

**Internalizing the Model Minority Myth: Dangers for Asian American Mental
Health and Attitudes Towards Other Minorities**

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Abstract

The model minority myth (MMM) falsely portrays Asian Americans as the “model minority” racial group in the United States due to their perceived educational and professional success. The MMM also paints an overly positive picture of the Asian American experience by ascribing primarily positive racial stereotypes to this group and blatantly disregarding the social adversity they continue to face as a racially marginalized population in the U.S. Research has demonstrated that even positive racial stereotypes can cause psychological harm due to heightened pressure to achieve unrealistic expectations. However, less is known about the psychological process of how Asian Americans internalize the stereotypes associated with the MMM. This article seeks to fill this gap by providing a review of the existing research regarding the internalization of the MMM among Asian Americans. Further, this article contributes to the literature by specifying how MMM internalization (a) impacts the way that Asian Americans view themselves, (b) influences mental health outcomes among Asian Americans, and (c) impacts the attitudes that Asian Americans form about other racial minority groups in the U.S. This article highlights several key gaps in the existing literature that should be addressed in future research and provides strategic policy recommendations for practitioners who seek to reduce psychological consequences resulting from internalizing stereotypes that portray Asian Americans as a “model minority”.

Keywords: Model Minority Myth, Asian American Mental Health, Asian Americans, Racial Triangulation

1. Introduction

According to the 2019 US Census Bureau Reports, Asian Americans constitute 5.7% of the US population. They also happen to be the fastest-growing racial group in the United States, with their population growing by a record 81% from 2000 to 2019 and the total population projected to triple in size from 2000 to 2060 (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021a). However, for a rapidly growing group that comprises a significant portion of the US population, Asian Americans are historically omitted from conversations concerning race-related discrimination and racial justice in the United States (Li, 2020; Naseeb et al., 2020; Young et al., 2021). Even within Asian American groups, parents seem to generally refrain from overt conversations about racism and the Asian American identity in US society, while recent evidence demonstrates that these conversations are most commonly initiated by children and not parents (Ramirez, 2021; Young et al., 2021).

These issues can partly be explained by how Asian Americans are uniquely racialized in American Society. On the face of it, Asian Americans surpass other racial minorities and even White Americans on conventional measures of success – specifically, educational attainment and median household income. Asian Americans consistently outperform all other racial groups in standardized test scores, including SAT scores (*National Center for Education Statistics*, 2019). Additionally, 54% of Asian Americans over the age of 25 hold a bachelor's degree, in comparison to only 31% of White Americans (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021b). Asian Americans' median household income is also significantly larger than White Americans, and other minority racial groups (Asante-Muhammad & Kurani, 2023). Asian Americans are also less likely to be criminal offenders than other groups and tend to be treated similarly to their white counterparts or even more leniently by the US Justice system (Johnson & Betsinger, 2009).

These perceived successes have led to Asian Americans being painted as a “model minority” group that is doing remarkably well in American society, particularly relative to other minority racial groups. The model minority myth (MMM) has not only affected how other racial groups perceive Asian Americans (Lee et al., 2009, Museus, 2008; Wong et al., 1998, F. Wong & Halgin, 2006) but also how Asian Americans perceive themselves (Yoo et al., 2010). The two major facets of the MMM are best captured by the Internalization of the Model Minority Myth (IM-4) scale which measures the degree to which Asian Americans internalize the MMM (Yoo et al., 2015). The first facet – *Achievement Orientation* – captures beliefs about an inherently stronger work ethic, heightened perseverance, higher intelligence, and better math skills in Asian Americans in comparison to other minority racial groups. The second facet – *Unrestricted Mobility* – captures beliefs about a lack of racial barriers and discrimination, and access to fair treatment in Asian Americans as compared to other minority racial groups.

