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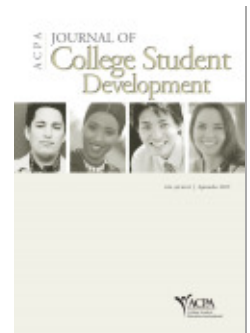
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American College Students

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The Continuing Significance of Racism in the Lives of Asian American College Students

Samuel D. Museus Julie J. Park

Asian Americans are one of the most misunderstood populations in higher education, and more research on this population is warranted. In this investigation, authors sought to understand the range of ways that Asian American students experience racism on a daily basis in college. They analyzed data from 46 individual, face-to-face qualitative interviews with Asian American undergraduates at 6 4-year postsecondary institutions around the nation, and 9 themes emerged from the data. Specifically, Asian American participants reported experiencing the following forms of racism in college: (a) racial harassment, (b) vicarious racism, (c) racial isolation, (d) pressure to racially segregate, (e) pressure to racially assimilate, (f) racial silencing, (g) the perpetual foreigner myth, (h) the model minority myth, and (i) the inferior minority myth. Implications for future research and practice related to Asian American students in higher education are discussed.

Asian Americans have historically been excluded from higher education research and discourse. While some researchers have begun analyzing the experiences of Asian American students in higher education (e.g., Buenavista & Chen, 2013; Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Kiang, 2009; Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000; Museus, 2008a, 2013a; Museus & Truong, 2009), such inquiries remain sparse. In fact, a recent analysis of five of the most widely read peer-reviewed academic journals in the field of higher education (*Journal of College Student Development*, *NASPA Journal*, *Journal of Higher*

Education, *Research in Higher Education*, and *Review of Higher Education*) revealed that less than 1% of articles published within the decade preceding this review gave explicit attention to Asian Americans (Museus, 2009). The absence of research-based understandings of Asian American undergraduates contributes to the perpetuation of misconceptions that they are problem-free minorities. This paucity of research also masks challenges that this population encounters in college, such as racial prejudice and discrimination, cultural conflict, and pressure from racial stereotypes (Museus, 2009, 2013a; Suzuki, 2002).

The current investigation responds to this invisibility by contributing to more empirically informed understandings of Asian American students in higher education. Specifically, in the current inquiry, we analyze how racism shapes the daily experiences of Asian American students. In the next section, we offer an overview of extant research that suggests that racism influences the experiences of Asian American undergraduates. The remainder of the article focuses on our examination of how racism shapes these students' experiences in college.

TYPES OF RACISM IN THE ASIAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Harrell (2000) defined *racism* as a system that benefits a dominant racial group and in which that group maintains influence over the nondominant racial groups' experiences and

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access to resources. Researchers have delineated many different types of racism (e.g., Harrell, 2000; Jones, 1997), which can be separated into three categories: institutional (i.e., systemic), cultural, and individual (Jones, 1997). *Institutional racism* refers to policies, practices, and behaviors that disadvantage racial groups within a system. While the intention to oppress may or may not be present where institutional racism exists, racial groups are marginalized within a system. *Cultural racism* refers to society favoring or privileging the customs, values, and beliefs of the dominant group over other races, and constructing the latter as inferior, thereby oppressing marginalized racial groups. *Individual racism* occurs when one or more persons in the majority treat one or more persons of color as subordinate because of their race. While this framework is useful for making sense of the various types of racism, it is important to acknowledge that these categories are not mutually exclusive, but rather are overlapping and interconnected.

Despite racial stereotypes of Asian Americans being monolithically successful and seemingly impervious to racism, research scattered across various disciplines (e.g., education, ethnic studies, psychology, sociology) suggests that Asian Americans face institutional, cultural, and individual racism in American society (e.g., Buenavista & Chen, 2013; Chou & Feagin, 2008; Museus, 2013a; Park, 2008; Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007). First, regarding systemic or institutional racism, Asian Americans and other Americans live within a racialized society and racialized system of social institutions (e.g., institutions of higher education) that “allocate differential economic, political, social, and even psychological rewards to groups along racial lines” (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, p. 474). Within this racialized society and its system of social institutions, it can be argued that racial divisions, racial inequalities, and racism

are endemic and commonplace (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Emerson & Yancey, 2011).

Second, existing empirical evidence indicates that Asian Americans face cultural forms of racism in society (Lewis et al., 2000; Museus, 2013a; Sue et al., 2007). Indeed, Sue et al. (2007) note that Asian Americans report the existence of societal perceptions and beliefs that Western cultural values are more desirable than Asian American cultural values, which are viewed as undesirable cultural deficits. For example, the authors describe how mainstream society and culture views Asian cultural values of silence and reflection as an indicator that an individual is uninterested, disengaged, and inattentive in college classroom settings.

Third, Asian Americans experience individual racism (Chou & Feagin, 2008; Lewis et al., 2000; Museus, 2013a; Sue et al., 2007). In its most overt form, individual racism targeted at Asian Americans manifests in violent hate crimes (Umamoto, 2000). Two examples of such crimes are the racially motivated beating and murder of New York advertising executive David Kao in 2009 and the racial bullying that led to the eventual suicide of Army private Danny Chen in 2011 (Chen, 2009; Shaw, 2012). In addition, higher education scholars have underscored how Asian Americans experience more subtle racism on a daily basis, including members of society rejecting their interethnic differences (“all Asians look alike”), ascribing them intelligence (“you people always do well in school”), and denying their racial realities (“Asians are the new Whites and do not face discrimination”; Museus, 2008a; Sue et al., 2007, p. 76).

