Causes of Cultural Identity Confusion and Mental Health

Stressors of Chinese American Adolescents:

“Model Minority” Stereotype, Family Value Conflicts, Peer Discrimination, And Low Levels of Media Representation

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**Introduction**

Oftentimes the generalized descriptive word “Asian” in the United States is thrown around freely. It is used to describe a wide range of people from a multitude of different backgrounds and experiences. There are many stereotypes and assumptions that have become linked over time, grouping all “Asians” under a single category. The representation of Asians as a whole has been insensitive to highlight individuality varying from culture to culture. Asian racial subgroups are represented as if they are culturally and physically homogeneous with no internal variation, and the monolithic view that all Asians are the same is illustrated by the mainstream culture’s ignorance when we see things like “McDonald’s Shanghai McNuggets with teriyaki sauce’ or Chinese characters who wear kimonos” (Park 1). Likewise, the media culture also demonstrates such insensitivity. Actress Constance Wu tells *TIME* magazine in an interview following the release of the all-Asian casted Hollywood movie, *Crazy Rich Asians:*

Asian isn’t a monolithic identity... But Hollywood has tended to treat it as one category... Obviously, Korean is different than Chinese, which is different from
the Vietnamese culture, but the way the [U.S.] culture has treated us is a point that we can probably find some common ground on...They think that having an Asian in their movie is the same thing as having an Asian American, and it’s just not. (Ho 44)

This assumption is damaging in that it doesn’t set the different communities apart and masks the individual struggles and conflicts of each community. Moreover, referring to all people of Chinese heritage descent as if they had similar experiences is yet another insensitive generalization. There is a more intricate difference between the many groups of Chinese people who experience various situations.

As one of the largest communities under the broader category of “Asians” in the United States, the Chinese community in the United States is also much more general. One must avoid generalizing Chinese Americans’ different backgrounds and upbringings. A community, as noted by Manzo and Perkins, is a connection focused on the bonds among people and that “emotional connection is at the core” of a sense of a particular community (339). In the Chinese American community, people share understanding of common conflicts and experiences that are unique to them and thus are able to form a community with emotional bonding. Chinese Americans are not simply people of Chinese descent. There is a specific group of Chinese Americans who share similar upbringings who are first- or second-generation Chinese Americans who are raised by Chinese immigrant parents. They have lived their whole lives or at least have developed their cultural identities in the United States from the start as their dominating culture and society, and are living in between two cultures. This differs them from their immigrant parents who have already developed their social and cultural identity while they lived in Chinese society, as well as the Chinese international students
who also grew up predominantly in Chinese society and identify as Chinese nationality-wise.

Chinese American adolescents who were born in the United States or immigrated with their Chinese immigrant parents at a young age have had to adjust to living with both American culture and Chinese culture simultaneously, and this often causes cultural disorientation as they are still growing to develop their own identities. In their youth, they struggle with cultural conflict with both the American society and their cultural heritage, as well as conflict with their own parents. Chinese American adolescents experience discrimination because of stereotypes such as the idea of the “model minority” and because of low media representation and exposure in American society; these factors have led to consequences such as developing mental health issues and lower academic performances that unfortunately have been constantly overlooked.

**Struggles of Chinese Americans and Impacts of Discrimination and Exclusion**

One of the fundamental conflicts Chinese Americans struggle with is society’s preconceived impressions of them being “model minorities,” which was a term coined during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement (Atkin et al. 108). The term implies that they won’t have any social and political struggles since they have been perceived to be financially successful as a result of hard work (108). Despite being associated with a positive ‘model minority’ stereotype, which is composed of attributes such as intelligence and industriousness, evaluators believe that Asian Americans are also low on dominance (unassertive and compliant) and low on sociability, one of the many common stereotypes of Asian Americans and Chinese Americans (Gündemir et al. 1).
This attitude already puts Chinese Americans down a step, making them seem like they don’t matter because they are already doing well. To date, there have been widespread studies on African American and Latino ethnic minorities and their experiences of discrimination (Hou et al.). However, as Hou et al. argue, the study of the relationship between the discrimination faced by adolescents and the outcomes of Asian-American adults is lacking, and that negative outcomes are most likely due to the “model minority” stereotype from society that portrays Asian-Americans as being able to adjust well and therefore assumes they won’t be subject to discrimination (Hou et al.). Therefore, even before being “discriminated against,” Asian-Americans, including Chinese Americans, are being stereotyped and treated a certain way because of preconceived biases. It makes it harder for Chinese Americans to be able to voice their opinions if society doesn’t even think they have opinions in the first place. Thus, fundamentally, there is not enough exposure of Chinese Americans’ stories in American society, including research studies as well as media exposure.