However, a nuanced look at the Asian American experience in the United States presents strong criticism against both facets of the MMM. *Achievement Orientation* beliefs stem from the fact that Asian Americans demonstrate higher income levels and educational attainment than other racial groups. However, a closer analysis of the US Census Bureau data from 2017-2019 highlights how these statistics can be highly misleading when interpreted without nuance (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021b). Firstly, there exist over 25 Asian American ethnic subgroups, with considerable variation in these statistics across subgroups (Census Bureau 2010). Only two Asian American subgroups – Indians and Filipinos – surpassed the Asian American median household income. Most remaining subgroups had median incomes well below the national average. While Indian, Malaysian, Mongolian, and Sri Lankan subgroups are much more likely to have a bachelor's degree than White Americans and other Asian American subgroups, Laotians and Bhutanese subgroups are

significantly less likely to have a bachelor's degree. The false perception of all Asian Americans doing exceptionally well in terms of academic achievement and annual income may contribute to certain groups being culturally invalidated within the Asian American community for failing to uphold the model minority stereotype and tarnishing the reputation of the group at large (Durkee et al., 2019). Secondly, over a quarter of Asian Americans surveyed live in multigenerational households leading to more working adults within each household, raising the median household income as a result. Finally, these statistics are the consequence of immigration policies that strategically prioritize highly skilled immigrants (Ong & Hee, 1993; Kochhar & Cilluffo 2018). Combined with the fact that immigration accounts for 81% of the increase in the Asian population in the US, higher household income among Asian Americans can primarily be attributed to these selective immigration policies, and not inherent characteristics that set them apart compared to other racial minority groups.

Unrestricted Mobility beliefs are hinged on the assumption that Asian Americans do not face any racial barriers in American society, and might even experience privileges similar to White Americans. However, Asian Americans are treated as perpetual foreigners in the US (Huynh et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2009). They are rarely perceived as “truly American”, and they continue to receive questions like “Where are you really from?” that consistently undermine their nationality (Wu, 2002). Even after accounting for the impact of perceived discrimination, awareness of the perpetual foreigner stereotype still significantly predicted reports of life satisfaction and feelings of hopelessness in Asian Americans (Huynh et al., 2011). Asian Americans are also disproportionately underrepresented in leadership positions despite having the qualifications and experience required for such roles, creating a dynamic that has been termed the ‘Bamboo Ceiling’ (Lu et. al., 2020). For example, Asian Americans represent over 20% of the permanent workforce

at the National Institutes of Health but only comprise 6% of the senior leadership positions (Goon et al., 2022, Mervis 2005). This has been attributed to lower levels of assertiveness in Asian Americans due to cultural differences; Asians (specifically East Asians) seem to display less assertiveness than what typically aligns with the expectations of leaders in American society (Lu et. al., 2020). More recently, overt discrimination against Asian Americans was brought into the public eye during the COVID-19 pandemic, in the forms of violent hate crimes, microaggressions, and vicarious discrimination, with these experiences correlating with poorer physical and mental health in Asian Americans, even in the long-term (Ermis-Demirtas et al., 2022; Lee & Waters, 2021; Yi et al., 2023). Finally, Asian Americans have endured significant historical racial struggles, and the resultant intergenerational trauma continues to persist. For example, people of Japanese descent were detained in internment camps during the Second World War for 2-3 years on average despite their citizenship status (Nagata,1998). This lead to heightened suppression of their cultural heritage, and assimilation into white culture across generations that followed to avoid being perceived as an outsider (Nagata et al., 2015). The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 put a decade-long ban on Chinese immigration into the US, resulting in undocumented immigration, and families being torn apart. Since older generations faced massive challenges immigrating under exclusion laws, younger generations have felt pressured to work hard to live up to these sacrifices (Fish, 2016).

Much harm associated with the MMM comes from the group's internalization of these stereotypes (Yoo et al., 2010, 2015). Firstly, the internalization of the MMM has been associated with negative psychological consequences for Asian Americans. For example, MMM internalization is associated with a decreased tendency to seek out professional help, leading to an increased reliance on personal support networks – family, friends, and the religious community –

which might not be equipped to provide the help required (Atkin et al., 2018; Kim & Lee, 2014; S. Lee et al., 2008). The cognitive dissonance between needing to seek emotional help, while also upholding the virtues of the purported model minority, also furthers the existing stigma associated with seeking professional care. Secondly, internalization of the MMM is generally associated with decreased sympathy towards other racial minority groups. For Asian Americans specifically, greater internalization of the MMM is associated with less support for affirmative action policies, a higher prevalence of anti-Black attitudes, and indifference toward the Black Lives Matter movement (Yellow Horse et al., 2021; Yi & Todd, 2021). This pattern likely occurs because the MMM paints Asian Americans as a minority group that has thrived, despite the odds, purely because of their hard work and intelligence (Yi and Todd, 2021). This belief also insinuates that other racial minority groups are likely not succeeding in American society due to their poor work ethic or lack of perseverance.