MANIFESTATION OF RACISM IN THE LIVES OF ASIAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

Systematic research that focuses on Asian American experiences with racism in college is sparse. Yet, there is a small and growing

body of literature that provides some evidence that racism does shape the experiences of Asian American students in postsecondary education (Lewis et al., 2000; Museus, 2008a, 2013a; Museus & Truong, 2009, 2013; Park, 2008, 2012). For instance, research suggests that Asian Americans are significantly less likely than their White peers to be satisfied with their campus racial climate (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000).

Literature indicates that these lower levels of satisfaction with campus climate could be a result of many racial realities. First, Asian Americans often report experiencing racial harassment in college (Kim, Chang, & Park, 2009; Kotori & Malaney, 2003; Museus, 2013a; Museus & Truong, 2009; Park, 2008). Second, while it is sparse, there is evidence that Asian American students experience racial exclusion and isolation in cocurricular campus life as well (Lewis et al., 2000; Museus, 2013a; Park, 2008). Third, research indicates that Asian Americans experience significant pressure to assimilate into the cultures of predominantly White institutions (PWIs; Duster, 1991; Lewis et al., 2000; Museus, 2013a). Indeed, this evidence suggests that, at PWIs, Asian Americans feel pressure to fit into the cultures of their campuses to belong and succeed. Fourth, evidence indicates that Asian American experiences might be negatively shaped by the model minority myth (Lewis et al., 2000; Museus, 2008a, 2013a; Museus & Kiang, 2009). For example, this myth can mask the challenges and needs of Asian Americans (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Suzuki, 2002). In sum, fragmented data across several studies suggest that racism influences the lives of Asian American students. Yet, systematic analyses of the racism experienced by Asian Americans in college are difficult to find.

PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The primary contribution of this inquiry to

extant literature is that it is the first systematic empirical analysis aimed at delineating and illuminating the types of racism experienced by Asian American undergraduates. The purpose of the current analysis was to systematically examine and generate a more holistic understanding of the ways that racism shapes the experiences of Asian American students in postsecondary education. One overarching research question provided the foundation for the inquiry: How does racism shape the Asian American experience in college? Three additional research questions guided the examination: (a) How does overt racism influence the experiences of Asian American undergraduates? (b) How do subtle forms of racism impact the experiences of Asian American college students? and (c) How do Asian Americans make sense of the ways that racism has an impact on their experiences?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The three aforementioned types of racism outlined by Jones (1997) served as our conceptual framework. As mentioned, institutional racism encompasses the policies, practices, and behaviors that oppress racial groups within a given system. Cultural racism functions to contribute to the oppression of groups of color through society's privileging of the cultural customs, values, and beliefs of the dominant majority over racial minority groups and constructing of the latter group as subordinate. Individual racism refers to instances in which individuals in the majority treat one or more people of color as subordinate because of their race.

This typology was deemed an ideal framework for the current inquiry for multiple reasons. First, it offers a more holistic view of racism that can help avoid narrowly focusing on the impact of one type of racism on Asian American students' lives. Second, as

demonstrated in the literature review, the typology provides a useful lens for interpreting the various forms of racism that might manifest in the lives of Asian American students. As mentioned, however, it is important to keep in mind that these types of racism can be overlapping and interconnected. For example, in the context of the Asian American experience, it could be argued that the model minority myth can lead to the exclusion of Asian Americans from campus policies or programs (institutional racism) or the bullying of an Asian American student (individual racism) because the stereotype suggests that they are nerdy and socially inferior (cultural racism).

METHOD

For the current analysis, because our aim was to identify and understand the many ways that racism manifests in the lives of Asian American students, we utilized a basic interpretive qualitative approach for multiple reasons. First, qualitative techniques allow for the examination of topics or concepts via the collection and analysis of detailed information (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002). Second, qualitative techniques are most effective for answering *how*, *what*, and *why* questions (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002). Therefore, we utilized qualitative techniques because they enabled us to acquire and analyze rich information regarding how racism influenced the experience of Asian American students in postsecondary education.

Participant Selection

Data for this analysis were drawn from two larger qualitative studies that examined the experiences of Asian American students in college (Museus, 2008b; Museus, Maramba, Palmer, Reyes, & Bresonis, 2013). Three types of purposeful sampling were used to

acquire participants: maximum variation, intensity, and snowball sampling (Patton, 2002). Sampling for *maximum variation* refers to acquiring a sample that permits the identification of themes that cut across diverse subsamples, sampling for *intensity* refers to seeking information-rich cases, and *snowball sampling* refers to acquiring information-rich informants by asking interviewees to recommend additional participants for the study (Patton, 2002). Thus, the combination of these sampling techniques generated a sample with information-rich cases across ethnic subgroups.

Maximum variation sampling led to the acquisition of participants that was diverse in gender (female and male), ethnicity (Chinese, Cambodian, Hmong, Korean, Laotian, Thai, and Vietnamese American), institution type (commuter and residential), geographic region (West Coast, Midwest, Eastern Midwest, and East Coast), and racial context (Asian Americans composed from 9% to 47% of the student body at participating institutions). Intensity and snowball sampling permitted the acquisition of participants who could speak meaningfully about their institutions and their experiences as an Asian American college student.

The assistance of faculty and staff members who work closely with Asian American students was solicited at six 4-year institutions. Those faculty and staff members were asked to distribute a solicitation for participation in this study via LISTserv e-mail and recommend students who were from diverse ethnic groups and could speak about their campus environments for the study. As mentioned, the additional technique of asking many participants, at the culmination of their interviews, to recommend other potential participants was also employed.

