANHPI future: validation and inclusion of our unique, specific, intersectional identities.

Our strengths: we are empathetic, sensitive and unafraid to be vulnerable. We can connect powerfully with others when we feel recognized.

What will alienate us from AANHPI work: feeling excluded for being different. Help us connect with others who share our experience or identity.

Attitude toward issues: systemic injustice is REAL and a huge problem in our society. We're skeptical that things can really change. That doesn't stop us from *trying*--by working in the social sector, organizing at work or spending our free time learning about social problems. We prefer to spend our energy where we find synergy and recognition from those around us.

Inclusive Optimists

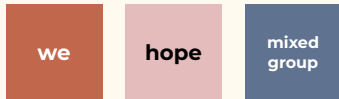
We are proud to be AANHPI when we can connect over shared experience, try each other's food and support each other's causes and communities, even even if there is not a 100% overlap. We do our best to include people of all ethnicities, sizes, sexualities, religions, etc. We have been on our own journeys to feel pride in our heritage and want others to feel that pride, too. Having pan-AA/NHPI spaces is more important than sharing everything.



Most-susceptible dominant narrative: **authenticity**

Most-developed aspirational narrative: **inclusion & pride**

Orientation to AANHPI:



Demo: **minority and/or experienced discrimination**

OBI audience: **people power**

Values: **part of a group, security, stimulation**

Aspirational AANHPI future: everyone in the AANHPI umbrella is included and celebrated with equal value. We band together when it matters to use our power in numbers.

Our strengths: We welcome everyone and will go out of our way to make sure a broad range of people are not just invited, but included.

What will alienate us from AANHPI work: emphasizing difference and individuality at the expense of unity.

Attitude toward issues: We are excited to help build a progressive future. We may not be exposed to every progressive idea, but we tend to get excited about the possibility of a more inclusive, equitable future for all communities. Help us elevate diversity without alienating those who are skeptical of pan-AANHPI.

Cultural Experimentalists

We are proud to be AANHPI when we build on the practices, values and ideas in the Inclusive Optimists persona to create the culture and identity we want to see. All cultures have room to evolve and grow. We're leading the way by choosing meaningful parts our heritage to share with our children, aligning our careers with our values, standing in solidarity with other groups and finding alternatives to the problematic aspects of our culture or narratives.



Most-susceptible dominant narrative: **authenticity**

Most-developed aspirational narrative: **interdependence & community care, solidarity, inclusion & pride**

Orientation to AANHPI:



Demo: **minority and/or experienced discrimination**

OBI audience: **people power**

Values: **part of a group, universalism, hedonism, stimulation**

Aspirational AANHPI future: a cohesive AANHPI community intentionally practicing the best parts of AANHPI cultures, building political power and acting in solidarity with others while respectfully evolving away from harmful behaviors and attitudes.

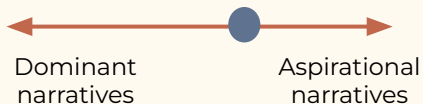
Our strengths: We navigate tensions in our lives with intention and experimentation.

What will alienate us from AANHPI work: emphasizing authenticity or confusing trauma with culture. Many of us are evolving *because* of negative experiences and could be prone to gatekeeping.

Attitude toward issues: We do our best to live our values. Many of us are involved in social justice in some way. We show others the wide range of ways one could get involved, from local politics to working for a social justice organization to leading mutual aid groups.

Rooted in Heritage

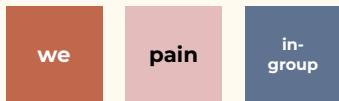
We are proud to be AANHPI when we feel connected to our cultural roots. We feel comfortable in our present-day ancestral communities and we're learning or are proficient in our heritage language. We've sought out additional opportunities to strengthen those connections on our own, through work, education, with our children or from our parents.



Most-susceptible dominant narrative: **scarcity, authenticity**

Most-developed aspirational narrative: **pride**

Orientation to AANHPI:



Demo: **late 20's, early 30's**

OBI audience: **people power**

Values: **tradition**

Aspirational AANHPI future: all AANHPI people can intentionally (re)connect to their cultural or heritage practices whether or not they grew up with them.

Our strengths: We transform our pain into action and go to great lengths to achieve our goals.

What will alienate us from AANHPI work: authentic expression of culture is a goal, not a reason to judge or exclude others.

Attitude toward issues: We care deeply about issues that impact the communities we are part of. This makes us more knowledgeable about politics and issues than other personas, but it may not extend beyond our community. Help us see how our personal journey to reclaim our roots is one example of cultural evolution.

Appendix

Screener survey ran May - June 2022

- **Demographics:** age, gender, location, race, ethnicity, urban/suburban/rural, immigration generation, education, sexuality,
- **Politics:** ideology, vote history, impact of political process on family, racial group, community involvement (e.g. giving money, volunteering)
- **Religion:** religion, importance of religion, evangelism
- **Identity:** importance of racial, ethnic, descendant-of-immigrant identity
- **Linked fate:** AAPIs, ethnicity, race
- **Experiences of discrimination**
- **Economic status:** class background, mobility
- **Issues:** affirmative action, #StopAAPIHate, abortion, policing, distinct Asian American & PI cultures, immigration reform, climate change,
- **Values & goals**
- **Free response**
 - Self-identification (e.g. AAPI, Asian American, Korean American)
 - Additional identities that are important
 - Occupation
 - Pride in AAPI / racial / ethnic identity
 - Connection/solidarity with other groups
 - What is shared across AAPI umbrella
 - Other topics or concerns on your mind



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Me thinking we can change the narrative about AAPIs.

Take our survey & help me get there: bit.ly/AAPISurvey2022

Deadline is June 8th

You can win a \$100 gift card!

Participants must:

- Identify as AAPI
- Be between 15-40 years old

<https://bit.ly/AAPISurvey2022>

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Interview Demographics

interviewees

Ethnicity

SE Asian	28%
Chinese	28%
East Asian	14%
South Asian	10%
Mixed	7%
NHPI	10%

Religious

Yes	41%
No	51%

Gender

Female	59%
Male	28%
Non-binary	7%
Other	3%

Politics

Strong Democrat	14%
Democrat	48%
Independent	31%
Republican	3%

Age

15-18	7%
19-22	14%
23-29	34%
30-40	31%

Region

CA	34%
West	10%
South	7%
Midwest	17%
AK	7%
HI	10%
Southwest	3%

Class (childhood)

Poor	21%
Working-class	21%
Middle class	41%
Upper middle class	14%