The current article synthesizes existing research regarding the internalization of the MMM among Asian Americans to provide consensus and a clearer understanding of how this internalization influences their psychological outcomes and attitudes towards other racial minority groups. It consists of two main parts – the first evaluating Asian American mental health outcomes (*Section 2*), and the second evaluating attitudes towards other racial minority groups specifically in light of the internalization of the MMM (*Section 3*). The first part reviews Asian American mental health at the subgroup level and then explores the link between the internalization of the MMM and mental health outcomes. In the second part, we provide a theoretical argument for why internalization of the MMM is likely to reduce the level of support and solidarity offered to other marginalized racial minority groups. We place this argument within the context of several recent events including the limited amount of support for the Black Lives Matter Movement among Asian

Americans, and the *Students for Fair Admissions vs. Harvard University* lawsuit which resulted in the Supreme Court significantly prohibiting the consideration of race in college admissions.

This article contributes to the literature by specifying how internalizing the ‘positive’ stereotypes associated with the MMM (a) impacts the way that Asian Americans view themselves, (b) influences mental health outcomes among Asian Americans, and (c) impacts Asian American attitudes toward other racial minority groups in the U.S. Following this review, this article highlights key gaps in the existing literature that should be addressed in future research (*Section 4*) and provides strategic policy recommendations for practitioners who seek to reduce psychological consequences resulting from internalizing stereotypes that portray Asian Americans as a “model minority” (*Section 2.3*).

2. Internalizing the MMM and Psychological Harm

2.1. Asian Americans and Mental Health

Asian Americans seem to fare considerably better than the general population in the United States when it comes to mental health. They have the lowest proportion of both lifetime mental disorders and past-year mental health concerns among all racial groups. (Miranda et al., 2008). Asian Americans also have the lowest substance use dependencies, and consequently, the lowest need to access substance use treatment as compared to other racial groups (*Need for and Receipt of Substance Use Treatment among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders*, 2013; Price et al., 2002). However, these rates may be influenced by cultural resistance towards seeking mental healthcare when needed. Results from the National Latino and Asian American Study (2002-2003) showed that only 8.6% of the 2,095 Asian Americans surveyed had sought any kind of mental health care, and of the respondents with a possible mental health diagnosis, only 34.1% had sought

out professional clinical support (Abe-Kim et al., 2007). Additionally, Asian Americans in need of substance abuse treatment who did not receive it were significantly less likely to recognize the need for treatment and actively seek it out, compared to other racial groups. This indicates that Asian Americans are hesitant to seek outside interventions for mental health difficulties.

Considering these trends, it is also important to highlight the high degree of diversity in the Asian American community to avoid framing this group as a monolith. For example, a study comparing substance use of a range of psychoactive drugs found significant differences across Asian American sub-groups (Price et al. 2002). While Japanese Americans match White Americans in terms of substance use and abuse, Vietnamese Americans have much lower rates (Price et al. 2002). Additionally, multiracial Asian Americans commonly experience higher rates of substance abuse compared to monoracial Asian Americans (Price et al. 2002). A study reviewing 6 databases regarding the prevalence of depression across Asian American sub-groups also found significant differences (Kim et al. 2015). Specifically, the prevalence of depression in Korean and Filipino-Americans (33.3 - 34.3%) was almost twice as much as in Chinese-Americans (15.7%). A recent study assessing depression risk in 16 Asian American sub-groups in New York City found that Southeast Asians were at the highest risk of depression (19%), followed by South Asians (11%) and then by East Asians (9%) (Misra et al., 2020). It also highlighted that the factors impacting this risk differed significantly across sub-groups. These facts taken together depict considerable diversity in Asian American experiences of mental health.