The media is a network of communications that connects people from all over the world and serves to inform and influence the people in many ways. However, when large growing populations such as the Chinese American community do not get enough media exposure or the correct representation, people become less aware of the real social makeup of such a diverse nation. Over the years, the number of times when Chinese American or Asian-American stories in general have had great exposure can practically be counted on one hand. The American film industry over the years has been guilty of whitewashing culturally Asian characters, hiring Caucasian actors to play those parts (Joon and Park). Joon and Park write that “leukocentric,” or Eurocentric, “whitewashing continues to erupt nearly unabated as business as usual” (150). Despite
having prospective big steps moving forward, like author Kevin Kwan’s novel *Crazy Rich Asians* being adapted into a Hollywood feature film featuring an all-Asian cast, it is disappointing to know that even with such a big step taken, prospective film producers once again attempted to transmogrify Rachel, the lead female Chinese American protagonist of the film, into a white character played by a Caucasian actress (Joon and Park 150). This shows that from the start, misrepresentation of Chinese Americans was never being treated seriously enough to be completely abolished by film producers. In fact, according to one of Kevin Kwan’s narratives in an interview, the problem lies solely in Hollywood and the film industry itself: the possibility of whitewashing the original story was rejected by a group of 30 white American Texan women who attended his book club (Joon and Park 150). This indicates that the audience has the ability to take the story as-is, but the film industry somehow has another mindset. The main consequence of whitewashing is its effect on those who aren’t yet aware of the issue of Asian American discrimination or those who are yet still too young to see the truth, such as children or adolescents who are still molding their own identities. The media and people who tell stories have the responsibility to give accurate information. For those who need this type of support in their lives, such as Chinese American adolescents who are struggling with cultural disorientation, a relatable film that represents their life, and one that could possibly lead them positively in the right direction, could mean everything.

Discrimination and exclusion from the nearby environment two of the factors that affect the development of adolescents that can intensify the feelings of not belonging to the American community. A solid ethnic identity is critical in an adolescent’s psychological development (Hou et al. 2111). As adolescents grow to
become more self-aware and develop more sophisticated perspective-taking capabilities, they start to be able to detect discrimination (Hou et al. 2111). Subsequently, their identity is highly susceptible to change caused by the discriminatory external messages that evaluate their own identities (Qin et al. 30). On a social level, they start to spend more time outside of their homes and more time in a wider social context, such as their schools, “where the likelihood of being discriminated against increases” (Hou et al. 2111). According to Bronfenbrenner’s social theories, peer context is a concept that is critical in the ecological contexts of adolescent development and has been tested in developmental research overtime, consistently showing that “peer relations have a significant impact on adolescent psychological well-being” (Qin et al. 28-29). Thus, for these reasons, adolescents perceive more discrimination than during the early childhood phase and are more sensitive to such issues that would affect the development of self-identity, their interactions with others, and their psychological well-being (Hou et al. 2111).

Unlike the pressurizing stereotype of being the “model minority” group who are adaptive and easy to manage, a lot of Chinese American adolescents actually “exhibit relatively low levels of psychological well-being (e.g., have more depressive symptoms), despite their strong academic performance” (Hou et al. 2111). Indeed, research has shown that adolescents’ experiences of “discrimination and negative appraisals about one’s ethnic group are often internalized in the adolescents’ sense of self and may reduce feelings of control in adolescence and foster feelings of helplessness, frustration, and depressive moods over time,” and that the ethnic or race-based peer discrimination and harassment that Asian-Americans endure has shown to be linked to increased depressive symptoms and lower levels of self-esteem (Qin et al. 30). In addition, reports
An Analysis of Chinese American Cultural Identity