The final sample for this analysis consisted of 46 Asian Americans. The participants

included 19 students who were enrolled at a large (over 29,000 students) urban public research university on the West Coast, 2 of the participants enrolled at a large (over 50,000 students) urban public research university in the Midwest, 1 participant enrolled at a small (over 7,000 students), urban, private 4-year college in the Midwest, 4 students enrolled at a midsized (over 15,000 students) urban public research university on the East Coast, and 8 enrolled at a rural midsized (over 14,000 students) 4-year institution on the East Coast. Regarding ethnicity, the sample included 10 Cambodian, 7 Chinese, 5 Hmong, 2 Korean, 3 Laotian, 1 Thai, and 14 Vietnamese Americans, as well as 4 multiethnic (2 Cambodian/Chinese, 1 Cambodian/Vietnamese/Thai, 1 Vietnamese/Thai) participants. Among participants, 36 were second-generation (i.e., born in the United States), 9 were 1.5-generation (i.e., immigrated to the United States before or at age 15), and 1 was first-generation (i.e., immigrated to the United States after age 15). Finally, the sample included more female (34) than male (12) students.

Data Collection Procedures

Each student in the sample participated in a single, individual face-to-face interview lasting between 60 to 90 minutes. Before the interview, participants were asked to fill out a brief demographic questionnaire. Then, the interviews were conducted using a semistructured approach, because such an approach permits the collection of data necessary to understand the phenomenon under investigation, while providing flexibility to address unexpected emerging themes (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Participants were asked a list of general questions about the ways that various factors influenced participants' experiences, such as (a) "What factors influenced your adjustment on campus?"

(b) "What factors have contributed to your success here?" and (c) "How would you describe the culture of this campus?" The semistructured approach was utilized to acquire participants' responses, and probing questions were used to understand the role of racism in their experiences in college.

Data Analysis Procedures

We analyzed data using several methods prescribed by Moustakas (1994) and Strauss and Corbin (1998). The NVivo® Qualitative Research Software package was used to organize and code the data. First, we created textural-structural descriptions to review each interview and get a better sense of the ways that racism shaped the experience of each individual participant (Moustakas, 1994). Second, we utilized open and axial coding to inductively generate themes and deductively identify the corresponding elements of these thematic categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Specifically, we utilized open-coding procedures to identify nine themes that cut across individual interview transcripts. Then, we generated a code report for each theme in NVivo and employed axial coding to identify salient properties of the initial themes. These nine themes and their related properties are discussed in the findings below.

Trustworthiness and Quality Assurance

Trustworthiness of the findings emerging from this examination was strengthened using several methods suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1986). First, triangulation, or the convergence of multiple data sources, was employed using interview transcripts, textural-structural descriptions, code reports, and researcher notes to cross-check and verify emergent themes. Second, member checks were conducted to ensure congruence between researcher interpretations and students'

perceptions. Specifically, study participants were sent findings of the data analysis, and asked them to provide feedback. Third, two peer debriefers who are knowledgeable about issues relevant to racial and ethnic minority college students engaged with the researchers in ongoing discussions regarding the meanings of the interview data and analysis. Finally, discrepant data were sought and examined throughout the investigation to help identify alternative hypotheses and question theoretical presuppositions.

Limitations of the Study

At least four limitations of this study warrant the attention of readers during the interpretation of our findings. First, faculty and staff gatekeepers recommended all of the participants, suggesting that these students were involved to some extent. Thus, participants' experiences might vary from individuals who are relatively disengaged. Second, volunteers identified as East and Southeast Asian American students and the sample did not include South Asian Americans, so we cannot draw any conclusions about how the latter population experiences racism in college (we use "East Asian Americans" to refer to those who live in the United States and have ethnic origins in China, Japan, and Korea; "Southeast Asian Americans" to refer to Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese Americans; and "South Asian Americans" to refer to those who live in the United States and have ethnic origins in southern Asia, such as Bangladeshi, Asian Indian, and Pakistani Americans). Third, the interviews did not include questions about the sources of racism, so we cannot draw any conclusions about the race of the individuals who committed acts of racism toward participants, except where participants volunteered such information. Similarly, because questions about the specific

sources of racism were not the focus of interview questions, except when participants volunteered such information, we cannot draw definitive conclusions about whether particular acts of racism (e.g., pressure to conform to stereotypes) came from faculty, staff, students, media, or other sources. Finally, the sample included more female (34) than male (12) students, and it is possible that this overrepresentation of women resulted in a set of findings that are more descriptive of female Asian American students' experiences with racism than their male peers.

FINDINGS

The current analysis resulted in nine themes. Before presenting these themes, a few caveats are warranted. First, while some of these themes can be perceived as *more* systemic (e.g., vicarious racism, racial isolation and marginalization, pressure to racially segregate, pressure to racially assimilate, racial silencing), cultural (e.g., forever foreigner myth, the model minority myth, the inferior minority stereotypes), or individual (e.g., racial harassment) in nature, many of the themes may overlap two or more of these types of racism. Second, we recognize that presenting all nine themes herein requires us to compromise some level of depth in discussion of our findings. Nevertheless, we purposefully chose to present all nine themes in the current article because this kind of broad analysis is essential to our effort to generate a more holistic perspective of Asian American college students' racial realities. Finally, it is also important to note that these nine themes are not intended to be an exhaustive list of the ways in which all Asian Americans experience racism in college. Rather, the findings delineate the ways that our 46 students described how racism shaped their college experiences.

Racial Hostility: “If You Were Called a Chink . . . Would You Feel Safe?”

Participants discussed encountering racial hostility. This racial hostility included instances of racial bullying, racial slurs, and racial profiling. The students discussed experiencing acts of racial hostility in their interactions with both peers and police on campus, as well as how these incidents contributed to a climate of fear on campus.

For example, when discussing their experiences navigating racially hostile environments, participants discussed encountering racial slurs. Cynthia, a Chinese American female student, tried to make sense of instances in which she has been called a “chink” and other racial slurs on the street, when she made the following remarks:

I don't know if it was because I'm quiet, but I've been called a “chink” and other names. . . . It's usually just when I'm walking past somebody, and they'll just scream it. I'm not really . . . I don't cause conflict, so I don't know why they're causing crap with me.

