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### The Model Minority Myths: Racism And Sexism Against Asian-American Community

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The Model Minority Myths:

Racism And Sexism Against Asian-American Community

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Honor Scholar Program Senior Project, 2017

Author Note: This paper is my Honor Scholar Senior Project, sponsored by Professor Christina Holmes.

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Thanks for everyone in my committee!

### **Abstract**

This project aims to investigate the negative influences of the model minority stereotypes to Asian Americans. The model minority myth is the idea that members from a minority group with Asian heritages are considered to achieve a higher degree of educational and socioeconomic success than the average population. Asian Americans are usually perceived as model minorities who achieve high educational and socioeconomic success without many negative experiences in the U.S. However, a closer examination of the model minority myth indicates that this idea is quite generalized and misleading, which cannot stand for the diversity and complexity of Asian American experiences. In order to help people better understand Asian American experiences and the negative implications of the model minority myths, I chose to do this project by deconstructing the model minority stereotypes. Asian American immigration history, racial discrimination against Asian Americans, domestic violence against immigrant Asian women, and controlling images in the social media are some of the main materials that I will cover in this paper. Overall, this is a multidisciplinary paper that combines knowledge from Asian studies, Women studies, and Psychology.

**Keywords:** The model minority myths, racial discrimination, mental stress, internalized racism, domestic violence, controlling images

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## The Model Minority Myths:

### Racism And Sexism Against The Asian-American Community

#### **Introduction of the whole project**

My personal identity as an international student with east-Asian heritage as well as my experiences at DePauw stimulate my interests in the model minority myth. Even though my life experience is different from Asian-Americans who are born and raised in the U.S., I still feel a huge pressure on me that expects me to keep a good academic record all the time from parents and from my American friends who believe that people with Asian descents should all do well in school. What's more, when I took the introduction to women studies course at the second semester of my freshman year, I found the sparseness of existing literature in regard to Asian American experiences in a white-dominant society. Indeed, even when we learned and talked about women of color's experiences in the U.S., I realized that most of the readings were relevant to African American and Latino Americans' experiences, but there was not much research about Asian-Americans. As an international student from mainland China, I really wanted to know more about Asian Americans including Asian American women's lives in the U.S. Driven by my curiosity, I searched key terms such as "Asian American women's life," "Racial discrimination against Asian Americans," as well as "Asian American immigration history" on the Internet, and I found much information about model minority stereotypes. After doing my own research and reading several academic articles about model minority stereotypes, I gradually understood that Asian Americans face different types of difficulties in their life: in some ways, they face racial discrimination just like people of color from other racial/ethnic backgrounds. However, their experiences also differ compared to other people of color. When I talked about the concept model minority stereotypes with a few of my Asian American friends, some of them knew this concept while some of them were not familiar with it. The fact that my Asian-American friends had mixed

answers in regard to their familiarity with the model minority concept further enhanced my desire to explore it more.

The Model minority myth is a stereotype against Asian-American people that claims that Asian-Americans are highly educated individuals who come from stable family structures and they tend to earn high incomes when compared to people from other minority groups. In this case, Asian Americans are judged and seen through white Americans' lens, because white Americans are the dominant groups of people in the U.S. who have the power to put people of color with dissimilar racial/ethnic backgrounds into different categories. Thus, the model minority stereotype is assigned to Asian Americans by white Americans. This so-called positive stereotype against Asian-Americans is quite misleading and I will show why the model minority stereotype is harmful to Asian-Americans and unable to stand for the complexity of Asian American experiences. There are four main sections in this project. The first overviews the history of Asian-American immigration and relational racialization of immigrants and people of color in the U.S. to contextualize understandings of Asian-Americans as racial and ethnic minorities in the U.S. In the second main section, I will use a sociological lens to examine the negative psychological implications (i.e. mental illness costs) as well as systemic discrimination against different Asian-Americans groups despite the fact that they are labeled as model minorities in the U.S. In the third main section, I will discuss domestic violence against immigrant Asian women and the model minority controlling images in the media that affect Asian American men and women differently yet negatively. In the fourth main section, I summarize all the findings from the previous three sections and propose new directions for future research by designing a study proposal and giving suggestions that aim to help Asian-American community.

This project is very important because it not only enhances people's awareness of what happens in Asian-American communities but also proposes possible new changes for many college campuses about

how to create a more supportive environment for Asian-American and international students with Asian heritages. Research and my interactions with a few Asian-American students have shown that Asian-American history, especially the history of how Asian immigrants have been discriminated against in the U.S., has not been taught in schools or been discussed with family members very often. Thus, a great number of people do not realize the difficulties that Asian-American have faced throughout history or in their daily life. On the other hand, the stereotypical idea that expects all Asian-Americans to behave well in school from the mainstream society and from traditional Asian cultures has put much psychological stress on Asian-American students, which affects their mental health negatively. The diversity of Asian-American groups in regard to cultural, linguistic, physical traits, and national differences has often been ignored by people from the mainstream groups. As “model minorities,” Asian Americans still face discrimination including hostility in a white-dominant society. Given the fact that so many people are unaware of Asian American experiences, I chose to do the project about the model minority stereotype with the hope that more people will be able to have a better understanding about the Asian-American community, including the negative implications of the model minority stereotype. By sharing this project with a wider audience, I hope that people working in the administrations of college campuses, including DePauw, are able to know better about the struggles that Asian-American students face and create a more supportive environment for them.

### **The first main section: Background information about model minority stereotype**

#### **The earliest history of stereotype formation: The West Constructs the East**

Asian immigrants’ experiences in the U.S. history have never been easy, because they constantly face prejudices and discrimination from people who come from dominant groups --White Americans. Indeed, non-white immigrants were usually carefully examined by officials of U.S. Immigration and held for days,

weeks, or even months for the purpose of determining their fitness for America (Wu , Song, 2007). From the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act that prevented Chinese workers' entry to the U.S. to anti-Asian American violence such as a Vietnamese-American's brutal death in the South California city of Tustin in 1998, one could see that hostility against Asians is a severe problem in U.S. society (Ancheta, 1998). However, European Americans' prejudices against Asians began long before the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Law. The "where and when" of the Asians' encounters with people with European heritages could be traced back to the fifth or fourth century B.C.E., a time when Europeans' imagination and construction of Asians had already begun (Wu, Song, 2007).

Europeans' stereotypical ideas of people with Asian heritages first developed in the fifth or fourth century B.C.E., a time when number of great philosophers documented their impressions of Asian people. Hippocrates noted: "Asians differed in every aspect and very widely from Europeans. Asia's mild, uniform climate supported lush vegetation and plentiful harvests, but under these conditions courage, endurance, industry and high spirit could not rise and pleasure must be supreme. Asians reflected the seasons in their natures, exhibiting a monotonous sameness and stagnation, and their form of government, led by kings who ruled as despots, enfeebled them even more" (Jones, 1923). Hippocrates not only uses pejorative terms to demean Asians, but also compares Asians with Europeans for the purpose of highlighting Europeans' superiority: "They (Asians) have yellowish complexions as though they suffer from jaundice" (Jones, 1923). Hippocrates further concludes that the living environments of Asians are very different from that of Europeans and Europeans had a wider variety of physical types and were more courageous and energetic than Asians (Wu,Song, 2007). The language that Hippocrates uses to describe Asians such as "a monotonous sameness," "stagnation," "suffer from jaundice" indicates that he believes Asians' physical appearance, culture, and government policy is inferior without any positive quality.

Hippocrates' negative attitude towards Asians could also be reflected by the fact that he believes Europeans' physical and personality characteristics are superior to that of Asians: "Europeans had a wider variety of physical types and were more courageous and energetic than Asians" (Wu, Song, 6, 2007). Other philosophers such as Aristotle also describes Asians negatively by indicating that "the Asians were always in a state of subjection and slavery" (Wu, Song, 6, 2007). In this context, word-choice like "subjection" and "slavery" emphasizes Aristotle's belief that Asians are submissive and they could be easily conquered. Both Hippocrates and Aristotle's negative descriptions of Asians reveal that even great philosophers still don't believe that there exists humanity within non-westerners (in this case, Asians) because they do not judge Asians' physical, environmental, and political differences from Europeans objectively.

The Asians that Hippocrates and Aristotle described in the above context were mostly people from Turkey and its surrounding countries. Most of these people are considered as Middle Eastern people in current society. Their physical characteristics, cultures, and life experiences are different from the people I will mainly focus on in my paper --Asian Americans with East-Asia and Southeast-Asia heritages, but we will see that, though Europeans' notion of "Asia" changes with exploration, not much changes in stereotypes. In other words, even though there are huge differences between Middle East people and people from other parts of Asia, Europeans still tend to describe all the non-Europeans in the same negative way, which vividly demonstrates that racialized portraits of non-Europeans evolved through trade and colonial expansion.

Moreover, the land of Asia is often stereotyped by Europeans as an easily conquered place with a great number of submissive and exotic women. The Roman historian Arrian's description of Greek men's conquests of Asian women could be shown as an example: Arrian indicates that many Indian women are willing to suffer themselves to be deflowered by Europeans when an elephant is promised as the purchase, believing that it is an honor to have their beauty valued at a such high rate (Wu, Song, 7, 2007). According

to Arrian's narration, during Greek men's journey in Asia, they are able to express their sexual desires by having sex with many women, which displays the triumph of mind over body, rationality over sensuality, and West over East (Wu, Song, 2007). His account represents Asia, India in particular, as a land full of easily conquered women from the lens of Europeans. The fact that Indian women are described as if they actively want to have sexual relationships with European men reflects Asian people's "feminized" trait judging by Europeans' standards.

One cannot tell whether these descriptions of Asian women as submissive to European men are objective or not because the communication between the West and the East is not equal. In other words, people from the West are able to write their judgments about people from the East while Asian people's own voices have been silenced and neglected since they don't have the same power to speak for themselves, at least not in the West. Edward Said, an expert in Asian studies and international policies, demonstrates his concerns about the imbalanced power structure between the West and the silenced East this way: "Flaubert (a Western man)'s encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented herself. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem (the Egyptian woman) physically but to speak for her and tell his readers in what way she was 'typically Oriental' " (Said , 1978). Without any doubt, the fact that Flaubert is a comparatively wealthy man from the West gives him the power to speak for the Egyptian woman by writing about her and telling other Westerners what she looks like or how she acts. The Egyptian woman never spoke or represented herself in her own voice to a Western audience. Thus, one could only see her through Flaubert' s descriptions. Unfortunately, Flaubert's power over Kuchuk, just like Arrian 's power over Indian women, is not an isolated instance. It stands for the general pattern of the encounters between the West and the East while the

West tends to describe the East in any way it wants because it has the power to do so.

What's more, Said considers the "Orient" as a region and an idea that encompass a large range of areas from the Middle East, South Asia, to Far East/East Asia in his study. By capturing the transition from early Orientalist accounts in the Greco-Roman eras to more systemic othering and categorization of the "Orient" that happened during the era of European colonialism, Said vividly demonstrates the fact that Europeans' stereotypical portraits of Asians happened long before Asian Americans and Euro-Americans' encounters in recent U.S. history.

Overall, the above paragraphs indicate that Asian people's experiences of being stereotyped by the West do not just happen in the U.S. immigration history. Instead, the very beginning of the encounter between the West and the East starts from the fifth century B.C.E., a time when Greek philosophers regard Asians as inferior and easily enslaved people when compared to Europeans. It is also a time when Asian women are stereotyped as exotic and submissive women who actively want to have sex with European men. Further, Asian people do not speak for themselves in these accounts and everything is seen through Europeans' perspective due to the imbalanced power structure.