have shown that “compared to other racial/ethnic groups, [Asian-American Women] aged 15 to 24...have the highest rates of female suicide, and suicide is the second leading cause of death among this population during young adulthood (Lewis 571). In a 2008 journal research article titled “The ‘Model Minority’ and Their Discontent: Examining Peer Discrimination and Harassment of Chinese American Immigrant Youth,” Desiree Baolian Qin, Niobe Way, and Meenal Rana studied two groups of Chinese American students, one from Boston and one from New York, on their experiences of discrimination at school. From this case study, they found that “over 80% of Chinese and Korean American students reported being called names, and close to 50% reported being excluded from social activities or threatened as a result of their race” (Qin et al. 2008, p. 29). In addition, “Chinese American youth from predominantly immigrant families reported the highest levels of peer discrimination,” more than their African-American peers, and have shown to have consistent levels of discrimination all the way through high school (Qin et al. 29). The forms of discrimination experienced vary from physical harassment to verbal name-calling, like being referred to as “Chinos” or being told to “go back to China” (Qin et al. 32). From these findings, it can be reasoned that the harassment is not a case-by-case situation, but rather it shows a trend that Chinese Americans and, more broadly, Asian-Americans have been targets of such discrimination.

Although there has been some research on the Chinese American adolescent group having increased amounts of depressive symptoms and feelings of unworthiness due to discrimination and harassment by their peers (Qin et al. 28), what is more important is being able to identify and recognize the systemic causes of their peer discrimination in school settings. One of the likely causes of highly prevalent cases of
group discrimination in school-based environments is teachers’ favoritism towards Chinese Americans and other Asian-Americans, resulting in resentment by classmates. From Qin’s case study, there were plenty of examples of teachers from the Boston and New York locations who made explicit statements to students and the researchers that they preferred to teach the Chinese students. One of the teachers said, “They are so hardworking and so respectful, always on time, just such a delight to work with! If they get me to teach students like this, I will never retire for the rest of my life!” (Qin et al. 35). As a result of blatant favoritism present in these teachers, Qin et al. reasoned that “many of the non-Chinese students felt quite frustrated and angry, and [so] they vented their anger on the Chinese American students themselves” (35). Qin’s study suggests that teachers’ favoritism due to their perception that Asian Americans are the “model-minority” causes a backlash from the rest of the class, as these other students feel they are receiving unfavorable and unequal treatment. Further, the study concluded that the schools observed do not do an adequate job of addressing the issues and protecting the victims. It seems that the teachers were not even aware of their actions or did not recognize how these actions might lead to peer discrimination.

Parents are also a factor in Chinese American adolescents’ experience of school. The study “Parental Expectations and Children’s Academic Performance in Sociocultural Context” highlighted that Asian or Asian-American parents tended to emphasize the importance of effort much more than the “innate ability on academic learning” (Yamamoto and Holloway 198). This tendency potentially contributes to a “weaker relation between past performance and parental academic expectations for these groups because they believe that their children can always improve their performance at school by putting forth more effort, regardless of their previous level of
attainment” (Yamamoto and Holloway 198). When teachers say that they prefer “model-minority” behavior, they aren’t considering the fact that this is part of their culture and relates to how they are educated at home. These thoughtless remarks and acts of favoritism do not lead to the harmonious interactions there should be between people in a diverse environment. How will peers be expected to quit their acts of discrimination as a result of feelings of exclusion by teachers, if the teachers themselves initiate discrimination with an imbalance in treatment of the students?

There is not enough awareness or understanding of the discrimination that Chinese Americans—and, more broadly, Asian Americans—experience as students. Up to 2008, limited research was conducted to examine the reasons for such high levels of peer harassment and discrimination (Qin et al. 28). In order to combat this serious issue, it is important to conduct more thorough research on Chinese American and Asian-American adolescents’ experiences with peer discrimination in order to improve school-based intervention programs, protect students from victimization, and overall enhance the psychological development of not only Chinese Americans and Asian-Americans, but the others as well who fall victim to their teachers’ unequal treatment. To oppose harboring peer discrimination that could otherwise have life-changing adverse effects on adolescent development, we can further encourage the establishment of high-quality peer relations because that is what protects adolescents from social anxieties and interpersonal peer discrimination and harassment, while also enhancing social competence, thus promoting a more positive development overall (Qin et al. 29).