2.2. The Link Between Internalizing the MMM and Mental Health Outcomes

Although the stereotypes associated with the MMM are largely positive, internalizing these stereotypes can cause significant psychological harm. This was first demonstrated in a study with

291 Asian Americans between the ages of 18 and 79 (Gupta et al., 2011). The internalization of positive stereotypes associated with the MMM was linked to significantly higher levels of somatic complaints and psychological distress. Additionally, the internalization of positive stereotypes was associated with a lower likelihood to seek professional psychological help when needed. The authors suggest that Asian Americans who internalize the MMM likely feel that they are not living up to the expectations of the Asian community and feel unworthy of even seeking help (Gupta et al., 2011). Similarly, a qualitative study found that much of the stress experienced by Asian American young adults stemmed from the expectation to be “smart” from both within and outside their ethnic groups (S. Lee et al., 2008). This study also shed light on participants’ inability to access mental health care due to their parents' fear that it would tarnish their reputation and affect their career prospects.

Yoo et al. (2015) examined the link between MMM internalization (i.e., IM-4) and stress from academic expectations in a sample of 155 Asian American Adolescents. They found that the MMM-Achievement Orientation factor was associated with greater stress from academic expectations, but the MMM-Unrestricted Mobility factor was associated with less stress from academic expectations. This indicates that strong beliefs for Asian Americans to be highly successful puts undue academic pressure on Asian American students, but greater belief that Asian Americans do not face discrimination or racial barriers helps to reduce this pressure. Subsequently, Atkin et al. (2018) probed the previous findings by the level of racial diversity in the schools that Asian Americans attended. They found that students in predominantly Asian American schools were less likely to internalize the MMM-Unrestricted Mobility factor, but faced stronger mental health consequences when they did internalize this factor. On the other hand, Asian American students in racially diverse schools were more likely to internalize the MMM-Unrestricted

Mobility factor, but faced weaker mental health consequences when they did. The authors suggest that students surrounded by primarily same-race peers were likely to feel that Asian Americans face fierce academic competition to succeed in America, thus leading to less internalization of the myth of unrestricted mobility. Whereas Asian Americans surrounded by racially diverse peers were more likely to be aware of the oppression faced by other marginalized racial groups and perceive their own racial oppression as relatively minimal, leading to greater internalization of the myth that Asian Americans face unrestricted mobility.

Kiang et al. (2016) found a counterintuitive relationship between MMM internalization and mental health outcomes in a sample of 9th and 10th-grade Asian American students from 6 public schools in the Southeast US. They found that when experiences of racial discrimination and MMM internalization were examined simultaneously in the same predictive model, greater MMM internalization was linked to higher self-esteem, more positive relationships with others, and lower depressive symptoms. On the other hand, experiences of racial discrimination had the opposite relationship with these outcomes. The authors suggest that these results are consistent with theories of self-development, which suggest that being perceived in a positive light leads to more positive evaluations of the self (Harter & Leahy, 2001). Kiang et al. (2016) also propose that including experiences of racial discrimination in the same statistical model with MMM internalization may have brought about these unexpected findings because the relationship between MMM internalization and psychosocial outcomes may change after the harmful effects of racial discrimination are accounted for. Additional research is needed to confirm whether these counterintuitive findings are likely to replicate in larger samples of Asian American youth.