### **Asian American Immigration History: The Earliest Chinese Workers in the U.S**

The Asian American immigration history could be traced back to 1835, a time when people from high socio-economic backgrounds in the U.S. decided to hire Chinese workers to work as laborers on the land. Many land owners who lived in Hawaii were frustrated that they could not convert the native people into docile and efficient modern agricultural workers. Thus, they began to employ Chinese laborers (Hooper, 1836). Land owners' exploitation of Chinese workers happened frequently at that time. For instance, a cruel land owner called William Hooper projected the huge demand for Chinese labor this way: "At a future day, necessary to locate some halfdozen Chinese on the land, if the establishment grows it will

require them. The Supt. cannot feed the mill, boil the juice, make the sugar, etc etc, and to trust it to the natives is worse than nothing--they are alas, children, boys, and always will be...However, a colony of Chinese would, probably, put the plantation in order, to be perpetuated, sooner and with less trouble than any other class of husbandmen" (Hooper,12,1836). Judging from Hooper's personal letter, one could tell that he has a strong desire to take advantage of potential Chinese workers' labor by claiming "A colony of Chinese would (be) less trouble than any other class of husbandmen" (Hooper,1836). Indeed, by portraying Chinese workers as submissive individuals who won't lead to any trouble if they work in plantation, Hooper demonstrates his determination to control foreigner labors, which is cruel.

Relational racializing of people from different racial groups can be shown in the above paragraph. In detail, whiteness is regarded as the norm and seen as the most civilized; Hooper figures himself as the patriarchal good father; indigenous people are seen as uncivilized, primitive, unruly, and disobedient sons who should be controlled by white men, which stand in contrast to the Chinese men who are considered as docile, easily manipulated, and good sons from white-Americans' lens. It's clear that racial categories are defined by white Americans in this situation. Most importantly, masculinity and reversed gender roles also happen: white men are the most masculine men who are able to control men of color, while Chinese men are men controlling male laborers who have to obey white men's orders.

Moreover, Hooper not only takes advantage of Chinese labors, but also takes pride in his behaviors by believing that Chinese workers are happily willing to work for him. After he hired a large number of Chinese men to the mill by demanding them to work everyday, Hooper bragged to his friends that he made the right choice by hiring Chinese men, because they are diligent workers who want to work for him:" Chinamen are highly pleased...And by their fixtures on doors I should suppose they intend to spend their days in it" (Hooper,1836). In this context, the description such as "Chinamen are highly pleased"

represents Hooper's belief that Chinese workers are quite satisfied with their working environments, which could be a way he uses to justify his exploitation of Chinese workers. Most importantly, everything is seen through Hooper's perspective, because he is the one who describes his attitude to and judgment of Chinese workers, while Chinese workers' own thoughts about the whole situation have been silenced since they are not the ones who talk about their own experiences here, and they have not been recorded through historical record. The imbalanced power structure is quite obvious: The fact that readers only know Hooper's stories from his perspective but not from laborers' lens shows that history is only told by people from dominant groups, while underprivileged people's voices are silenced.

The above analysis about white Americans' exploitation of Chinese workers from 1835 could demonstrate the harsh circumstances that Chinese men have to face after they arrived in the U.S. Most importantly, the fact that the beginning of Asian American immigration history goes back to Chinese people's experiences of working as workers due to white Americans' demands demonstrates that Asian immigration history is full of exploitation and inequity.

### **Indian American Immigration History: Political Expressions And Immigration**

The Naturalization Act of 1790 made Asians ineligible for citizenship due to the fact that citizenship limits to whites only. After this Act was abandoned, Indian Americans began to immigrate to America (Wu, Song, 2007). The majority of them immigrated to America for the purpose of living a better life after they went witnessed political conflicts in their own country (Wu, Song, 2007) .

First-generation immigrants who are born and raised in their home country and then immigrate to their new Country usually follow the political events of their former homeland closely (Wu, Song, 2007). Indeed, given the fact that first-generation immigrants tend to have a close connection with their former home country, they are more likely to pay close attention to what is happening in their former nation and

participate in different types of political organizations. Asian Americans from certain ethnic groups who immigrate to the U.S. tend to participate in political protests as a way to fight against injustice and to gain power in their new homeland. Both the behaviors of participating in political movements in home country and participating in political protests in new country indicate that many first generation Asian-Americans care about their former home countries and want to enhance their own rights in their new countries as well. The following section shares the stories of those Asian Americans who are active in political protests from the beginning of Asian Immigration history.

Asian Indians are the people who organized the first community organizations in North America in 1906 and 1907(Wu, Song, 35,2007). A great number of Asian Indians ran the United India League in Vancouver with the purpose of protecting the rights of Indian workers. Other nationalist organizations like the Indian Independence League also existed, and they were first formed in San Francisco for the purpose of protecting political education for Indian immigrants in that area (Wu, Song, 2007). Most importantly, Asian Indians who immigrated to the U.S. not only fought for justice and equity in the United States, but also cared about their people who lived in other western countries. Indeed, in the year of 1907, some Asian Indians who lived in San Francisco published an Urdu periodical called *Circular of Freedom* by openly criticizing British rule in India (Wu, Song, 36, 2007). Overall, based on the fact that Asian Indians participated in many political organizations actively, one could tell that they used their own actions to fight against injustice and to enhance their life in a new country. From another perspective, the fact that Asian Indians developed so many political organizations could also indicate that first-generation immigrants' life in their new country may have been full of mistreatment and hardships, which is why they held so many activities to enhance their life conditions.

Asian Indians who lived in America from the year 1906 faced harsh conditions such as limited

opportunities to find jobs due to their racial/ethnic identity and limited resources to help them fight for injustice through law systems (Wu, Song, 2007). As minorities, Asian Indians are usually offered jobs with low pays such as being cooks in cheap restaurants and it's also hard for them to get promotions. Language barriers and a lack of understanding of the legal systems in the U.S. are main factors to prevent them from getting legal help. Due to the limited helps from legal systems, a large number of Asian Indians hold political organizations that aim to gather more people from their own community and help each another to fight against discrimination.

In summary, Indian Asians participated in political movements actively due to the political conflicts in their former home country and the negative political trend in the United States --their new country. Their active participation in political activities not only demonstrates their bravery and persistence against injustice, but also implies the harsh conditions that first-generation Indian Asians have to face.

### **Asian American Immigration History: Angel Island**

The above analysis indicates that Asian American immigration history could be traced back to Chinese people's arrival in 1835, and a great number of Asian Indians fought against injustice after they arrived in their new homeland. People with Asian heritages have been through a lot during their road to immigrate to the U.S., and they have settled and lived in different parts of the U.S. Among those places with a great number of Asian-Americans, Angel Island, a place in San Francisco Bay, is one of the most significant places that witnessed the difficulties that Asian-American faced throughout the history.

During the period from 1910-1940, Asian Americans in Angel Island went through lots of impediments during their life in the U.S. What makes this island stand out is the immigration history of it. Indeed, the need for an immigration facility in San Francisco was a direct outcome of anti-Chinese legislation, the Page Act of 1875 and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prevented Chinese from mainland China from becoming

U.S citizens (Daniels,4, 1997). At that time, a certain number of Chinese workers had already been working in the island. Unfortunately, given the fact that people with Chinese heritages were not considered U.S citizens due to the passage of the Exclusion Act, Angel Island detained many Chinese men and women until 1940 (Daniels 1997). The practice of Chinese Exclusive Act caused a huge demographic change in the island: Between 1910 to 1940, about 60,000 people passed through Angel Island, but nearly 10,000 Chinese were deported in those years (Daniels, 5, 1997). Based on this statistical data, one could tell that the mainstream U.S. society did not welcome immigrants from certain nationality background (in this case, immigrants from China), so the demographic information in Angel Island went through a huge change.

The Angel Island not only includes Asian immigrants from China, but also has a huge number of Japanese women who arrived at the U.S. as immigrants. About 60,00 Japanese women lived in this land, and most of them come to the U.S. to serve the role of picture brides (Daniels 4,1997). There was a policy called Gentlemen's Agreement from 1907-1908 until the immigration law of 1924 cut off all Japanese immigration (Daniels 1997). At that time, most Japanese women married and lived in the U.S. by proxy, often to men who they have never seen before. Their new life in the U.S. was full of impediments due to linguistic and cultural barriers. The main reason why Japanese women immigrated to The Angel Island at that time was because Japan encouraged or even sent a large number of its citizens to live in America as a way to enhance Japanese people's understandings of Western cultures and ideologies. Indeed, Japan went through many social changes from the early periods of 1900. The Japanese government faced the dilemmas of how to keep a balance between preserving Japanese cultures and learning from Western cultures. Despite the dilemma, the government still encouraged its citizens to come to Western nations including America to learn Western cultures. Additionally, there was also a significant number of Japanese Americans returning from education in Japan but were held on the island until their status could be verified correctly (Daniels 7,1997). Factors such as

suspicious of Japanese Americans' motivations for returning to Japan and the political conflicts between Japan and America explain why a large number of Japanese Americans were held on the island for a long time.

Overall, the above paragraphs show that Angel Island is an important place that witnessed Asian American immigration history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most importantly, the fact that Chinese Exclusion Acts caused a great number of Chinese workers to be deported from Angle Island and many Japanese women who lived in this Island usually married men whom they had never met before indicated that immigrants from Asia went through lots of impediments in the U.S. History.

### **Deprivations of political rights**

From the beginning of Asian American immigration history, immigrants with Asian heritages faced a variety of prejudices and mistreatments from being forced to work as hard laborers, being deprived U.S. nationality (e.g. The Chinese Exclusion Acts), to being deprived political rights in the U.S. society. From 1917 in the state of Arizona, anti-Asian sentiment was strong. Minorities with Asian heritages such as Japanese Americans or Chinese Americans were not allowed to vote, and most of them could not get U.S. citizenship as well. Unlike their European counterparts who could participate in the electoral process easily after they acquired citizenship, immigrants of Asian descents were unable to influence local politicians to listen to and to pay attention to their needs (Wu, Song, 2007). The fact that Asian Americans could not vote indicated that they had no political voice to make changes for their own community.

Even in the state of California -- a place with a great number of Asian Americans, immigrants with Asian descent were still treated unfairly when compared to their white counterparts. For instance, in late 1853 a white American was convicted for the murder of a Chinese American. However, in 1854 the California Supreme Court reversed the conviction by claiming that the person who murdered a Chinese American was founded not guilty (Wu, Song, 59,2007). Most importantly, there was not any Chinese American

to give testimony at that time, because the prohibition against Chinese testimony was written into the statute books clearly (Wu, Song, 2007). The legal system was extremely unfair for Chinese Americans, because they were unable to use law to protect themselves. Indeed, written law clearly indicated that Chinese Americans (the largest group of Asian Americans at that time ) were not allowed to give testimony in court, which largely limited their chances of winning. Asian Americans' limited political rights shows the high level of discrimination they face in the U.S. society as minorities.

### **Immigration life of Filipino women**

Starting from the year 1898, a great number of women from the Philippines began to work in the U.S. as nurses. Even though there were political conflicts between the U.S. , Spanish, and Filipino governments, American politicians believed that the concerns for Filipinos' welfare and permission to allow Filipinos to immigrate to the U.S would strengthen the relationship between the U.S. And the Philippines (Choy 2013). In the same year, U.S. President William McKinley claimed that Americans should be considered as friends instead of invaders to Filipinos (Choy 2013). It's clear that the U.S. politicians tried to minimize the conflicts between America and the Philippines by allowing Filipinos to work in the U.S. However, Filipinos' life in the U.S. were also full of discrimination just like other Asian Americans faced.