Aside from discrimination, another major conflict that developing Chinese American adolescents face is nurturing the balance between Chinese and American culture when they collide in their interactions with their immigrant parents and
different parenting, social, and cultural beliefs. In a case study, Juang et al. (2018) explained that since “adolescents tend to adopt the values and behaviors of the majority culture faster and more strongly than their parents, [this tends to create] a mismatch in their cultural orientations” (938). The parents may be more inclined to use Chinese parenting styles and instill values that follow the collectivistic and interdependence mindsets, which the parents grew up with subconsciously; however, as the adolescent begins spending more and more time in society, they start taking in information from outside, which clashes with the ideologies being taught at home. The article also explains that this dissonance can cause further explicitly culturally-based conflict (Juang et al.). Based on another retrospective case study by Liu et al. (2018), where participants recalled their experiences growing up with Chinese cultural heritage, over half of the participants shared that their parents were emotionally inexpressive (5). Some felt “frustrated or disappointed by their parents’ lack of physical affection, communication, and emotional restrictiveness” (5). According to the study, some of the participants explained that they began to “internalize the meaning-making of the conflict, feel guilty, or blame themselves for the conflict,” and spiral into an unhealthy mental state (6). This correlates with the finding that “family-related stress has been linked to increased levels of anxiety, depression, and somatic problems among both parents and children” (2).

The practice of parental racial-ethnic socialization is described as being the “process of parents transmitting messages about race to their children” and is known for its effect on being able to protect adolescents from racial discrimination (Atkin et al. 2). As Annabelle L. Atkin et al. of the study titled “What Types of Racial Messages Protect
Asian American Adolescents From Discrimination? A Latent Interaction Model” claim in a public significance statement:

Findings from the current study suggest that for Asian American adolescents, parents’ messages about cultural traditions and history and promotion of diversity protect children from psychological distress in the face of discrimination. Moreover, messages warning children to avoid racial-ethnic outgroup members are positively associated with distress for those who have experienced discrimination. (1)

In their study, there were generally low scores reported for racial-ethnic socialization levels in their recent sample, which could be traced to a few possible reasons. One of the explanations offered was that because 81% of the sample reported to speak a language other than English in their homes, it may be that a large amount of these people grew up with immigrant parents who did not grow up in American society (Atkin et al. 6). Thus, these parents may not be the best at knowing how to deal with racial discrimination, a problem that they weren’t as exposed to previously. As a result, they may not be able to provide the most effective resources and teach the best skills to their children about how to deal with discrimination. Another possible explanation traces to the differences in nature of the two different cultures. Chinese cultural values emphasize “the suppression of emotion and maintaining harmony,” which may once again make it difficult for immigrant parents to “open up to their children about their experiences with discrimination” (6). Finally, as previously mentioned before, “structural racism has historically resulted in the stereotyping of Asian Americans as the model minority, such that Asian Americans endorsing this myth are less likely to recognize or report experiencing discrimination” (6). Through the information gained from this study, it is
clear that there are plausible explanations to why Chinese American adolescents have not been the most successful with combatting racial discrimination. Instead of just staying on the superficial level of analyzing issues, digging deeper—which is being done in this study—to find reasons and areas that can be targeted for a change, is much more beneficial for the community in question or for other underrepresented groups or topics of concern. However, research still has a long way to go in order to figure out more specifically how parents and adolescents should interact to explore better potential methods of aid.