While campus police are charged with serving and protecting college students and other people, in some instances, participants reported that they were the perpetrators of racial harassment. For example, Lin, a Cambodian American male, discussed being profiled by police multiple times, including a time he was stopped for jaywalking on his campus, where it is normal for students to jaywalk on the way to classes, and another time he was stopped at gunpoint:

I would say there's some discrimination toward Asian people. . . . I was pulled over by cops . . . White cops . . . like four times. One time was for jaywalking. Who *doesn't* jaywalk on this campus? Me and three other guys were pulled over because the officer said there was a car behind us. And, evidently, there

was no car behind us. She just pulled us over for no reason. . . . For jaywalking. I mean everyone does it, not just us. . . . Another time, there was a gun pointed at us because someone reported that some guy was walking around who started a fire. . . . And I felt like I was violated . . . as a human being.

In the context of explaining the nature of racial prejudice and discrimination on campus, Lin shared these experiences of being racially profiled and violated with frustration.

Participants also reported that these direct encounters with racial hostility contributed to a climate of fear among Asian American undergraduates on their campuses. Terry, another Chinese American female student, discussed her experiences with this racial hostility on her campus when she stated that there are “bias incidents . . . property damage . . . racial slurs. . . . If *you* were called “chink” in the middle of the night and have no one do anything about it, would you feel safe walking home?” Terry's comments illuminate some of the ways that racial hostility manifested on her campus, but they also illustrate how these incidents were associated with feelings of diminished safety. In sum, participants reported experiencing such racial hostility from their peers and police on campus and its contribution to a climate of fear.

Vicarious Racism: “If it Happens to Another . . . I Know it Can Happen to Me”

In addition to their encounters with racial hostility, participants discussed how vicarious racism shaped their experiences. Vicarious racism operates when Asian American college students witness racist incidents that are directed at other Asian Americans or people of color.

First, participants underscored the salience of observing other individuals within their

environment encounter racist experiences. Tina, a Chinese American female, discussed the salience of these vicarious experiences with racism in the following remarks:

It doesn't have to happen to me personally, like I don't have to be called a "chink" or a "gook" or whatever. . . . If it happens to another Asian American, I know that it can happen to me. . . . One of my acquaintances, who's Asian American, had poop, like feces, smeared on his dorm door . . . and they were the only Asian Americans on their floor. I've heard about so many other incidents like this. I know it can happen to me. That's how I'm personally affected by it.

Tina's comments clarify how vicariously experiencing racial hostility in the environment can shape Asian American students' experiences, even if they are not the direct victims of racist acts. She went on to clarify that her university's nonresponse to racist incidents that she vicariously experienced compounded her negative reactions to this vicarious racism:

I don't need that damage done to my door. I don't need to be called a certain thing to my face. I know it can very well happen to me in this climate, where these deeds are committed and gone unpunished. The university's response is like a bunch of lies, deceit.

In addition to linking direct experiences of racial harassment with the climate of fear on some campuses, participants also described how these vicarious experiences with racism led to feelings of diminished safety and fear on campus. For example, Lin shared how vicariously experiencing racial violence on campus made him feel less safe in the campus environment:

One of them Black guys were killed in his apartment and it had to do with racism because "nigger" was written on the wall. So, sometimes, I do feel scared . . . to be

here. Last semester, we had three people die in one semester and they all were a minority. One lady was hit by a car. One Korean guy was beaten to death by some guy in his apartment. . . . It's pretty scary to be a minority around here sometimes.

In Lin's case, a hate crime perpetrated toward a Black student and incidents involving other Asian American students both contributed to an overall climate of fear. Indeed, the participants' comments suggest that their awareness of incidents of racial harassment and violence occurring periodically on their campuses meant that they were not safe from harm and could randomly or unpredictably become victims of racial hostility themselves.

Racial Isolation and Marginalization: "I Always Feel Like I'm Out of Place"

Participants discussed experiencing racial isolation from the mainstream cultures of their campuses. This theme manifested in two forms, including participants' feelings of being one of few people from their ethnic group and active marginalization from peers on their campuses.

First, several participants discussed being one of few or the "only one" from their racial and ethnic community on campus. For example, a female Chinese American, named Lani, attended an institution at which Asian Americans composed approximately 5% of the student body and discussed feeling like the only Asian American on campus in the following comments:

I always feel like I'm out of place. . . . I kind of feel out of place when I'm the only Asian in the room and everyone else is White. . . . I've had a couple of classes where it's been like everyone's Caucasian and I'm the only minority. . . . I guess when I first go in there, I'm kind of . . . disappointed that there's not another minority in there. I don't know why.

Even on campuses with larger representation of Asian Americans in the student body, some Southeast Asian Americans discussed feeling like one of few or the only one from their specific ethnic subgroups on campus. For example, Danielle, a Laotian female student, attended a campus that was 12% Asian American and stated the following:

There is a lot of representation here but it kind of warps the whole breakdown of the other Asian American ethnic groups. There's a lot of underrepresentation of Southeast Asians so it doesn't get recognized because we see so many Asian faces around here. For Southeast Asians, we're a really small group, and Pacific Islanders a small group.

Similarly, Janet discussed feeling like the only Vietnamese American on a campus that was 13% Asian American after her one Vietnamese friend transferred to another institution:

I felt a little unique . . . being the only Vietnamese. Well, not the only one. . . . I actually had a friend, freshman year. She was Vietnamese, but she transferred. It was kind of lonely, the fact that we feel like we were the only two Vietnamese people on campus.