Reports from historians have shown that most Filipino women who worked as nurses in the U.S. lived in horrible conditions, and their engagement in nursing could be regarded as a gendered issue (Choy 2013). From the mid-nineteenth century to today, nursing has been consistently regarded as women's work. As women of color and immigrants, Filipinos had to face a variety of impediments in their new life in America due to their cultural, linguistic and ethnic differences when compared to White Americans. Indeed, Filipino women received less pay and worked long hours than their white peers. When they were abused and taken advantages by employers, Filipino women were unable to seek justice because most of them did not speak

English fluently (Choy 2013). From another perspective, as immigrant women who arrived in America due to political conflicts between the U.S. and their home countries, Filipino women faced more psychological stress when compared to other Asian immigrants from mainland China who came to America not because of huge political conflicts. In other words, people who immigrated to new countries for the purpose of running away from political conflicts in their native nations not only need to face problems like linguistic and cultural differences just like any other Asian immigrant, but also undergo huge psychological stress given the fact that their families and many people in their home countries may still be negatively influenced by political conflicts to a certain degree.

### **Vietnamese People's Immigration to the U.S**

Between 1975 and 1990, a great number of Vietnamese immigrated to America, and most of them came to the U.S. as refugees (Zhou, Bankson, 12,1998). The Vietnamese are members of a large Southeast Asian refugee population who arrived in the U.S. shortly after American troops' withdrawal from Vietnam (Zhou, Bankson, 1998). As war refugees, Vietnamese people did not have adequate language skills or resources to help them adapt to their new life in America smoothly. First generation Vietnamese Americans who came to America as war refugees not only faced discrimination from white Americans due to their ethnic, cultural, and language differences, but also faced more severe mental stress when compared to most Asian immigrants because of the pains and psychological struggles of witnessing war in their home country.

The children of first generation Vietnamese Americans tended to live in a better condition than that of their immigrant parents (Zhou, Bankson, 1998). However, the class barrier is still hard to break in the U.S. society: rich people benefit their children by giving them adequate resources to be access to good education and a large social circle, while children from poor socio-economic backgrounds or immigrant families are

less likely to go beyond the class barrier. Current American society has an emerging hourglass economy because opportunities for movement from bottom to top have become harder for everyone (Zhou Bankson, 1998). In this situation, Vietnamese American children who grew up in households headed by relatively poor, and low-skilled immigrants who came to America as war refugees faced uncertain prospects from moving ahead through academic success. Most of these children's parents have few economic resources or language skills to help them do well in school. To grow up in poor community where the majority of neighborhoods are beset by violence and drugs makes it harder for Vietnamese children to do well in school and get academic help from their own community. From another perspective, children who grow up in more recent generations tend to be exposed to the wage and consumption standards of U.S. Society, which is one of the reasons to cause them to expect more than their parents' generations ( Zhou Bankson, 1998). Vietnamese American Children who are born and raised in America or who come to the U.S. before the age of five are usually not willing to work at low-paying and low-status jobs like their parents. However, lack of education, skills, or potential opportunities to do better make them unable to achieve their goals. Researchers regard the mismatch between second generation Vietnamese American children's rising aspirations and limited chances to become successful as unique "second-generation revolt" (Perlamn, Roger, 899,1997), which takes time for both parents and children and outside resources to solve the issue. Different from other Asian immigrants, most of the first generation Vietnamese immigrants came to America as war refugees, and it's hard for their children to gain academic and occupational success since these children come from families with relatively low socioeconomic background. The fact that Vietnamese Americans and their children face difficulties to become successful in America shows that factors like race, immigration status, language difference, and class are able to largely influence Asian-Americans' life in the U.S. Overall, one could tell that most first-generation Vietnamese Americans moved

to America as war refugees, and it's hard for their children to get good education or to have potential chances to live a much better life due to class barriers and many other obstacles in their life.

From the above analysis, one could tell that people from Asian countries immigrate to America in different time periods with different reasons: people with Chinese descent first came to America at the year 1835 because Anglo Americans demanded foreign workers to help them build the country; Asian Indians immigrated to America for the purpose of escaping from the political tensions in their home country; Japanese people first came to the U.S. due to the Japanese government's determination to encourage more Japanese people learn about western cultures; Filipino women came to America to escape the political conflicts in their own country; Vietnamese Americans immigrated to the U.S. as war refugees. Asian Americans are a diverse group of people from a variety of ethnic and national backgrounds. Most importantly, even though Asian Americans with dissimilar ethnic and national backgrounds arrived in U.S. with different motivations, a large number of them experienced prejudices in America --a white supremacist society. Given the fact that the Asian American community is so diverse, how could people use a simplified term "model minority" to describe Asian Americans? Why are Asian Americans put into the same stereotypical box despite the diversity of their life experiences, linguistic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds? The following section will introduce the origin of the term model minority including how it is used as a political strategy to against other minorities in the U.S. society.

### **The historical origin of Model Minority Myth**

The term model minority refers to people from minority groups who gain a high level of achievement in regard to education, household stability, and socio-economic backgrounds (Skrentny, 2002). In most cases, this term is usually used to describe Asian Americans in the U.S., because Asian Americans as a group tend to attain educational and financial success relative to other minority groups (Skrentny, 2002). The history of this

term in America could be traced back to 1966 (Kymlicka 1995).

In 1966, American sociologist William Peterson used the term model minority for the first time in U.S. history. Peterson talked about the model minority in an article he wrote for *The New York Times Magazine* with the title "Success story: Japanese American style". In this article, he focused on how a closely connected family structure and a cultural emphasis on diligence helped Japanese Americans to overcome racial discrimination against them and achieve great success in the U.S. (Skrentny, 5,2002). After Peterson published the article about Japanese Americans and model minorities, many other popular presses also published stories about successful Asian American families with diligent work ethic, loyalty to families, and "genetic superiority" (Kymlicka 8,1995). Due to the influence of the popular media, the generalized and stereotypical image that regarded Asian Americans as model minorities was deeply imbedded into many Americans' minds.

More importantly, people from the dominant racial groups in the U.S. not only regard Asian Americans as model minorities by exaggerating the academic success of a few number of Asian Americans, but also put down other racial minorities by comparing Asian Americans with other minorities especially African Americans. Indeed, after the article "Success story: Japanese American style" was widely known by many people, a few academic compared Japanese Americans' successful stories with African Americans' civil right protests against injustice, and they made racist assumptions such as "why black Americans are so violent?" or "why black Americans are not as successful as Asian Americans" (Omi, Winant, 1989). In this situation, by putting down African Americans just because they protested against injustice and racism in American society, white Americans silenced African Americans' painful experiences in a white-dominant society. From another perspective, to ask why African Americans are not as successful as Asian Americans is to neglect the long history of slavery that negatively influences African Americans' health, living conditions, educational

performances, and job opportunities. Even though Asian Americans do suffer from systemic racism in the U.S. , their experiences are different from African Americans given the fact that African Americans were brought to America as slaves. During slavery, a large number of African Americans went through horrible experiences like vicious beatings, systemic rapes, and mental abuses from their masters. Given the extreme abuses that African Americans went through, it's misleading and unfair to compare Asian Americans with African Americans. Overall, the above analysis indicates that there's a political motivation to explain why white Americans exaggerate the success of Asian Americans' success: by exaggerating the "differences" among people of color and putting racial minorities into different groups, white Americans tend to further the divisions among different minority groups while maintaining their racial privileges in the U.S.

#### **The diversity of Asian American experiences: Immigration and the Health of Asian Americans**

From the above analysis of Asian American immigration history and the introduction of the origin of the term model minority, one could tell that Asian Americans make up a diverse community with people from different linguistic, cultural, and national backgrounds. The diversity of Asian American experiences also indicates that the model minority myth is such a simplified stereotype that cannot summarize the richness of Asian Americans' stories. The following research is a comprehensive report about Asian Americans' socio-economic status and health in the U.S. , which could be used to demonstrate the idea that Asian American experiences are multi-level.

Parker Frisbie, Youngtae Cho, and Robert Hummer analyzed the data from 1992-1995 National Health Interview Survey for the purpose of examining the effects of immigrant status and ethnic backgrounds on the health of Asian American adults (Frisbie, Cho, Hummer, 373,2001). All the participants were given comprehensive questionnaires to fill in with many questions aimed to ask their lifestyles, the history of using

drugs, and health status. About 49,000 households with 125,000 people of all ages participated in this study. Researchers mainly focused on the health of people who were 25 years or older. The data reveals that Asian Americans are dissimilar from each other in regard to health conditions as well as socioeconomic and demographic traits (Frisbie, et al.,2001). Asian Americans who have relatively large populations in America such as Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, Korean Americans and Asian Indians tend to be educated and skilled even when compared with the white majority, and most of them have positive health status. On the other hand, Asian Americans who come from relatively lower social-economic status with a large number of refugees from Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam tend to have worse health conditions (Frisbie, et al.,2001). Further, Asian Americans who immigrate to America as first generation immigrants tended to have worse health conditions than second generation and third generation Asian Americans who are born and raised in the U.S. in general (Frisbie et al.,2001).

The result of this study indicates that model minority myths fail to represent the complexity of Asian American experiences, because the stereotype claims that Asian Americans are highly educated people with high incomes in the U.S. society. In contrary to the model minority stereotype, the results in this study show that Asian Americans' socio-economic status and health differs from one another due to factors like overall populations from their own ethnic groups and immigration status. Most importantly, the fact that Asian Americans' health and social-economical backgrounds are affected by populations and immigration status demonstrates that there isn't a single concept to summarize the overall characteristics of Asian Americans. Thus, the model minority stereotype cannot stand for Asian Americans' life experiences.

### **The second main section : Why model minority is a myth?**

#### **Mental pressures in Asian-American community**

People tend to believe that the model minority stereotype is beneficial for Asian Americans. However, positive stereotypes like model minority stereotypes do not always bring about positive outcomes to Asian Americans. Asian Americans are more likely to be expected to do well in school all the time due to the high expectations put on them from model minority stereotypes, which causes them to have high stress. One student explained:

Understand that we aren't coming to schools as other students. 'you and your success.' Yes, that's a part of it. But what you carry, like for me...the day that I left for college, my mother said to me, 'you are an Asian-American. You should always keep a good academic record. I know that I will be able to die in peace, my daughter is going to become a doctor now'. Can you imagine every time I tried to tell my mother that I didn't want to be a doctor, those were the words that haunted me. My mother will not be able to die. My mother will die because I am a failure. When she dies, she will carry that, that disappointment with her, to her grave. That is huge, you know (Chou, Feagin, 113,2016).

The above response comes from a second generation Asian American who was born and raised in the U.S. Descriptions such as "always keep a good academic record," "my daughter is going to become a doctor now," and "the words that haunted me," from her answers imply that she is under a high level of mental pressures due to her mother's expectations. By expecting her daughter to be a doctor and regarding her daughter's career as the only relief/comfort for her to die peacefully, the participant's mother demonstrates her overemphasis on her daughter's career success. In this case, immigrant parents regard their children's career achievements as an important factor to determine their feelings about life without considering their children's own thoughts and expectations about their future career plans. It's clear that the participant comes from a cultural background that stresses the significance of academic and career success. It is a cultural value that increases her mental stress because her mother overemphasizes the

traditional cultural values, but the image of the smart, hardworking Asian is also repeated back to her and reinforced in popular media.