2.3. Accounting for MMM Internalization to Improve Asian American Mental Health Care

Internalizing the MMM is directly linked to adverse psychological outcomes in Asian Americans in several forms: depressive symptoms, psychological distress, self-esteem issues, and stress to meet unrealistic academic expectations. While factors like academic performance, racially diverse school contexts, and even representations of God (benevolent vs. authoritative) have been shown to moderate this link, this relationship needs to be further explored (Atkin et al., 2018; P. Y. Kim, 2021; Yoo et al., 2015). Given the complicated relationship between internalizing MMM beliefs and the resulting mental health consequences, Asian Americans require structured, culturally sensitive mental health care that takes these factors into account. However, Asian Americans face several barriers to accessing the mental health care they need. Fong and Tsuang (2007) reviewed the prevalence of substance addiction and barriers to treatment in the Asian American community and found that the MMM encouraged Asian Americans to underestimate their problems due to the fear of being perceived as weak. Further, most Asian Americans either sought out professional psychological help at significantly later stages than other racial groups or abstained from seeking out help altogether. They also found that cultural stigma associated with seeking out psychological treatment was more pronounced in Asian American communities as compared to other racial groups, with barriers such as “shame” and “losing face” preventing individuals from seeking necessary care. These trends suggest that Asian American communities likely hold themselves to extremely high standards, and as a result, are considerably more sensitive to perceived shortcomings. Research to date has yet to understand the complex relationship between MMM internalization and help-seeking attitudes among Asian American populations. However, this gap in the literature may provide promising new directions to explore mechanisms that can eliminate barriers to seeking professional care and potentially reduce MMM internalization.

Educating therapists who engage with Asian American clients on the impact of internalizing the MMM remains a goal for practitioners. Especially when therapists themselves have internalized MMM stereotypes. In a study measuring therapist biases, White therapists were likely to attribute a reserved interpersonal style of communication in Asian American clients to Asian cultural norms of being polite and quiet, rather than identify these traits as symptoms of social withdrawal and anhedonia, which are key characteristics of major depressive disorder (Leong & Lau, 2001). Due to MMM internalization, Asian Americans feel pressure to be perceived as smart individuals who persevere through tough times without seeking help (S. Lee et al., 2008). This outcome indicates the need for culturally competent diagnostic measures and tools to work around this stigma and provide accurate diagnoses. There is also a need for cultural training of healthcare providers to understand the intricacies of how the unique racialization of Asian Americans impacts their mental health (S. Lee et al., 2008). Finally, there is a need for culturally appropriate programs to raise mental health awareness within Asian American communities to help change the connotation of mental health issues being perceived as personal shortcomings.

3. Impact of MMM Internalization on the Perception of Other Racial Minorities

3.1. Racial Valorization of the Asian American Community

The Asian American community has historically been used as a strategic wedge between Black and White populations within American society (Kim, 1999). Kim (1999) describes “relative valorization” as the process of placing Asian Americans higher than Black Americans, and closer to White Americans, in terms of social status in the US. This process allows dominant racial groups to use Asian Americans as a model example of what other racial minority groups could achieve if only they “worked harder” and demonstrated “more perseverance”. These

strategic efforts are designed to pit racial minority groups against each other and persuade Asian Americans to minimize the effects that historical trauma and institutionalized racism have had on their own social status and the social position of other marginalized racial groups. Relative valorization began in the 1860s when Chinese immigrants were brought to the US to provide cheap labor nearly immediately after slavery was outlawed (Kim, 1999). Asian immigrants were encouraged to internalize this relative valorization and assimilate into White culture by distancing themselves as much as possible from Black people, in an attempt to retain higher status and gain access to greater opportunities (Gans, 2012; D. H. Kim, 2014). The process is still visible in society today when Asian Americans are culturally invalidated for violating norms associated with the MMM. Ironically, among Black Americans the term “acting white” is used as an insult to culturally invalidate members who assimilate into White culture, but in Asian American groups, this label is often seen as a compliment and even something to strive towards (Durkee et al., 2019; 2022; Matthews, 2008).

Another example of relative valorization is the Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA) vs. Harvard College lawsuit that led the US Supreme Court to abolish affirmative action policies and prohibit the consideration of racial adversity in college admissions. This legal case was first introduced by Asian American students who were in opposition to affirmative action policies, but the significant restrictions resulting from this case are likely to disproportionately affect Black and Latinx students by lessening their likelihood of being admitted to highly selective institutions. However, legacy admissions will remain fully protected in the US and this form of affirmative action has disproportionately benefited White students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Recent research examining admissions data from Harvard University suggests that removing legacy admissions would decrease the proportion of White students by 6% and increase the

proportion of Asian American students by 9% (Arcidiacono et al., 2022). A subsequent lawsuit has been filed in 2023 to further prohibit legacy admissions in the US (Morges-Gerbi et al., 2023). The controversy created by the national debate on affirmative action policies has sparked increased interest in understanding how MMM internalization influences the attitudes that Asian Americans hold toward other racial minority groups.