In addition to feeling isolated or like they were one of few people from their racial or ethnic group on their campuses, participants discussed how White students subtly, but actively, marginalized them in and outside of class by avoiding interactions with them. For example, another Chinese American female student named Tammy described the active marginalization that she experienced in the classroom in the following remarks:

Well, the social dynamics are very subtle. Most of the time, when we get into groups and the professors aren't picking our groups, I have no choice but to turn to the person next to me and the person next to me is almost always White. But . . . maybe

like 80% of the time, a White classmate will turn to me and look away and start moving to another group. . . . I'll be the last person to say, "Can I join?"

Thus, several students reported experiencing racial isolation on campus. Ultimately, these experiences were associated with students' lack of belonging to the dominant campus culture, and led, in part, to increased racial segregation at these institutions.

Pressure to Racially Segregate: "I Feel Not Accepted . . . I Want to Stay in My . . . Little Bubble"

Participants also discussed feeling pressure to racially segregate on campus. Pressure to segregate refers to how unwelcoming campus environments diminish students' desires to interact across racial lines and result in their immersion in Asian American subcultures (e.g., Asian American studies programs and Asian American student organizations). This theme comprised three elements: disengagement from the dominant culture, immersion within ethnic subcultures, and the unfair burden to integrate racial groups on campus.

First, it is important to note that, where Asian American groups on campus are visible, people can perceive them as self-segregating and antisocial. Alex, a Vietnamese American participant, for example, illuminated these perceptions with the following comments:

I feel like if they're an Asian sorority or fraternity, they're very clique-y. I feel like you shouldn't seclude yourself from other races. I don't know. I just feel like it's a little weird to be in just strictly Asian organizations.

Thus, Alex had developed negative perceptions of ethnic organizations on campus because of the perception that they were self-segregating or prevented interactions with other racial groups.

However, several participants discussed how they found their predominantly White

campus environments unwelcoming and consequently decided to disengage from those spaces. For instance, Lin discussed his conscious decision not to engage in predominantly White spaces, such as student government and other mainstream organizations:

I hang out around White people . . . but it's just very subtle. I mean, I'm sure people of color do it to Whites too, but I mean the mainstream groups are controlled by White students and, if I feel like I were to join one, I would just be a token. A token could be a great change agent, but I'm not going to make that sacrifice.

Lin explained that getting involved in mainstream organizations would be costly because he would be tokenized and marginalized within those groups. He implied that doing so could allow him to facilitate positive transformation on campus, but that it was not worth the cost for him.

In addition, this perception of campus environments being unwelcoming or tokenizing for Asian Americans led some participants, including some who entered college with a desire to interact across racial lines, to seek out and immerse themselves in predominantly Asian American spaces. Jacqueline illustrated this point with the following remarks:

I feel not accepted, like not included or whatever. . . . It makes you not feel a sense of community . . . back at home, I felt more of a need to be more multicultural or have different kinds of friends. . . . But, I don't get that feeling anymore. I don't care. I want to stay in my Korean little bubble.

Moreover, some participants expressed that they were expected to shoulder the burden to reach out and interact across racial lines. They reported that those in the majority did not make such efforts. Kenneth, a Vietnamese American male student, shared this perspective:

I can't really say if the Caucasians would

like to join any non-Caucasian events, but it just seems that way. . . . I've definitely invited a lot of non-Asian students to come to our events. It seems mostly that the Caucasian students, they seem like they don't want to come.

Thus, the perception that Asian American students are self-segregating because they join predominantly Asian American organizations might be misleading. The participants' perspectives suggest that at least some Asian American students gravitate toward such groups because of the unwelcoming campus environments that force them to seek safe spaces where they can feel welcome and find a sense of community.

Pressure to Racially Assimilate: "I Go to School and I Have to Be a Different Person"

Several participants also discussed how they felt pressure to assimilate to the predominantly White cultures of their campuses. This pressure to assimilate refers to the pressure that Asian Americans feel to dress, talk, and act in ways that were congruent with the White majority on campus. This theme consisted of two elements, including pressure to fit in and internal conflict that resulted from efforts to assimilate to dominant racial norms.

Participants reported that their peers sent them signals that they were outsiders due to their linguistic accents, ethnic foods, and behaviors. Cynthia, for example, explained the following:

I wanted to make [Chinese] food, and they wouldn't eat it. . . . Another thing is they like to make fun of . . . some words that I can't say because I grew up speaking Vietnamese, so there's some vowels that I can't really pronounce correctly compared to them, so I know they think I talk weird a little bit. . . . I always feel like . . . I'm the Asian girl that can't speak English and they're the white people together.

Moreover, participants discussed feeling pressure to change their appearance and actions to fit in on campus. Jacqueline, for example, made the following comments:

I completely stand out. . . . No matter what I do, no matter what I say, it's going to be different. . . . I mean, our group met the other night at the student union to talk about our project and I feel as if I have to talk a certain way . . . like to fit in . . . and I hate doing that.

As this quotation illuminates, Jacqueline felt inevitably different from the majority on campus, pressure to change to fit in, and discontent that she had to negotiate this cultural conflict.

Moreover, participants discussed how pressure to assimilate resulted in internal conflict. Valerie, for example, a Hmong American female student, discussed how pressure to assimilate and her efforts to do so resulted in her feeling like a different person when she was on campus:

It's hard. . . . I just feel like sometimes I go to school and I have to be a different person. I'm very Asian American. I'm just more American than Asian, I guess, personality and everything. But when I go back home I'm very Asian.

In sum, participants felt pressure to be a different person on campus in order to conform to the dominant institutional culture. This pressure to be a different person in college posed challenges for Jacqueline, Valerie, and several other participants in the study.

Racial Silencing: "Why Can't We Have a Voice in the Mainstream Curriculum, Too?"

Participants also discussed how they felt that Asian American students were racially silenced on their respective campuses. This theme underscores the reality that Asian American participants were denied voice in various

sphere of campus life. Participants discussed how Asian Americans were silenced in the knowledge exchanged on their campuses and the physical spaces that they navigated across their campuses.