The above participant's answers indicate that her mother's high expectation puts a high level of mental stress on her. However, many other factors can explain why her mother expects the participant to work as a doctor: even though traditional east-Asian culture expects people to maintain academic and/or occupation success, it does not necessarily mean that cultural value is the only factor that causes her overemphasize her daughter's occupational choice. Instead, the standards of survival and success in a new country can also play a role. Indeed, to be a doctor is one of the most profitable careers in the U.S. Thus, it's not surprising that the participant's mother wants her daughter to be a doctor --to do the type of job that is able to guarantee her economical stability in America. Traditional culture values and the desire to want children to be successful based on a new country's standards could work together, influencing the mother's expectations of her daughter.

Another student, Charlotte, indicates that she has to shut down herself emotionally and feels that life is not happy due to the model minority stereotype enforced upon her:

In fifth grade, my mother and my teacher told me that I just needed to keep a stiff upper lip, and I really couldn't go home every day in tears. And I couldn't just cry all the time because it just didn't work. So I stopped crying...Um, that unfortunately, psychologically, probably damaged me until I was much older, until I was probably an adult, but I didn't know that...(And) I tried my very hardest to flunk out of school. That's my rebellion, to try not to be Asian...I was insistent that I was dumber than a box and that I was going to make sure that everyone else knew that I was dumber than a box by flunking out or by barely succeeding, and I did that well. But that's how I kept the pressure off of me with the grades. When I turn around, I've got many Asian American friends who are all doctors and attorneys, but the amount of pressure put on them was always

there...And does that mean there's any joy or happiness in their lives? I really don't know (Chou, Feagin, 121, 2016).

Charlotte's interview responses indicate that she has to pretend to be strong when she faces troubles in her life. The fact that both her mother and her teacher encourage her to keep a rigid attitude (to keep a stiff upper lip) towards troubles imply that even elders believe Asian Americans ought to maintain the images of being strong and not seeking troubles when they meet impediments in their life. Charlotte's resistances of model minority stereotypes and her references of other Asian Americas' occupational success show that to be a typical Asian American is to perform well academically. What's more, by purposely doing bad in school, Charlotte aims to reject the pressure of model minority stereotype puts on her. The rejection of model minority stereotype implies that Charlotte is repulsive about this stereotype. Another important idea from her response is that Charlotte does not know whether her successful Asian-American friends are happy about their life or not, which indirectly implies that there are potential restrictions of the model minority stereotype: it does not allow free choices in Asian-Americans' life, including the choice of a satisfying self-identity.

### **Internalized Racism, Psychological Stress, And Attitudes Towards Help-seeking**

Researchers Gupta, Szymanski, and Leong did a study that aimed to investigate how internalized racism led to Asian American students' high levels of psychological stress and influenced their attitudes towards help-seeking (Gupta, Szymanski, Leong, 2011). Internalized racism is defined as the internalization by people of racist attitudes towards members of their own ethnic group including themselves. In this study, internalized racism means that Asian Americans internalized the model minority stereotypes by believing that they ought to keep a good academic and/or occupational performance all the time, and they will no longer face any discrimination from white Americans as long as they are the "good minorities" who always follow the rules (Gupta et al., 2011, pg.105).

Gupta, Szymanski and Leong's study includes 291 participants who identify themselves as Asian Americans. The range of participants' ages is from 18 to 79 years old with an average of 30 years. Ethnicities included 27% Chinese, 31% Indian, 8% Japanese, 11% Korean, 3% Pakistani, 7% Taiwanese, 6% Filipino, 7% Vietnamese, and 16% other. All the participants completed a questionnaire with 11 items that aimed to measure positive stereotype attitudes towards Asian Americans as the first step of this study. Most of the questions asked about how Asian Americans view themselves in regard to model minority expectations. In the second step of this study, participants completed a questionnaire with 12 items that measured their psychological stress arising from perceptions of bodily dysfunctions. Examples of items include "Headaches" as well as "Pains in the lower part of your back" (106). The last section of this study measures attitudes towards help-seeking centers. One of the sample items is: "My first inclination would be to get professional attention if I believed I was having a mental breakdown" (105).

The results of this comprehensive questionnaire show that higher levels of endorsements of model minority stereotypes were closely related to more somatic complaints/symptoms and higher levels of psychological stress. Participants who are high in psychological stress level also indicate that they don't always seek helps due to the stigma against mental illness in their own community. These findings are highly consistent with the hypothesis, and they also suggest that the endorsements of positive stereotypes do have similar effects as the endorsements of negative stereotypes (Gupta et al.,2011). Overall, this study indicates that Asian Americans who internalized model minority stereotypes are more likely to experience somatic complaints and high levels of mental stress.

From another perspective, traditional Asian cultures imply that there is a negative perception of any person who seeks counseling. Thus, individuals who express a desire to see counselors are more likely to be labeled as weak and/or lazy people who don't want to be responsible for their own decisions. Living in a

culture which has such a strong taboo against mental illness, many Asian Americans don't feel comfortable to ask help from counselors in mental health centers. Another major factor that prevents Asian Americans from seeking mental health is due to the lack of Asian American counselors who understand their cultural backgrounds (Lee et al., 2009). Therefore, they find it hard to locate Asian American counselors who can understand their cultures, personal experiences, and struggles as racial minorities in the U.S. society, which largely discourages them from seeking mental help. In addition to these struggles, the following study will explore how racial discrimination is highly related to Asian Americans' mental health.

### **Racial Discrimination and Health among Asian American**

Racial discrimination may negatively influence racial minorities' life circumstances through different ways: systemic racial discrimination can determine people's residence, economic opportunities, stress, and experiences relevant to health care. As minorities, even though Asian Americans are usually considered as model minorities, they still face racial discrimination in their daily lives. Model minority stereotypes could be a reason that white American use to ignore the problems of discrimination against Asian Americans (Gee, Ro, Marco Chae, 2009). In fact, comprehensive public polls show that even though Americans regard Asian Americans as the model minorities in the U.S. society, they still have mixed feelings towards Asian Americans in general. An Asian American college student's personal experiences are able to support this point:

Racist incidents happened in my college campus even though my college has the reputation of being liberal. I remember one day another friend of mine who is also an Asian American came home to a note that said 'Stop cooking your dog food and stinking up our hall!' That made huge, absolutely huge news on campus...Many Vietnamese Americans were affected by it...Many people used 'dog food' to describe China and Vietnam, because both of these countries are

communist countries, that you hear these horrible things about. I don't know why, especially with Vietnam. It just correlates with Vietnamese food for some reason. It made even worse that of course they had to use 'dog food' and not just 'food', that they have to track on 'dog' to it too (Chou, Feagin, 79, 2016).

The above example shows white Americans' stereotypes against Asian Americans whose origins could be trace back to Vietnam: Vietnamese Americans and Vietnamese people are considered as savage people with a barbaric cultural practice of eating dogs. Undoubtedly, this negative stereotype portrays Vietnamese Americans as uncivilized and un-American people who deviate from mainstream norm. The fact that Vietnamese Americans' food are described as dog foods could show that there is a racial aspect in the whole situation and people's stereotypical ideas about Vietnamese culture still exists.

Moreover, people usually believe that the majority of Asian Americans are immigrants or children/grandchildren of immigrants, so they are not loyal to America (Wilson, 255,1996). Other polls in more recent years showed similar results: a survey conducted in the year of 2001 found that at least 32% of Americans believed that Chinese Americans were more loyal to mainland China than to America, 24% of the participants thought that Chinese Americans were taking away too many job opportunities from white Americans, while 28% felt that the increase in Asian immigration was harmful to the U.S. society (Parillo, Donoghue, 265,2005). Judging by these results, one could tell that despite the fact Asian Americans are regarded as model minorities, they are still not totally accepted by the U.S. society due to their racial identity and immigration backgrounds. These results also show that to be model minorities do not mean that Asian Americans enjoy the same privileges as dominant groups of people in America.

A study that aims to measure the association between Asian Americans' self-reported discrimination and health can be used to demonstrate how racial discrimination negatively affects Asian Americans' health.

In this study, 40 Asian Americans filled in comprehensive questionnaires about their experiences of racial discrimination, mental stress, and overall physical health conditions. Items in this study include questions about how frequent participants have experienced incidents relevant to racial discrimination, what types of discrimination they usually experience, and to what extent do these discrimination incidents affect their mental well-being. Overall, the results of this study show that those participants who have experienced more frequent racial discrimination like being mocked and/or judged due to the differences of their last names from white Americans', being excluded by people in a party because of their race, or being denied promotions in a predominately white environment usually have worse mental health when compared to those Asian Americans without many experiences of racial discrimination (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, Torino, 2007). Furthermore, another study found that racial discrimination can not only negatively affect people's mental health, but also influences people's physical health and it is associated with increased risks for diabetes and breathing problems (Nadimpalli, Hutchinson, 2012). As for why racial discrimination is related to increased risks for diabetes and breathing problems, one explanation is that people's emotional/psychological health affect their physical health to a certain extent: racial discrimination negatively affects people's psychological well-being, while poor psychological well-being is harmful to people's health. Moreover, systemic racial discrimination can also deprive Asian Americans' job and housing options, which causes a vicious circle by affecting Asian Americans' physical well-being. A negative physical well-being can also change Asian Americans' food consumption patterns: they may eat less food and/or develop a poor eating habit as a response to poor physical well-being.

These studies show that to be considered model minorities does not mean that Asian Americans are totally accepted in the U.S. society. Most importantly, the fact that a certain number of participants believe

that Asian Americans as a whole are harmful to the U.S. society demonstrates that to be considered model minorities does not protect Asian Americans from targets of racist conspiracies. The association between racial discrimination experiences and the increase of mental pressures and/or physical illness further indicates that racial discrimination is one of the factors that negatively affects Asian Americans' life quality.

### **Racial Discrimination against Asian Americans who don't fit in Model Minority Stereotypes**

For those Asian Americans who don't fit in model minority stereotypes due to their physical characteristics, skin colors, or religious backgrounds, they tend to face more severe racial discrimination when compared to those Asian Americans who fit the stereotypes more closely. People tend to have negative impressions towards Asian Americans with South-Asian heritages because most South-Asians (e.g. people with origins from India, Pakistani, or Bangladesh) have darker skins and a certain number of them identify as Muslim Americans. After the attack on 9/11, many Asian Americans with South Asian origins face a high level of hostility from other Americans and sometimes people tend to consider them as Middle-East individuals mistakenly. Therefore, South Asian Americans are usually regarded as terrorists.

Fareena is a 1.5 generation Muslim Bangladeshi American who immigrates to the U.S. with her families during her teenage years. She is still a college student after 9/11. During her interviews with researchers, she talks about her confusions as being a Muslim American in the U.S. and a racially motivated incident happened to her brother:

And at that time I identified as Muslim American; I practiced it in a sense...I also felt very defensive to speak in class...And then all these class members were like, 'Why don't you cover yourself up like the other women do? We have been watching how Muslim women are supposed to be, you're not even a real Muslim woman'. Many people questioned me, so I did not know how should I present myself in front of others....My brother was targeted by the

university police. He was the only one who was punished harshly after a fistfight involving several people at a fraternity party...He was treated very badly, and like he had to stay in jail..It was a very tough situation. Our lawyers had asked the judge to be a bit more lenient because it was a very short, brief fight and it could jeopardize his status in America...He could get deported...And the other side, the other lawyers, were like ‘Well now this is a matter of national security. Look at him he’s an engineering student, a threat. I’m threatened by him. And I think he should get a harsher sentence.’(Chou, Feagin, 82,2016).