3.2. Linking MMM Internalization to Anti-Black Attitudes and Affirmative Action

MMM internalization relies on seemingly positive stereotypes to explain the success of Asian Americans, but these beliefs also promote consequential assumptions that other marginalized racial groups experience lower success because they fail to embrace these positive stereotypes. For example, Asian Americans who internalize the MMM may attribute the lower social position of Black and Latinx Americans in US society to their inability to work hard or persevere through tough situations, instead of recognizing the chronic impact that structural racism has had on these groups. Research from Yi and Todd (2021) has found that MMM internalization was directly associated with greater anti-black attitudes and opposition to affirmative action policies among Asian American undergraduates. They also found that greater beliefs in colorblindness explained (i.e., partially mediated) the link between MMM internalization and opposition to affirmative action. Lastly, greater beliefs in a just world (i.e., the belief that the world is essentially a fair place and people's actions determine their life course outcomes) explained the link between MMM internalization and anti-Black attitudes. Collectively, these findings suggest that colorblindness and beliefs in a just world are critical mechanisms that link MMM internalization to both anti-Black attitudes and opposition to affirmative action. Therefore, colorblindness and beliefs in a just world may be important mechanisms for researchers and

practitioners to consider as points of intervention to help disrupt the intergenerational effects of relative valorization.

Recent research from Le and colleagues (2023) evaluated whether the link between MMM internalization and anti-Black attitudes would persist in a sample of low-income Asian Americans. They found that low-income Asian Americans with higher internalization of the MMM also had higher anti-black attitudes even though they did not fit into the traditional model minority stereotype due to their low-income status. Interestingly, they also found that low-income Asian Americans had higher levels of internalization of the MMM on both the Achievement Orientation and Unrestricted Mobility factors compared to other studies that recruited primarily middle and upper-middle-class Asian Americans (Yoo et al., 2010). Le and colleagues (2023) suggest that low-income Asian Americans might be internalizing the MMM more to cope with the intersectionality of race and class by believing they are “at least better than Black Americans”.

Statistics of Asian American support for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement suggest that anti-black attitudes among Asian Americans may be quite common in the U.S. Data from the 2016 Multi-Racial Post-Election Survey revealed that 39% of Asian Americans were in support of the BLM movement (12% strongly support, 27% somewhat support), whereas 43% were indifferent towards the movement, and 18% were somewhat or strongly against the BLM movement (Merseeth, 2018). A closer look revealed that Asian Americans who strongly believed that their own success was closely related to other Asians (*racial group linked fate*) were 18% more likely to support BLM (Merseeth, 2018). Additionally, Asian Americans who strongly believed their success was linked to the success of individuals from other racial minority groups (*cross-racial group linked fate*) were 13% more likely to support BLM. The acknowledgment of one's success being closely related to those of in-group members and other racial minority groups

influences individuals' tendency to support the struggles of other marginalized populations. Additionally, Asian Americans who tended to critically reflect on how systemic inequality works in keeping minority racial groups oppressed also tended to demonstrate more support for BLM than those who did not (Matriano et al., 2021).

Another study specifically examined Asian Americans in the 2016 Multi-Racial Post-Election Survey who were indifferent to the BLM Movement (Yellow Horse et al., 2021). They found that nativity (U.S.-born vs. foreign-born), belongingness (emotional connection to the U.S.), and degree of acknowledgment of racism against Black Americans predicted the degree of indifference towards the BLM Movement. Specifically, being born in the US and feeling a heightened sense of belongingness to the US decreased the degree of indifference towards the BLM movement. This points to the need to include detailed contextual factors in analyses that evaluate the link between MMM internalization and anti-black attitudes. These efforts will enable scholars to better understand these dynamic relationships more holistically.

