

Re-Collecting Race: Memory, Performativity and Hapa Identity

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the construction of identity among Hapa students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. ‘Hapas’ are individuals of mixed ethnic background, usually Asian and Caucasian. This thesis looks at how they use the available cultural resources in order to define their senses of self. The theoretical framework employed synthesizes Dorinne Kondo’s performative, post-structuralist notion of identity and Pierre Bourdieu’s notions of the field, capital and habitus to understand identity in terms of the multiple relationships constructed between the self and various others. Life history interviews were conducted with four Hapa students at MIT, along with participant observation at the MIT campus and analysis of media representations. These revealed identity to be a multi-faceted construct that drew together the interviewees’ ideas about Asian ethnicity, MIT student culture, family life, and