Classmates’ questions about Fareena’s identity show that the majority of American people have a limited understanding of Muslim people’s diversity. What’s more, the fact that Fareena’s brother is the only person who was punished harshly as a person of color and a follower of Islam indicates that people’s bias against Muslim Americans reach a newhigh after 9/11. The stereotypical reactions of the university police and prosecuting attorneys demonstrate that people of color with darker skins are treated extremely unfairly regardless of their cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. Fareena’s brother was called “foreign” and a potential threat to “national security”. The latter reveals significant ignorance of world geography from some white Americans’ perspectives and the tendency to put people of color with darker skin tone into the same category: Bangladesh is a South-Asian Country not located in Middle-East. Thus, any person who accuses Fareena’s brother of being a threat to “national security” makes a huge geographic mistake. The tendency to put all people of color with darker skins into the same category without any understanding of their ethnic and cultural backgrounds reveals that university policies and prosecuting attorneys do not show any respect to people of color.

People’s negative impressions of Asian Americans with darker skins reveal the problems of colorism in America. According to the academic article *The Persistent Problem of Colorism: Skin Tone, Status, and*

*Inequality* written by a sociologist named Margaret Hunter, colorism is a systemic process that privileges light-skinned people of color over darker/dark skins minorities in areas like income, education, housing, and the marriage market (Hunter, 2005). Colorism is usually concerned with actual skin tone instead of racial and/or ethnic identity (Hunter, 2005). Even though all people of color suffer from systemic racism/discrimination to a certain degree, the intensity, the frequency, as well as the outcomes of the discrimination may differ dramatically due to skin tone differences. For example, darker-skinned African-Americans are more likely to earn less money than lighter-skinned African Americans, although both earn less than white Americans even if they do the same jobs (Hunter, 238,2005). Another example to demonstrate colorism is that people of color with darker skins are more likely to be regarded as a threat to American society and more likely to be targeted by the police when compared to lighter-skinned minorities' experiences. Fareena's brother's experience shows the severity of colorism: due to his darker skin, he is treated like a potential criminal and the whole school ignores his unfair treatments, revealing the fact that colorism is closely tied to racial discrimination.

Asian Americans with east-Asian origins are usually considered as model minorities in the U.S. society due to their ancestors/families' immigration history, cultural expectations that emphasize diligence, and mainstream American society's general expectations towards them. On the other hand, south-east Asians and South Asians are more likely to be regarded as Asians who don't fit in model minority stereotypes because of their ancestors/families' immigration history (e.g. South-East Asians such as Vietnamese Americans come to the U.S. as war refugees), their skin tones (e.g. Some South Asians usually have darker skin tones), or their religious beliefs (e.g. Some South Asians practice Islam). They endure the risk of being considered a threat to America, especially after 9/11. As a south-Asian with darker skin tone and a follower of Muslim, Fareena's brother is regarded as a "threat" to America instead of being considered as a "model

minority". Overall, Fareena's brother's experience shows that South-Asian Americans' experiences are different from east-Asian Americans, which further demonstrates the diversity of Asian American experiences in the U.S. <sup>1</sup>

Among the diversity of Asian American experiences, researches have shown that there is a contradiction of Asian Indians/Indian Americans' experiences. Academic reports about Asian Americans usually indicate that Asian Americans with east-Asian heritages and Indian Americans maintain good academic records when compared to minorities from other ethnic backgrounds. Indian Americans as a group are more likely to choose profitable careers such as being a doctor, being a lawyer, or working in financial markets. However, since the majority of the Asian Indians have darker skins, they are more likely to be targeted by policemen and be treated as potential threats when compared to east-Asian Americans with lighter skins. The contradiction of Asian Indians' roles in the U.S. shows that issues like colorism further complicate Asian Americans' life experiences: even "model minorities" who keep good academic records and work in high-income jobs can still face racial discrimination due to the color of their skin tones. It also shows that being portrayed as model minorities does not prevent Asian Indians from racial discrimination at all, indicating the severity of racism, including colorism in America.

### **Asian Americans Who Don't Fit in Model Minority Myths: The Issues of Internalized Racism**

Fareena's brother's personal experience above indicates what it means to be an Asian American who does not fit in model minority myths. Joel, a Hmong American, reports the negative feelings of enduring a double burden from race and class. Even though there are a large number of Asian Americans in his community, the Hmong are usually viewed by whites in much the same negative way that they view black Americans (Chou, Feagin, 2016). Joel's conversations with researchers indicate the impact of this common framing:

1. Footnote: However, we might consider that during WW2, Japanese Americans were also considered a threat to America rather than a model minority.

I guess because the fact the Hmong people were a new cohort of immigrants into the U.S. during that time period, there was a more negative perception of them...There is the whole notion that the Hmong people are on welfare and that they're taking taxpayer money, etc. So I think from my perception, there's a negative perception of the Hmong people because they're new immigrants. And more likely that they weren't getting a junior high education. I chose to associate more with the white individuals so I can internalize their expectations and also go in the same route that they are going...I got straight As, and then I was one of the valedictorians for our junior high. But then at the same time, I kind of like, I knew that I wouldn't associate with the Hmong people as much, because it was kind of like, they're not doing so well. And I was doing better because this is where my parents want me to go, and this is also where most of the individuals in my class are going. So I kind of turned my "Hmongness" off, and I kind of more associated with, like, white individuals or those individuals who were doing academically better (Chou, Feagin, 155,2016).

Realizing that Hmong Americans are not considered as model minorities by white Americans, Joel does not want to have any close association with other Hmong Americans because they lack academic achievement. With a strong sense of internalized racism, Joel chooses to distance himself from other Hmong Americans and prefers to associate with white Americans, because doing so seems to be a necessary step for him to be successful in the U.S. In this example, people of color's values and preferences for friends are influenced by white Americans to a certain extent. Similarly, another Hmong American, May Ia, indicates that she prefers to make friends with white Americans even though she lives in a heavily Hmong neighborhood in the Midwest. May explains: "Because growing up, I chose to follow more of the prosperity of the Caucasian culture, the white culture. Therefore, a lot of my thoughts, my attitudes, are more of an American (white) culture...pretty

much means individualized, to be independent” (Chou, Feagin, 156,2016). May admits that she considers her own people as individuals from low social-economical backgrounds (Chou, Feagin, 2016). Both Joel and May think of Hmong Americans negatively, but neither of them mentions the role of systemic discrimination that white Americans create that severely affect the Hmong people’s political and economic status in the U.S., and devalue their cultural belief.

From a historical perspective, the Hmong were severely exploited by U.S. government officials in waging a secret war in Laos for the purpose of fighting against Vietnamese communities during the Vietnam War. Hmong people’s involvement in helping the U.S. military and intelligence organizations made them vulnerable targets for revenge after the U.S. government withdrew (Chou, Feagin, 2016). The Laotian government retaliated against Hmong people, and those individuals who were unable to flee or hide in the mountains were destitute and placed in refugee or reeducation camps (Jeff, 2002). Considering this historical background, one could see that Hmong people were exploited harshly by the U.S. government and their own government. However, Joel and May only blame their own people by regarding Hmong Americans as poor individuals or individuals without any academic achievement without considering the historical context: most of the recent Hmong immigrants in the U.S. usually come to America as impoverished refugees, which is one important factor to explain why it’s hard for them to maintain a high level of educational and occupational success in their host country. In this case, both of their judgments of Hmong Americans seem to be heavily affected by the mainstream ideology from the dominant groups in the U.S. Their interview responses not only show that Asian Americans who are not considered as model minorities tend to look down upon people from their own communities but also demonstrate the dark sides of some Asian Americans’ immigration history and life experiences.

In a study by Alvarez, Liang, and Juang, researchers hypothesized that racial socialization is closely related to Asian Americans' perceptions of racism and racial socialization is able to predict Asian Americans' racial identity schema. All the participants in this study are undergraduate students who take intro to psychology courses in the same college. As for the detailed steps of this study, participants were given The People of Color Racial Identity Attitude Scale to fill in as the first step. This scale aims to investigate different types of schema that racial minority people use to respond to racial discrimination. At the second step of this study, participants were given a new scale named Racial And Life Experiences Scale to fill in. This scale is a comprehensive test that measures people's perceptions of racism and racial socialization in their daily life. More importantly, different types of racist incidents are put into dissimilar categories. Indeed, racism has subscales of direct racism, collective racism, as well as vicarious racism. Finally, at the third step of this study, participants fill in a demographic sheet that asks about their age, gender, generational status, and length of residence in the U.S. Moreover, the demographic sheet had a short section about participants' understandings of and familiarity with Asian American history, including the number of courses that each participant took in Asian American studies, Ethnic Studies, and Women Studies was recorded. (Alvarez et al., 2006).

The results of this study show that even though model minority myth does affect Asian Americans' mental health and their perceptions of themselves, racism directed to Asian Americans happens at a scope and frequency that needs to be paid more attention by researchers (Alvarez et al., 2006). 98% of the participants reported at least one significant experience with racial discrimination in the past year and 99% of them indicated that they witnessed or heard about some form of racism happened to other Asian Americans in the past few years. Answers from participants also showed that Asian Americans' understandings of racism are largely affected and shaped by the conversations relevant to one's racial identity and racial worldview (Alvarez et al., 479, 2006). Moreover, close conversations with family members, friends and mentors play a

huge role of Asian Americans' perceptions of racism as well (Alvarez et al., 480,2006). Overall, the findings of this study indicate two major points: 1. Racist incidents happen to Asian Americans, and discussions about race with families and friends as well as courses relevant to Asian studies are beneficial to Asian Americans' understandings about race. The fact that such a large number of participants admit that they have experienced racist incidents vividly demonstrates the prevalence of discrimination against Asian Americans. The good thing is that Asian Americans can enhance their understandings of racism as well as their self-perceptions of their racial identities by taking courses and/or discussing with families, which could be an effective method for them to alleviate confusions, feelings of discrimination, and injustice; it may push them toward action against these.

### **The third main section: Domestic Violence Against Asian Immigrant Women**

Domestic violence against women is a global issue. In America, homicide data from New York City indicates that immigrant women in general are disproportionately represented among female victims of male-partner-perpetrated homicide (Campbell, Webster, Block, 2003). Even though immigrant women, especially women of color, are at increased risk for being domestic violence victims, there have been few efforts that aim to help these women (Raj, Silverman, 2002). Literature has shown that the current anti-domestic violence movement mainly focuses on white and middle-class women's experiences with limited emphasis on immigrant Asian women's needs (Wang, 1996). In other words, the mainstream anti-domestic violence movement is mainly a white women's movement due to the fact that white women are the majorities in America, so feminist movements including anti-domestic violence movements usually emphasize their experiences. In this situation, immigrant Asian American women are more likely to feel that they receive little help even when they do ask for help. Moreover, a large number of Asian Americans are immigrants who are born and raised in other countries. Immigrant women usually face many problems such as language

barriers, the unfamiliarity with local culture, lack of understandings of the legal system, and the fear of deportation when they live in a new country. All these potential impediments may prevent Asian immigrant women from asking for help. Many Asian American communities have a high rate of foreign birth, which ranges from a relatively low of 63.3% of Chinese Americans to a high rate of 93.9% of Cambodian Americans (Barringer, 1993; Wang, 1999). Based on this data, a huge number of Asian Americans are immigrants and/or children of immigrants. As immigrant women of color, they tend to face many barriers when they try to seek justice and/or get protection from women's shelters when compared to non-immigrant white women in the U.S.