First, participants noticed that Asian Americans were denied voice and representation in the knowledge that was exchanged on campus. Tammy discussed this denial in the following comments, as she described how an American literature professor excluded the work of Asian American authors from the course and relegated those authors' work to the domain of Asian American studies, even though no Asian American Studies Program existed on their campus:

I took like a creative writing class last semester. . . . I cannot recall any Asian American authors. . . . So, I talked to my professor about it, and she turned to me and told me, "Well, that's why we have African American studies and Asian American studies. Are you aware of those?" I'm like, "I'm working on the campaign [to get Asian American studies established]." . . . Asian American literature is like 99.9% in English, except for a few words that are scattered here and there. How does that *not* constitute American English literature? Why can't we have a voice in the mainstream curriculum too? Why should we have to take electives?

A Vietnamese American male student, named Nick, discussed how this exclusion extended beyond the classroom to literature and knowledge available in the library:

Tradition . . . library resources have books but a lot of that's written by Americans . . . it's really not portraying the right perspective . . . the traditional perspective has to be obtained through ancestors or actually going back to Vietnam . . . because I can read Vietnamese and . . . you see that there's a huge difference in the tone and how [history is] described.

Indeed, Nick's comments underscore the general exclusion of Vietnamese and Vietnamese voice from the literature and knowledge that students can access on his campus.

Participants also discussed how this lack of voice led to feelings of exclusion from both curricular and cocurricular spaces across their respective campuses. According to Peter, a Thai American male student, one of the most salient challenges faced by Asian American students across his campus was that they lacked voice:

I think one of the biggest challenges for Asian Americans across this campus is to just have a voice to be heard. . . . For the past couple of years, a couple of Asian Americans tried to make efforts to make their voices heard. . . . I think, as Asian Americans, that is one of the hurdles. . . . It's really hard for us to be heard. . . . We don't seem to have a voice when it comes to all these things. . . . I've never heard Hispanics have much of a voice either. So, I think as Asians one of the big problems is having a voice or having a say.

Hence, this racial silencing posed challenges for participants in both curricula and physical spaces throughout their respective campuses.

The Forever Foreigner Myth: "It's Almost Like I Don't Deserve to Be Here"

Racial stereotypes also shaped participants' experiences in college. For example, participants discussed the forever foreigner myth, which refers to Asian Americans being characterized as perpetual foreigners, despite the fact that they grew up in the United States or immigrated as young children. This theme included others' assumptions of foreignness based on physical appearance and challenges to Americanness or being in the United States.

Indeed, several participants discussed encountering situations in which people treated them as foreigners, even though they were born or grew up in the United States. For

example, Lani, who was born and raised in the United States, shared the following experience:

Three Caucasian guys came on the bus and one of them. . . . I don't know if he was drunk or whatever . . . but he was just like, "Hey. Is this even the American bus?" and that made me really, *really* upset. But, I mean, I didn't say anything because, you know, if he *was* drunk or whatever, I didn't want to cause trouble or harm upon myself.

The forever foreigner myth also manifested in participants' experiences in more subtle ways. Danielle, who grew up in the United States and speaks fluent English, shared the following:

They just think of me as being Asian. It's kind of irritating when I'm having a conversation with someone and . . . because I'm Asian, they probably think that I don't really know how to speak English, so when I'm trying to talk and then I'll pause . . . they'll try to finish my sentence because they think I need help with my words.

Thus, Danielle felt that people's perceptions of her as perpetually foreign led to them making assumptions about her linguistic abilities and influenced her everyday interactions.

In addition, participants also described having their citizenship or presence in the United States challenged by their peers. Valerie, for example, shared the following comment about an experience in which a peer interrogated her about her coming to and being in the United States:

I had one experience growing up where someone asked me, "So where are you from?" I told them that "I originally lived in California, but now I live in Minnesota." She was like, "Well, where are you from originally?" I'm like, "Oh, well, I'm from France." She's like, "Okay. . . . What are you doing here?" I'm like "Excuse me?" It's almost like I had to explain to her why I'm here. I felt like

I had to carefully answer that question because, if my answer doesn't justify why I'm really here in this country, then it's almost like I don't deserve to be here or I don't have the right to live in this country.

Thus, these comments illuminate that, regardless of how long participants lived in the United States or whether they identified as American, they could still be viewed as perpetual foreigners.

The Model Minority Myth: "People Assume . . . You're Going to Be Successful . . . I Hate It"

While the model minority myth that all Asian Americans are universally academically and occupationally successful may not appear to be a harmful stereotype on the surface, participants described how it is associated with several negative assumptions about them. Indeed, the model minority myth was associated with three interconnected sets of assumptions that Asian Americans are characterized by social ineptitude, are pressured into math and science fields by circumscribed intelligence, and have a genetic predisposition to succeed in these spheres.

Regarding social ineptitude, participants discussed the problematic nature of stereotype that all Asian Americans are nerds who lack social skill. Peter discussed this misconception:

You're already given this title as nerd, overachiever. . . . These stereotypes are negative, and more of the negative stereotypes they see, the more they look down on these people. I think that needs to be changed because not all Asians are just an anime freak or a video game freak. . . . I don't think just because we are considered overachievers or that you see a lot of Asians studying, they don't know how to have a good time like anyone else.

Second, with regard to circumscribed intelligence, participants highlighted that

the model minority myth was related to assumptions that Asian Americans have a genetic predisposition to go into math and science fields. For example, a Vietnamese American male named Scott discussed how the model minority myth was associated with expectations that Asian Americans would choose prepharmacy or premed majors, but his passion was for teaching:

I was able to find my passion for teaching. . . . But being Asian here . . . people automatically assume that you're going to pursue pharmacy or med school . . . yes, I think they're just like, "Oh you're in pharmacy because you're Vietnamese." People think Vietnamese people are going into pharmacy.