4. Directions for Future Research

While research has made promising strides toward understanding how internalization of the MMM influences important mental health outcomes in Asian Americans and negative attitudes toward other racial groups, it has also opened up several new questions to understand the nuances of these links. Firstly, it is important to understand the dynamics of MMM internalization more closely to allow researchers and practitioners to design effective interventions to help Asian Americans cope with its consequences. Currently, it is still unclear what characteristics make certain Asian American individuals more prone to internalizing the MMM than others. It is likely that both contextual factors and individual factors (i.e., demographics) play a role in the

internalization process. For example, environmental factors such as contextual racial composition and political climate, as well as individual factors such as socioeconomic status (SES), gender, and personality traits may influence the degree of internalization. Therefore, additional research is greatly needed because these factors may function as valuable moderators that influence whether certain individuals or contexts face greater risk of MMM internalization.

Collective Identity is another factor that may influence MMM internalization. Collective Identity captures how important one's racial identity is to their overall sense of self and how close one feels to other members of their racial group (Leach et al., 2008). A study predicting the tendency to engage in racial in-group activism showed that increased internalization of the MMM was associated with less racial in-group activism, while increased collective identity was associated with greater racial in-group activism (Tran & Curtin, 2017). Considering these polarizing trends, future research should examine whether there are direct or indirect effects between the degree of collective identity and MMM internalization.

Secondly, given the effects of MMM internalization on relations with other racial groups, the research literature would benefit greatly by examining its effects among specific Asian American subgroups. This would be particularly useful due to the stark socioeconomic hierarchy, and long-held biases, within the Asian American diaspora. For example, colorism is an inherent belief in Asian American communities that lighter skin is associated with perceptions of higher class and heightened beauty (Jones, 2013). The effects of this discrimination, both from within and outside the Asian American community, are pervasive across all spheres of life including education, marriage, and career prospects; with South Asians receiving even greater victimization (Banks, 2015). A study examining Asian Americans from a nationally representative dataset found that Asian American males and females with fair skin were more likely to obtain a bachelor's

degree compared to Asian American peers with darker complexion and these effects were robust even after controlling for several covariates (Ryabov, 2016). Future research should explore whether lighter-skinned Asian Americans are more likely to internalize the MMM and whether the link between MMM internalization and anti-black attitudes is moderated by the skin tone of Asian Americans.

Finally, given the link between MMM internalization and poor mental health outcomes in Asian Americans, it would be useful to examine protective factors that weaken this link. Prior research has revealed that both the diversity of school contexts and beliefs in a benevolent God helped reduce this impact (Kim, 2021). A strong sense of belonging (i.e. the degree of emotional connection an individual feels with the U.S.) may further cushion this effect by functioning as a protective factor since prior findings indicate that internalization of the perpetual foreigner myth is linked to poorer life satisfaction in Asian Americans (Huynh et al., 2011). Additionally, it would be helpful to explore whether self-awareness of MMM internalization influences the severity of psychological consequences. In other words, does conscious awareness of MMM internalization help to protect Asian Americans from negative mental health consequences?

5. Conclusion

While there has been a lot of research examining how the MMM impacts the perception and treatment of Asian Americans in the U.S., less is known about how internalizing this myth affects the members of this group and their attitudes toward other racial minorities. This paper provided a review of the existing research regarding MMM internalization and highlighted several key gaps in the literature that should be addressed in future research.

MMM internalization is a significant risk factor for the mental health of Asian Americans. Despite the stereotypes associated with the MMM being largely “positive” assumptions about Asian Americans, the studies summarized in this paper consistently show the detrimental effects these stereotypes have on individuals within this population. This harm can manifest in the form of stress from extremely high academic expectations, somatic symptoms, and psychological distress (i.e., anxiety and depression).

Additionally, MMM internalization negatively impacts Asian American attitudes toward other racial minorities. This link seems to be largely mediated by beliefs that an individual’s success has little to do with race (i.e., colorblindness) and that the world is a just place. However, the intricacies of these links have yet to be fully explored. Given that the Asian American population is growing rapidly in the US, pursuing these research directions and using findings to inform policy decisions is important not just for Asian American communities, but for American society as a whole.

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