Ling's case shows how important language barrier can be. Ling's husband had beaten her for eight years. One evening, he tried to pick a fight with her as she cleaned fish for dinner. She ignored him, which angered him. He tried to strike her with a chair and Ling used the fish knife to defend herself. Her husband kept lunging at her and cut himself on the knife. Ling ran to a nearby store to call the police. When the police arrived, her husband --who spoke English well--accused Ling of attacking him. Ling did not speak enough English to defend herself. The police, whom Ling had called to protect her, ended up arresting her instead:

I grew up speaking Ilocano...I learned English after coming to San Francisco. I can understand what people are saying as long as they don't talk too fast, but because of my accent people sometimes don't understand what I am saying. That was how it was with the police. I also didn't understand them because I was too scared (Golden, 1992). Based on Ling's personal experience, one could tell that the limited understanding of English is the main reason why the police misunderstood the whole situation and arrested her unfairly. As an immigrant Asian women, Ling does not speak English as a native speaker, and her accent makes others perceive her as an immigrant easily. As an immigrant woman of color with limited English ability, Ling finds it hard to defend herself, and the feelings of

fear and anxiety during the process of facing police can also explain why Ling failed to defend herself when the police came to her house. In addition, police may mistakenly believe that victims like Liang are submissive or hesitated seeking help. Not enough bilingual officers or social workers are available to help immigrant women in these situation (Alvarez, 1994), making it extremely hard for immigrant women to get their messages delivered to the police successfully.

Asian immigrant women not only face problems of language barriers when interacting with the police, they also face problems when they enter women's shelters. Win Ha first sought help last year after her husband beat her three times during her first month in the U.S. A Vietnamese friend gave her the number of an advocacy group, and Ha was placed in a women's shelter. She stayed only three days: "There was no Vietnamese food in the shelter", says Ha, and no one spoke Vietnamese, so when Ha's children became sick, she didn't know what to do (Kim, 24, 1994). This indicates the sense of helplessness and isolation for immigrant Asian women. Indeed, Ha finds it hard to stay in a women's shelter due to the fact that she cannot eat traditional food from her former country, she has a limited understanding of English, and she has no idea about how to solve the problems when her children are sick. Living in a women's shelter that mainly aims to help white and non-immigrant women who speak English and know the law in the U.S. society, Ha is more likely to feel that she is not welcomed, because she faces so many problems that the majority of the women do not need to think about. Considering all the impediments that she faces, it makes sense that she leaves within three days.

These factors also play a role when women try to understand and navigate immigration law. Mina, an undocumented Filipina woman, goes to court seeking a restraining order against her battering husband. When her husband comes to the home, violating the restraining order, she calls the police. Her husband flees before the police arrive. The officer that responds makes a report and then asks her for her green card (Jang, 1990).

Due to the complexity of immigration laws, many battered undocumented women and/or refugee women face greater obstacles than documented immigrant and non-immigrant women when they seek help after they are abused. Immigration laws put Asian immigrant women in a extremely vulnerable situation, especially for those women who immigrate to the U.S. to marry (Jang, 1990). Historically, American immigration laws and regulations have been structured in a way that forces immigrant women to depend on their spouses who are American citizens and/or legal permanent residents so that they are able to obtain legal residence and/or citizenship (Janet, 1995). In this situation, immigrant Asian women who are married to American citizens and/or American permanent residents may be unwilling to report their experiences to the police for the fear of deportation. Even for those women like Mina who do report their situations to the police, the police are more likely to ask for their status in the U.S instead of trying to help them solve the conflicts that happen in their families and providing other services to help these women. For those undocumented immigrant women like Mina, they may not get the help that they need but also fear the risk of being deported after they report to the police.

Furthermore, the existence of similar cultural patterns across many Asian American communities that emphasizes female subordination is one factor to explain why Asian American women, especially those recently immigrated women, don't know how to fight for their own rights after they experience domestic abuses. The following short passage comes from an Asian immigrant woman's recollections of her family story, which demonstrates the ideology of female subordination in her own culture:

My sister's death did not begin with her murder --it began years ago when he (her sister's husband) first called her a whore. It started with he first called her a whore. It started with the pushing, the hitting, and kicking...He broke her nose, bent her finger back so far it broke and

gave her bruises, but everyone pitied him. Now that he's killed her people still pity him. They will say: We have to help him...He's a Filipino...He just loses control...(Nilda, 56,1991).

For those Asian Americans who come from immigrant backgrounds, they are more likely to live in the type of community with a certain number of people who share the same cultural backgrounds like them. Although it is not reasonable to consider every Asian American community in the same way, many Asian American subgroups do share some similar cultural ideologies including the general attitudes towards women (Wang, 1996). Indeed, the stereotypical gender expectations that expect women to obey their husbands by behaving submissively have negatively affected many Asian immigrant women, which causes them fear to do anything after they are battered by their husbands. The fact that people downplay the severity of the husband's behaviors in the above story by saying "He just loses control" indicates that violence against women has always been dismissed by many people. Many people don't even believe that domestic violence is a serious issue, and this dismissive attitude is more likely to make survivors feel helpless and/or isolated, discouraging them from seeking help. Further, awareness of white Americans' discrimination against immigrant communities may lead some women to stay silent to protect not just their male partners, but the community, from further racism.

Racism against Asian American also plays a role in the whole situation: The model minority stereotype that expects all Asian Americans to be successful individuals in America is also a factor to explain why is extremely hard for people to notice issues like domestic violence in Asian American communities. The previous sections have already elaborated the downsides of the model minority stereotypes. Given the fact that this "positive stereotype" considers Asian Americans as the model minorities who obey the laws and perform well in many aspects of their life, outsiders (non-Asian Americans) tend to believe that Asian Americans in general have already been quite successful on their own, so there isn't any problem in their own

communities at all. Therefore, horrible things that happen to Asian Americans especially immigrant Asian Americans tend to be downplayed, ignored, or dismissed by other Americans. For example, when Asian American women experience incidents like domestic violence, many people may mistakenly believe that it is not a serious incident at all, because Asian Americans are “model minorities” who never cause any trouble at all. Even people in Asian Americans’ own communities may not realize the severity of domestic violence. Without any doubt, cultural and linguistic impediments with the influence of people’s positive expectations towards Asian Americans (the model minority myths) work together by explaining why Asian Americans may find it hard to get the help that they need.

Historical factors can also explain the sense of helplessness and isolation that immigrant Asian women face when they try to solve the domestic violence in their own community. From a historical perspective, Asian American women have always found it difficult to deal with the white-centered feminist movement and to find the types of help that work for them. Asian American women not only struggle with the process of eliminating a culturally-rooted belief in the subordination of women in their own groups, but also struggle for a place in a white-majority feminist movement (Mirikitani, 1972). The conflicts between white and Asian American feminists reached new heights after a decision about a New York domestic murder case in 1989 (Wang, 1996). In 1989, a New York judge sentenced a Chinese-American man, Dong Lu Chen, to only a five-year probation for the murder of his wife (Yen, 1989). In this case, the judge made the decision based on Chen’s cultural defense argument that claimed that traditional Chinese culture and the loss of manhood are what motivated him to kill his wife after he learned of his wife’s infidelity (Jetter, 23,1989). Even though many Asian American and white American feminists protested the judge’s decision, conflicts happened between different feminist groups due to the differences between Asian American and white American’s ideologies (Jetter, 1989). White feminists in general wanted to ban the use of culture as a defense completely by arguing

that there should exist only one color-blind standard of justice. On the other hand, some in the Asian American community, including the Organization for Asian women, wanted to employ culture as a defense in some contexts despite the fact that they did not condone Chen's use of a cultural defense in his case (Jetter, 1989). White feminists' failures to realize the fact that cultural ideologies played a role in Asian American women's domestic violence experiences implied the incompatibility of a white-centered movement's agenda with the needs of women of color communities (Wang, 1996). Overall, this example demonstrates that Asian American women face more severe impediments when they try to solve issues like domestic violence when compared to white American women's experiences, because factors like traditional cultural ideologies that emphasize the submission of women from their own communities negatively affect Asian American women to a certain extent, just as racism may impact punishment of abusive men. While the mainstream feminist movement is still a white-centered movement that tends to ignore Asian American women's experiences, Asian Americans have already made huge contributions in anti-domestic violence movements such as organizing different types of activities throughout the whole country that aim to aid battered Asian American women.

One issue that would help us better understand domestic violence is to have more intersectional studies done. For instance, the majority of the research and studies about domestic violence fails to reveal much information relevant to battered victims' racial and ethnic identities other than their gender, which indicates that women of color including Asian American women's experiences are usually silenced and/or ignored in this research (Carraway, 1991). In other words, most of the research and studies usually report statistical data about how many American women are battered each year as well as how many of these battered women are in serious physical harms without any reference to battered women's race. By doing so, researchers fail to

realize how different factors such as racism, sexism, cultural ideologies, or even immigration status are able to affect different women differently.

### **Negative influences of controlling images for Asian American women:**

#### **Images of Asian American Women in Multicultural Advertising**

Stereotypical images objectify women and reinforce power differences between the two sexes (Berger, 1977). Patricia Hill Collins elaborate on the power of structured images in “Mammies, Matriarchs, And Other Controlling Images”. In this article, Collins indicates that people from the mainstream groups (e.g. white Americans) dominate others by attempting to objectify the subordinate group through the use of “controlling images” (Collins, 1999). For instance, during slavery, white masters made black women work as if they were animals or “mules uh de world,” representing a form of dehumanization and objectification (Collins, 69, 1999). Even after slavery, deference rituals like calling black domestic workers “girls” and/or by their first names enable employers to treat their employees like children, or as less human beings (Collins, 69,1999). Objectification of black women shows the imbalanced power structure between people of different race.s Moreover, stereotypical and misleading controlling images of black women are often used to justify white Americans’ crimes during slavery: the allegedly emotional, passionate nature of Black women has long been used to justify black women’s sexual exploitation as well as to implant racist policy against black women(Collins, 70,1999). In regard to the controlling images against Asian American women, data shows that with the arrival of a large number of Asian immigrants in America, more and more advertising campaigns have tried to diversify the images in social media by including Asian/Asian American characters. Unfortunately, researchers have found that the representations of racial/ethnic minorities in the mainstream social media are mostly based on gendered and/or racialized stereotypes that have become controlling images(Kim, Chung, 2005).

Said's work on Orientalism discussed earlier, is key to understanding controlling images of Asian in the U.S. *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture (1999)*, written by Robert G. Lee, depicts Asian Americans as pollutants in California and Chinese immigrant workers as potential threats to the stability of white-predominant American society. In famous movies like *The Bitter Tea of General Yen (1933)* as well as the Fu Manchu films (1920-1965), the images of asexual Asians co-existed with the images of licentious beasts --the type of portraits that implied Asian Americans' potentials to undermine traditional and white American families (Kim, Chung, 2005). These representations of Asian Americans strongly suggest the mainstream American society's hostile attitudes towards Asian Americans, and they set the stage for differentiate social, political, and economic treatment.

The mainstream media's portrayal of Asian American women, represented them as sexually submissive and fragile women, or in a highly sexual and dangerous way. Images like the China doll, Geisha girl, and the shy Polynesian beauty belong to the categories of sexually submissive Asian women. On the other hand, images like dragon ladies show hypersexual and dangerous women (Kim, Chung, 2005). Both of these two types of images emphasize Asian American women's sex appeal for the purpose of pandering to white American males' sexual desires and the objectification of foreign, "exotic" Asian women as their property. For example, the film *The World of Suzie Wong (1960)* focused on Asian American women's strong sexual desires, their dangerous traits, as well as their inability to resist white males (Kim, Chung, 2005). The fact that Asian American women are portrayed as dangerous women who are unable to resist white men indicates that white men are usually the ones who consume Asian American women's bodies, which further demonstrates the imbalanced power structures between white males and Asian American females. It also sets groundwork to ignore white men's abuse of Asian women by suggesting them invited the relationship.