Third, participants also discussed how other people assumed that they did not *earn* the grades they received because they are genetically predisposed to excel in math and science, indirectly devaluing the hard work that they invested to do well in education. Tim, a Vietnamese American male student discussed this assumption and his frustration with it:

People assume that, because you're a certain race, you're going to be successful and stuff. I hate it. Whenever we get our midterm and I get a good grade, they're all like "Dude. You're Asian. It's not fair." I'm like "What? I studied."

The assumptions that Asian Americans are genetically superior in math and science created problems for participants when they needed support. Valerie noted that these assumptions led to others' beliefs that she should not need help and her feeling inadequate when needing help, thereby making it difficult for her to ask for necessary support:

They had free tutoring in rooms and labs. I will try and go, but. . . . They have stereotypes. You're Asian. You're supposed to be great in math and science. So, when you walk in, it's like "What do you need

help with? . . . You're Asian and you're supposed to get this. What do you mean you don't get it?" It felt discouraging. Like, "Oh god, am I really that stupid?" So when I go into the tutoring session, I feel like I don't belong there because this should come naturally to me and it doesn't.

Thus, although the model minority myth is often viewed as a harmless or even positive conceptualization, these participants' comments underscore its negative consequences.

The Inferior Minority Myth: "You Must Be Ghetto or Poor . . . It Just Makes Me Angry"

Although our participants were stereotyped as model minorities in general, some Southeast Asian American participants discussed being stereotyped as inferior. Specifically, they discussed being stereotyped as "ghetto" (i.e., having characteristics of someone who originates from low-income communities of color) or poor and having cultural deficiencies (e.g., placing low value on education). These stereotypes contributed to some experiencing social challenges.

Indeed, the inferior minority myth encompassed the assumptions that Southeast Asian American participants originated from deficient cultures. Daisy, a female Laotian student, for example, discussed her frustration with these assumptions when she said, "If you're from Southeast Asia, you must be ghetto and poor. . . . They're like, 'Oh, you're from Southeast Asia? Isn't that a poor country?' . . . They think . . . I'm ghetto." She went on to describe how the assumption that all Southeast Asian Americans come from poor origins was associated with misconceptions that they do not value education or are not capable of succeeding in college:

They're just like, "Wow. You're at a university." . . . It just makes me angry

because I'm being put in that category. . . . I just want them to be able to understand that, yes, there are some from Southeast Asia that join gangs and they don't really care about education . . . but there are some people in their culture that do the same thing. . . . All they see is the Southeast Asian people doing it.

Danielle also explained that she sometimes encountered these stereotypes in interactions with people close to her, who did not intend to do any harm. In the following comments, she discusses how her partner's friends stereotype her in this way:

They're not trying to be negative, but I feel negative. I mean they are just asking questions but I feel that I'm being targeted. I'll talk to my boyfriend and say I don't feel comfortable when your friends ask me those kinds of questions. He'll just say they're just asking you questions, so don't take it too seriously.

This quotation shows both how the inferior minority stereotype can manifest in subtle ways and that, if Southeast Asian Americans react, they can be perceived as overreacting or overly sensitive.

Among a few participants, this inferior minority stereotype caused social challenges, as it led to peers ostracizing them. Erica, a Cambodian American female, described the negative social consequences of this myth in the following remarks:

I was trying to be really friendly with everybody else and meet new people. . . . I was asking one of my friends, "Why aren't they friendly to me? Why don't they come up to me?" He was like, "People tell me that you intimidate them . . . because you're kind of ghetto." How am I ghetto? It still confuses me. How am I ghetto?

Erica discussed how this stereotype created social challenges for her on campus, as her peers chose not to socialize with her.

Thus, Southeast Asian American participants' experiences were mutually shaped by two polarized academic stereotypes: the model and inferior minority myths.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study contribute to existing literature in several ways. First, the findings provide one of the first systematic empirical examinations of the range of ways that racism shapes the experiences of Asian American college students. As mentioned, while previous studies have discussed some of the ways that racism affects the Asian American experience in college (e.g., Kotori & Malaney, 2003; Lewis et al., 2000; Museus, 2008a; Museus & Truong, 2009; Park, 2008), most of these inquiries have focused on a specific aspect of the racialized experiences of Asian Americans (e.g., experiences with racial harassment) or lumped Asian Americans into larger groups of students of color. Our inquiry adds to this research by offering a more comprehensive and systematic exploration of the racialized experiences of Asian American students specifically. Again, the findings are not intended to be exhaustive. Indeed, scholars have noted that Asian American students experience forms of racism that did not emerge in our study, such as the racialized objectification and exoticization of Asian American women and the racial emasculation of Asian American men in college (Cho, 2003; Museus, 2013a; Museus & Truong, 2013). Nevertheless, the findings herein do provide a useful typology to aid educators in understanding the ways that Asian Americans experience racism in college.

Second, the findings of the current inquiry confirm earlier studies that have suggested that Asian American students encounter racial hostility in college (Kim et al., 2009; Kotori & Malaney, 2003). In addition, these

findings add to this body of existing literature by demonstrating how Asian American undergraduates can experience racism in the campus environment vicariously. Indeed, the current findings suggest that such vicarious racism can have a significant influence on Asian American college students' levels of comfort and feelings of safety on their respective college or university campuses. While researchers are beginning to generate a better understanding of the nature, pervasiveness, and consequences of vicarious racism in the experiences of undergraduate students (e.g., Alvarez, Juang, & Liang, 2006), this phenomenon is not well understood, especially in the context of postsecondary education.