Even though the mainstream media emphasizes cultural diversity as America becomes more and more

diverse, the inflexible and stereotypical portraits of Asian American women are still quite prevalent. Indeed, advertisements with women of color consistently emphasize strong cultural references. For example, in one of the ads shown in Kim and Chung's academic research (2005), one could see that an African woman was wearing a colorful headdress, a dancing Latino woman was in a light-colored cotton weave, and an Asian woman was in heavy make-up and traditional Chinese dress. In this situation, the emphasis of foreignness is vividly shown from the Asian woman's dressing and make-up styles: she was wearing the type of dress and hairstyles that people no longer use, reflecting Said's point that Westerners tend to depict Asia as the unchangeable and undeveloped image of a colonized Orient (Said 1978).

### **The emergence of controlling images of Asian American males from historical perspectives**

When comparing the preponderance of images of Asian American women with those of Asian American males, we see that Asian American males make rare appearances in magazine advertisements (Kim, Chung, 2015). Indeed, following the popularity of Asian American women like Connie Chung, Asian American women anchors and actresses have been very visible. On the other hand, Asian American male anchors are almost completely absent (Espiritu 1997). What causes this huge difference? Why is it that Asian American males barely exist in the mainstream media? And how are Asian American males usually portrayed in the mainstream media when they do appear?

Looking back through U.S. history, Asian American males have faced economic, political, and ideological racism that negatively harmed their manhood (Kimmel, Messner 2012). During the pre-World War II period, unequal and gendered immigration policies and labor conditions have emasculated Asian American men, forcing them to do "feminized" jobs due to the absence of women (Kimmel, Messner, 2007). At that time, a great number of Asian American males labored in domestic service, laundry work, as well as food preparation (Daniels 1998). David Katzman described the domestic labor situation in America this way: "In 1880, California

and Washington were the only states where most domestic servants were men” (Katzman 6,1978). In late 1920, data has shown that near 50 percent of the Chinese in America still worked as domestic servants (Light, 1972). A large number of Chinese males also became laundrymen, not due to the reason that laundering was a traditional male-dominant occupation in mainland China, but because there were very few women of any ethnic origin in gold-rush California (Chan, 27,1991).

The educational and economical situations for Asian Americans as a whole are much better now when compared to the pre and post World War II period. However, when one breaks down the statistical data by ethnic groups and immigration status, the results are mixed: A number of Asian American males who are second or third generation immigrants (e.g. Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans) are more likely to be well-paid and educated. Yet recently immigrated Asian Americans such as Cambodian Americans and Filipino Americans usually work in lower-paying and secondary sector jobs (Ong, Hee, 1994). The economic diversity of Asian American males contradicts the model minority stereotype that the majority of Asian Americans are highly educated with high incomes.

Due to the fact that the majority of Asian American males did “feminized” jobs for a long period of time in the U.S. history, Asian American males as a whole were stereotypically labeled as asexual males who lack of masculinity. Without any doubt, Asian American men are uniquely marginalized within the hierarchy of hegemonic masculinity when compared to men of other races (Chen 1999). Researchers who study controlling images’ influences on Asian American males usually come to the conclusion that men of color’s oppressive experiences increase their negative mental health to a certain extent (Lu, Wong, 2013).

American society expects men to endorse “hegemonic masculinity “, (Lu, Wong, 2013), a concept invented by sociologist R.W.Connell, which is defined as a practice that legitimizes men’s dominant position in the society and justifies the subordination of women, and other marginalized ways of being a man

(Wedgwood, 150, 2009). White males are considered as the standards of masculinity in the U.S. society, and they are more likely to date outside their race when compared to men of color. With the increase of inter-racial couples, some Asian American males admit that they feel emasculated and/or disappointed when Asian American women enter inter-racial relationships with white men (Chan, 1998). The model minority stereotype, which emphasizes Asian Americans' traits of diligence and submission, implying asexuality, because academic/occupational success means sacrificing personal and romantic relationships (Sue,1990). Moreover, different from overly masculine stereotypes associated with African American and Latino American males, stereotypes of Asian American males put them at the bottom of masculine standards (Fujino,1992), which could be an important factor to explain why Asian Americans tend to lack confident about their masculinity even when they compare themselves with other men of color.

Controlling images against Asian American males also negatively affect other people's perceptions towards Asian American males. According to the data published by OkCupid, people who use OkCupid (one of the most popular online dating sites in the U.S) do have some racial preferences in regard to who they want to respond to. In an article called "Race and Attraction, 2009-2014", the data shows that in 2009 (the year when OkCupid was initiated) all women tended to respond to the men who shared the same race as them, but some of them otherwise penalized Asian American males by showing no responses to them (OkCupid, 2,2014). The data published in 2014 still shows that Asian American males are far less likely to receive responses from female users when compared to non-Asian men's experiences (OkCupid, 3,2014). The fact that Asian American males are under-evaluated in this dating site implies that stereotypical descriptions of Asian American males do affect others' impressions towards them, which negatively affects Asian American males' dating life to a certain extent.

The increase of inter-racial couples of Asian women with white males, the model minority stereotypes, and the overly masculine portraits of white, African American and Latino American males are all potential factors to explain why Asian American males tend to be anxious about their masculinity. Among these factors, the model minority stereotypes play a huge role: by overly underscoring success/high achievement, the stereotypes mislead others to associate “good managers” with Asian American males’ “nerdy” personality (e.g. shy, passive/lack of passion). In this case, the nerdy trait demonstrates a submissive, weak, and pejoratively feminine masculinity (Cheng 180,1996), which makes many people believe that Asian American males only focus on personal achievements, are socially awkward, and lack normative masculinity.

Asian American males are not only portrayed as socially awkward people without any masculinity, they are also portrayed as “forever foreigners” who do not fit in the mainstream American norm. Many films and TV shows perpetrate and reinforce the “forever foreigner” stereotypes of Asian American men: The media tends to make fun of Asian American men --Fu Manchu effeminately manifesting as the *Yellow Peril* --a threat to the American society, “yellow-faced” Mickey Rooney as Yunioshi in the movie *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, sex-starved yet nerdy Long Duk Dong in *Sixteen Candles* (Shek 2006). More recently, there is shy and awkward Raj Koothrappali in the TV show *The Big Bang Theory* who is unable to talk to women unless he drinks beers, and nerdy Chinese gangster Leslie Chow in *The Hangover* (Lu, Wong, 385,2013). Judging from these examples from movies and TV shows, all of these stereotypical controlling images portray Asian American males as socially awkward “foreigners” who do not fit in America. Both Asian American males and Americans from other racial and/or gender identity can be deeply affected by these negative images.

In order to further understand Asian American males’ attitudes towards themselves and other people’s judgments of Asian American males, researchers Lu and Wong conducted surveys to a total of 220 male participants. Most of the survey questions are closed-ended questions, and the sample was mostly East Asian,

especially Chinese American males (Lu, Wong, 2013). The results of their survey shows that most participants want to be considered as tough and attractive men; unfortunately, others do not necessarily attribute these traits to them (Lu, Wong, 346,2013). A few number participants admitted that they were disadvantaged by stereotypes and Euro-centric ideals, so they tended to feel pressured by believing that they fail to display the traits such as toughness, strength, and sexual appeal. Perceiving cultural bias, one participant felt that others judged him based on Euro-centric standards: "I have to be cool and open to people. There are many mistakes I make which are regarded as weakness. People don't seem to accept me the way I am...Instead, they judged me according to their own American standard of being a man" (Lu, Wong, 360,2013). This response shows the inner struggles of Asian American males who feel that people like to judge them based on American standards while their own cultural practices of being a man are usually ignored<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, traditional east-Asian cultures emphasize the importance of responsibility and calmness. Thus, Asian American males with east-Asian heritages are more likely to have a different understanding of being men when compared to Americans who are only raised in western cultures. In other words, western/American cultures expect men to be physically strong and to reveal their masculinity publicly, which is a dissimilar way to act like a man from Asian American males' perspectives. Other participants in the study also demonstrated their struggles of keeping a balance between their own cultural practices and the mainstream American expectations of being a man. Another participant expressed his struggles this way: "I try to display courage and strength, but I tend to shy away from awkward or very difficult situations that require me to confront

Footnote 2: the majority of the participants in the study conducted by Wong, Owen, Tran, Higgins, Collins (2012) claimed that they knew the model minority stereotypes that expected Asian Americans to be smart and successful in schools. Most importantly, for those Asian American males who knew the nerd stereotypes, they were more likely to be conscious of their physical attractiveness and feel depressed.

others...I was taught to be polite and respectful to other people...It is hard, but I have to feign toughness” (Lu, Wong, 364,2013). This participant’s response shows that he wants to avoid disagreements/conflicts with others, but he feels the pressure to fake toughness as a way to maintain his masculinity.

Researchers not only find that the majority of the participants feel the pressure to fake toughness and/or other people like to judge their masculinity based on Western standards, but also find that many participants are not confident about their body images. One participant expresses his frustrations this way: “Feeling unattractive is disheartening, especially if one equates it with masculinity...I see my body differently compared to others, and it frustrates me that they (other people) see a different body size” (Lu, Wong, 363,2013). Living in a white-dominant society where strong white males’ bodies are considered the norms of masculinity, Asian American males could feel insecure about their masculinity, including body sizes. In terms of the media’s portraits of Asian American males, the above sections have indicated that Asian Americans are shaped by controlling image that portray them as as nerdy and asexual men without any masculinity, largely reducing Asian American males’ confidence in themselves. Even when the media portrays Asian American males’ body images and/or romantic relationship stories in movies and/or TV shows, Asian American males are shown as scrawny, small-penis, and hairless men who deviate from the norms (Lu, Wong, 2013). Undoubtedly, Asian American males’ masculinity is seriously challenged by the mainstream media and the Western standards of “being a man”, which negatively affects their confidence.

#### **The fourth main section: Conclusions**

From the history of Asian immigration to the negative influences of the model minority myth, this thesis demonstrated different forms of discrimination that Asian Americans face in their daily life. A high level of mental pressure results from the model minority stereotype; racial bias and discrimination from white Americans; internalized racism against people who belong to the same racial/ethnic group; domestic violence

against Asian immigrant women; and the negative effects of controlling images. Asian Americans with different racial/ethnic backgrounds, immigration status, and socio-economic backgrounds have dissimilar experiences in America, and the model minority myth that describes every Asian American as a high earning, scholarly achiever fails to represent the richness and complexity of Asian American experiences.

Given the fact that the model minority myth negatively affects Asian Americans in so many different ways, what types of research should be designed for the purpose of improving people's awareness of Asian American life? I designed a survey for Asian American students.<sup>3</sup> Whether Asian American students have taken courses relevant to Asian studies, whether and how often they feel stressed due to high expectations from families and/or the society, how many role models that they rely on when they need help, whether they pay attention to the mainstream media's portraits of Asian Americans are all included. Such a study would also ask administrators questions that aim to understand their perceptions of Asian American students' social life in DePauw and what types of programs have already designed for the purpose of helping Asian American and other minority students. By comparing and analyzing answers from Asian American students with those from administrators, I am able to better understand what types of problems that Asian American students usually face in their life, as well as how could administrators help to create a more inclusive environment for racial minority students at DePauw. By comparing students' answers in my survey with all the findings from my literature review, I am able to know to what extent are DePauw Asian American students' situations consistent with the findings from the existing literature. If there's a high level of consistency, then it means that Asian American students do face different levels of impediments resulting from the model minority stereotype. On the other hand, if there isn't a high level of consistency between the literature review and my survey findings due to the fact that the majority of the Asian American students do not report feeling stressful from high

Footnote 3: The completed survey questions can be found in the appendix of this thesis.

expectations or they are not negatively affected by the controlling images in the mainstream media, then it means that the overall racial climate at DePauw University is relatively friendly and inclusive.

Moreover, there are both advantages and limitations of my self-designed survey. The advantages of this survey include: (1) There are about 25 questions for students to answer and 7 questions for administrators to complete. Thus, it will not take participants much time to complete the survey, which increases the possibility that participants will answer the survey attentively. If there are too many questions in the survey and it takes a long time for participants to finish everything, then participants are more likely to feel tired at the end of the survey so that the quality of their answers will decrease. (2) Most of the questions are multiple-choice questions yet allow participants to write additional answers in sentences. In this way, it's easy for researchers to code and analyze all the answers with the use of SPSS (a statistical software). If most of the survey questions are not multiple-choice questions, then it will take researchers a much longer time to code all the answers. (3) This is an anonymous survey and every participant is allowed to quit the survey without any penalty. Given the fact that researchers do not collect any identified information of all participants and every participant does not have obligation to finish the survey, participants in this study are more likely to feel relaxed and to answer everything honestly. On the other hand, the limitations of this survey also exist: (1) Since most questions are multiple-choice questions, researchers can only have a relatively shallow understanding of Asian American students' life at DePauw. In contrast, methods like face-to-face interviews are more likely to help researchers understand participants in a much deeper way when compared to online surveys. (2) What people say in the survey may not indicate their real life experiences. Even though this is a anonymous survey and participants can quit at any time without penalty, it does not necessarily mean that every participant will answer it based on their real-life experiences. Even if participants do try to answer the survey as honestly as possible, their perceptions of their own experiences may be slightly different from what

really happens. (3) Asian American students' answers at DePauw University may not represent all Asian Americans' experiences in the U.S. DePauw University is a private institution in the Midwest without a large number of Asian American students. Thus, Asian American students who study in DePauw are more likely to share similar experiences with other Asian Americans who study in private institutions and grow up in the Midwest. For those Asian Americans who do not attend college or grow up in other parts of the U.S., they are more likely to have different experiences and give dissimilar answers in the surveys when compared to the experiences and answers from Asian American students at DePauw.

From another perspective, even though researchers can design surveys and conduct interviews with Asian American students and share the results to a wider audience, there are many other ways for people to help Asian Americans. In family contexts, parents and/or grandparents can have face-to-face and honest conversations about their life experiences in the U.S. to the next generation. By sharing experiences relevant to racial discrimination and mental stress, older generations are able to help young generations develop collective memory, which also helps Asian Americans from younger generations know that their experiences are not isolated. Therefore, when Asian American youth face unpleasant incidents such as racism from other people or high and unrealistic expectations from teachers due to their Asian heritage, they are more likely to be prepared for these things and talk about them by asking for help from families when compared to those Asian American youth who never has any discussion about racism with other families. They may also feel empowered to assert themselves when confronted with discrimination. What's more, it is important to hire more Asian-American counselors to work in counseling centers and to build more help centers for Asian American students. If there are more Asian-American counselors, then Asian American students are more likely to feel comfortable to express their honest feelings, including anxieties to counselors, because counselors who share the same heritage are more likely to understand their struggles. Large organizations

that give Asian Americans opportunities to meet with other Asian Americans and minorities are also helpful to enlarge Asian American youth's friend circles.

The model minority myth has many negative implications to Asian Americans. As "model minorities," Asian Americans are usually regarded as highly successful people who do not face any problems in the U.S., by deconstructing this stereotype with the use of many personal stories and findings from academic research, I hope more and more people will have a better understanding of Asian Americans' struggles. Most importantly, more research about Asian Americans, more open discussions among family members, as well as more Asian American counselors and organizations are potential ways to help Asian Americans. If families, educators and the whole society work together hand in hand, then future American generations with Asian heritage are more likely to have a healthy psychological well-being by learning to resist the model minority myth.

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Appendix

The completed survey questions for my study proposal

\* Survey questions for Asian American students

Participants: Asian American students/International students with Asian heritages/ A few staff members who work in the student services/student academic life at DePauw

1. Which of the following best represents your racial or ethnic heritage?

- A. Non-Hispanic White or Euro-American
- B. Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African-American
- C. Latino or Hispanic American
- D. East Asian or East Asian-American
- E. Southeast Asian and Pacific Asian and Pacific Islander or Southeast Asian/Pacific Islander-American
- F. South Asian or South Asian-American
- G. Middle Eastern or Arab American
- H. Native American or Alaskan Native
- I. Other Specify:

2. What's your gender identity?

- A. Man
- B. Woman
- C. Non-binary/third gender
- D. Others (specify if you care to)

3. If people identify as East Asians, Southeast Asians or South Asians, they need to answer this question: What's your ethnic heritage? Choose all that apply.

- A. Bhutanese
- B. Burmese
- C. Cambodian
- D. Chinese
- E. Filipinos
- F. Indian

- G. Japanese
- H. Korean
- I. Native Hawaiian
- J. Pakistani
- K. Thai
- L. Vietnamese
- M. Others (specify):

4. What's your nationality? Please type the answer.

5. For those people who give answer in the 3<sup>rd</sup> question, they need to answer this question: Do you identify as Asian-American?

- A. Yes
- B. No

6. For those people who answer yes in the 5th question, they need to answer: In which generation do you consider yourself to be?

- A. First-generation Asian Americans (People who were born in another country and they move to the U.S. after 18 years old)
- B. 1.5 generation Asian Americans (People who were born in another country and they move to the U.S. with their families before 16 years old)
- C. Second generation Asian Americans (People who were born and raised in the U.S.)
- D. Third generation Asian Americans (Those people who have grandparents immigrate to the U.S. From another country)
- E. Others ( Please be specific):

7. Have you ever taken courses related to Asian studies/Asian-American histories at DePauw or in your secondary or high school education?

- A. Yes
- B. No

8. For those people who answer yes in the 7th question, they need to answer this question: When did you take the course?

- A. Freshman year
- B. Sophomore year
- C. Junior year
- D. Senior year

9. For those people who answered yes to question 7, they need to answer this question: Why did you take this course?

- A. I was interested in the course
- B. I needed credit
- C. Other reasons (please be specific)

10. For people who type answers in the 9 question, they need to answer: Do you think that courses about Asian studies/Asian-American history help you understand yourself better?

- A. Yes (please specify how so):
- B. No (please specify why it does not):

11. Have you ever felt that you are under lots of stress due to high expectation (e.g., You are expected to do well in school all the time) put on you from your parents/society?

- A. Always
- B. Sometimes
- C. Neutral
- D. Seldom
- E. Never

12. How intense is the pressure you feel from your family or society to perform or act in a certain way?

- A. Very strong
- B. A little strong
- C. Neutral
- D. Not very strong
- E. Not strong at all

13. For those people who answer question 11th and 12th, they need to answer: Whenever you feel that you are under pressure, can you find someone that you can trust to talk to from your family or community?

- A. Yes
- B. No

14. How many role models or other sources of support are there in your family or community that you can look to for guidance, or talk to?

- A. More than three
- B. Three
- C. Two
- D. One
- E. Zero

15. For those people who choose E (zero) in question 14th, they need to answer: If there are no role models or sources of support in your family or community, where do you find them?

- A. Social media
- B. Peers
- C. Social organizations
- D. I haven't found any or haven't looked
- E. Others (please specify):

16. How much attention do you pay in regard to the mainstream American media's portrayal of Asian Americans? Please choose an answer from a scale from 1 to 5.

1. I pay a lot attention 2. I pay some attention 3. Neutral 4. I don't pay much attention 5. I don't pay any attention at all

17. For those people who choose "1" or "2" to the above question, they need to answer: Based on your personal opinion, how accurate does the American media portray Asian American people?

- A. Very accurate B. mostly accurate C. Neutral D. Not very accurate E. Not accurate at all

18. What kind of effect does the American media's portrayal of Asians have on your self perception or self image?

1. Very negative 2. Mostly negative 3. somewhat negative 4. Neutral 5. somewhat positive 6. Mostly positive 7. Very positive

19. How differently do you think the mainstream American media portrays Asian American men and women?

1. Not at all differently 2. Not very differently 3. Not differently 4. Neutral 5. Somewhat differently 6. a little bit differently 7. Very differently

20. How does the mainstream American media portray Asian American men? Choose all that apply.

- A. Highly academic men B. Not academic at all C. Shy men with awkward social skills D. Men with strong social skills E. Men without any dating experiences F. Men with lots of dating experiences G. Men with weak body image H. Men with strong body image I. Others Specify:

21. Based on your experience, how does American media usually portray Asian-American women? Choose all that apply.

- A. shy women B. extroverted women C. Sexually submissive women D. Sexually aggressive women E. Women with limited understandings of English F. Women who speak fluent English just like any other American G. Others Specify:

22. Do you think that the way mainstream American media portrays Asian-Americans has a negative impact on your dating life?

A. It influences a lot. B. It influences slightly. C. Neutral D. It does not influence a lot. E. It has no influence at all

23. If you needed to, how comfortable would you feel seeking help from the Counseling center at DePauw?

A. Very comfortable B. Mostly comfortable C. Neutral D. Not very comfortable E. Not comfortable at all

24. Do you feel that people who work in DePauw's Counseling center would be able to empathize with your situation?

A. Yes B. Don't know C. No

#### SEPARATE SURVEY FOR STAFF/ADMINISTRATORS

1. How much attention have you ever paid to in regard to the racial climate at DePauw University?

A. I have paid much attention to it. B. I have paid some attention to it. C. Neutral D. I don't pay much attention to it. E. I don't pay any attention to it.

2. Based on your observation, do you feel that Asian American students usually have positive relationships with other students?

A. They always have good relationships with other students. B. They mostly have positive relationships with other students. C. Neutral D. They don't always have positive relationships with other students. E. They don't have positive relationships with other students at all.

3. Based on your observation, how do you feel about international Asian students' social relationships with others?

A. They usually have positive social relationships with other students. B. They mostly have positive social relationships with other students. C. Neutral D. They don't always have positive relationships with other students. E. They don't have positive relationships with other students at all.

4. Based on your understandings and observations, are there any key differences between Asian American and international Asian students' college experiences?

A. There is a huge difference. B. There's some difference. C. Neutral D. There isn't a huge difference. E. There isn't any difference at all.

Please expand your answers in a few sentences if you want. Thanks!

5. Based on your understandings and observations, are there any key similarities between Asian American and international Asian students' college experiences?

A. There's a huge similarity. B. There's some similarity. C. Neutral D. There isn't a huge similarity. E. There isn't any similarity at all.

Please expand your answers in a few sentences if you want. Thanks!

6. To your acknowledgment, how many programs are already designed to help international and/or Asian American students at DePauw?

A. More than three B. Three C. Two D. One E. Zero

Please expand your answers in a few sentences if you want. Thanks!

7. In your opinion, what kinds of services/needs that you would like to do for international and/or Asian American students for the purpose of improving their college experiences?

Please explain your answers in sentences. Thanks!!