Third, the findings buttress earlier assertions that Asian Americans experience racial isolation at PWIs (Lewis et al., 2000; Park, 2008), but add to this research by illuminating that racist climates might pressure at least some to disengage from mainstream environments and immerse themselves in ethnic enclaves. This is a particularly salient finding, given that some have argued that ethnic enclaves on campuses are destructive, perpetuate ethnic isolation, and contribute to ethnic tension (e.g., D'Souza, 1991). In contrast, our findings suggest that racist campus environments might make Asian Americans feel they must seek out Asian American subcultures and immerse themselves in those enclaves to feel a sense of belonging on campus.

Fourth, the findings build on earlier research suggesting that the model minority myth might not be benign (Museus, 2008a). The findings of the current study, however, enhance earlier research to offer additional insight into how the model minority myth negatively influences the experiences of Asian American undergraduates by fueling assumptions that they are socially inept, are naturally geared toward math and science, are genetically predisposed to excel academically,

and therefore should not need or ask for help. Thus, the current inquiry adds to a more holistic understanding of the ways that the model minority stereotype may determine the educational choices, experiences, and trajectories of Asian American undergraduates.

Finally, unlike their East Asian American peers, Southeast Asian American experiences appear to be mutually shaped by both the model minority and inferior minority stereotypes. Research suggests that it is possible that this population is racialized as academically inferior because some ethnic groups within this category (e.g., Cambodian and Laotian Americans) tend to have darker skin, on average, than their East Asian American peers (Carter, 2005; Helms, Nicolas, & Green, 2010). Other explanations of this differential racialization exist as well, such as the relatively high rates of poverty and comparatively low rates of educational attainment among South East Asian Americans (Museus, 2013a, 2013b; Ngo & Lee, 2007). However, examination of the various sources of the differential racialization of Southeast Asian Americans was beyond the scope of our analysis.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The current inquiry has several important implications for future research and practice. Regarding research, as previously noted, our participant sample was limited to East and Southeast Asian American students and disproportionately male. Therefore, future studies should extend these findings by shedding light on the range of ways that South Asian American students experience racism in higher education. Future research should also unpack how gender shapes the racism experienced by Asian American men and women. Although we found no salient gender differences in experiences with racism

in the current sample, the role of gender was not the focus of our examination, and more systematic analyses of such gender differences in Asian American undergraduates' experiences with racism are warranted.

Second, it is important for scholars to delve deeper into the ways that racialized campus environments induce pressure for students to gravitate toward and become immersed in subcultures of peers who share their racial backgrounds. This inquiry begins to shed light on this phenomenon. However, more quantitative research that illuminates the extent to which negative perceptions of campus racial climates lead to balkanization and diminish Asian American students' engagement in meaningful cross-racial interactions in college is warranted.

Third, researchers should examine the ways in which exclusion of Asian American voices from curricular and physical spaces affects various outcomes in college. For example, one question that resulted from this analysis is how this racial silencing hinders the identity development, sense of belonging, and overall satisfaction of Asian American undergraduates. Finally, future research should pay specific attention to the types of interactions in which racism that Asian American students encounter (e.g., with whom they were interacting when the racism occurred), to add to insights into these students' interactions with other racial groups in college.

With regard to implications for practice, the findings underscore the importance of considering the potential consequences of vicarious racism. While most educators acknowledge that direct victims of racist incidents can be negatively affected by such experiences, it is also important that they recognize such incidents as being potentially harmful to the well-being, sense of safety and belonging, and satisfaction of those who vicariously experience such occurrences as well.

This means that it is important for educators to react to racist incidents by developing comprehensive meaningful responses and addressing the concerns of the larger student body. This should not be limited to public denouncements of racist acts, but also include creating safe spaces for students to voice concerns and working with faculty, staff, and students to construct strategic plans for addressing these incidents and responding to tension in the campus climate.

In addition, college educators have a responsibility to ensure that Asian American voices are included in curricula and physical campus settings in meaningful ways. Although this might seem like common sense, the reality is that Asian American voices are still excluded from curricula and physical spaces on many campuses. It is important to acknowledge that Asian American voices are indisputably part of American history, literature, perspectives, and realities. Thus, faculty across disciplines—such as history, the humanities, and the social sciences—should make concerted and meaningful efforts to incorporate literature and perspectives from Asian Americans into their course content. Similarly, college educators should ensure that Asian American voices are included in campus spaces in which discourse around race and diversity issues take place (e.g., diversity conferences and forums).

It is important to ensure that faculty and staff are educated about racial stereotypes of Asian Americans, so that they do not contribute to the perpetuation of such myths. Professional development opportunities can provide critical spaces for this type of education to take place. Once college faculty and staff are aware of such stereotypes, they can make efforts to convey to their students that they do not subscribe to such myths in order to create a more culturally sensitive environment for those students. In addition, faculty and staff who receive such training

and work in advising and counseling can engage Asian Americans in discussions about the pressures they might face to avoid seeking help or choose specific majors (e.g., math and science). Helping students understand these stereotype-induced pressures might aid them in comprehending whether they might be avoiding support or allowing themselves to be pressured into a major and career in which they are unhappy.

Finally, educators should refrain from assuming that racial balkanization on campus is a result of Asian American and other racial minority students' independent choices to self-segregate. Empirical evidence that supports such assumptions is difficult to find, and the current findings suggest that even if Asian Americans are making conscious decisions to immerse themselves in ethnic enclaves, it could be a function of larger racist climates that are pressuring these students to disengage from more mainstream environments. Educators should assume responsibility for facilitating meaningful interracial interactions and educate all students about the importance of assuming responsibility for promoting such interactions.

We conclude by calling on higher education scholars to increase current levels of understanding regarding the ways in which racism shapes Asian American experiences in higher education. While there is a small and growing body of scholarship that illuminates these racial realities, developing more comprehensive and intricate understandings of how racism shapes the lives of Asian Americans in college is warranted, as it is critical to both developing accurate understandings of students' experiences in college and effectively serving this population.

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