While Chinese American adolescents face pressure trying to be accepted as American, and they may also struggle with dissonance in clashing cultures at home, there is another concern that can cause them to feel rejected. A part of the cultural identity issue they struggle with includes another factor, and that is the difficulty for Chinese Americans to identify with native Chinese people and vice versa. This touches back on the topic covered earlier of the media and Hollywood’s leukocentricism and lack of representation of Asians and Asian Americans. In Hollywood there have been popular films made back in the day that show the tip of the iceberg of Chinese native culture. In a presentation at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association in 2009, Ji Hoon Park observed that “Asian Americans do not always take stereotypical and demeaning portrayals of Asians in Hollywood films seriously, because they tend to view films just as entertainment distinct from reality” and that this was one of the possible factors for Hollywood’s persistent acts of misrepresentation of diversity (2). This apathy felt by Asian-Americans, including Chinese Americans, could also be explained by the fact that Asian-Americans have been “desensitized as minorities” as they have always viewed the entertainment content that was created for white audiences
This demonstrates the dangers of putting out inaccurate content that even people of the same race could become desensitized over time, if they were never exposed to accurate representations of minorities and weren’t even aware of a need for change. In the case that the audience was an outsider who isn’t familiar with the culture or what people of that group generally look like, it could normalize the inaccuracies and allow new stereotypes to be created or contribute to existing demeaning stereotypical portrayals of Asian men and women. While this is an impeding factor that could hinder the progressive future of Asian representation in Hollywood, another possible source of apathy in Chinese Americans is the fact that “they do not always identify” with the “non-American Asian actors, such as Jackie Chan, Jet Li, or Chow Yun-Fat,” who have been well-known for making Kung Fu and martial arts stunt movies that are a representation of more cliché “Chinese culture” (Park 10). The problem with this is that although Chinese Americans have Chinese heritage, it’s demeaning to suggest that martial arts is the only thing about Chinese culture, or that it’s the only thing about a Chinese American that others don’t have (using Kung Fu as an example, but could be replaced by any other stereotypical cultural artifacts of Chinese culture well-known globally). First, this is not an accurate holistic representation of Chinese culture, and second, if anything, these films draw from native Chinese culture rather than that of Chinese Americans. It becomes difficult for Chinese American adolescents who grew up completely in American culture to feel obligated to accept that Kung Fu, for example, is part of their identity. Nonetheless, it should not be expected that one film that features Asians in it, can take credit for representing all the Asians in the United States, to say the least all the Chinese Americans. Thus, there is a clear need for more representation of the subgroups of Asians, Asian-Americans, and Chinese Americans in the film
industry, which, in its current state, is far from being inclusive and representative of the broader category of various groups of individuals from different backgrounds that fall underneath.

Once again, Chinese immigrants and Chinese American adolescents who grew up in the States are not the same. They did not experience the same situations growing up, nor will they face the same struggles in their future. Actress Constance Wu, who starred in *Crazy Rich Asians* in 2018, was also featured in a television show called *Fresh off the Boat* first released in 2015. This television show was unlike the 2018 film in that it features a Chinese immigrant family (Wang). The main character Jessica from *Fresh off the Boat*, the “tiger mom” of the family, acts very differently than Rachel from *Crazy Rich Asians*. In a *Rolling Stone* article written by Amy Wang titled “Constance Wu Takes on Hollywood: 'Asians Have Stopped Asking for Permission,'” Constance Wu explains in her interview about the differences between the characters, the difference between Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans:

When you come to the States or immigrate to any other country as an adult, all the things that have formed you environmentally, they pretty much become standard. Because Jessica grew up somewhere where she did see herself represented, she has the type of confidence that Rachel doesn’t have when she goes to Singapore. And her confidence is funny not because she’s a tiger mom. It’s funny because Americans have expectations of people who don’t speak English well or have accents; they make assumptions. So what’s special about Jessica is: Jessica doesn’t think her accent is any reason for her not to have a voice. Because she grew up in a place where she did have a voice. Whereas Rachel grew up in a place where she was not the dominant culture. She did not see herself
represented in media. For myself and for Rachel, when you go through that, you wonder what parts of you are Asian and what parts are American. You’re sort of caught between, because you recognize elements in your identity of both. From this interview, Constance offers a new perspective that highlights the fact that Chinese Americans have an extra layer of struggle that has to do with finding one’s own cultural identity and being able to find a middle ground in between.

Even though Chinese Americans may not be able to identify with all the aspects of native Chinese culture, they often go through the struggles of getting accepted into society as a minority group and work to reach a stage in their life in which they are proud to be of Chinese descent. However, in turn, many Chinese Americans who have been more “Americanized” have worked hard with themselves to be accepted in their schools and communities, and sometimes they can’t spend as much time and effort to cultivate their foreign language skills. They have also worked hard to balance their lifestyles at home, incorporating similar family values as in their native country. However, in terms of their mindset, particularly regarding individualism versus collectivism, they can’t help but adopt the dominating American cultural values. This is something that can’t really be controlled when the balance is not maintained. Even though it is unintentional, these differing stances towards culture and heritage drastically separate Chinese Americans from those that are from the Mainland. Chinese Americans’ desperation to grab on to their Chinese heritage, and all their hard work that they put in, in turn causes them to be seen as being too “Americanized” by Chinese people, once again receiving ridicule for being different. This is where a lot of the weight of being stuck in between two cultures comes from. Actress Michelle Yeoh, another star of Crazy Rich Asians, said in an interview for AOL’s BUILD series that she used to feel
like a banana, yellow on the outside and white on the inside. Yeoh shared a story about visiting a Chinatown restaurant: when she couldn’t read the Chinese menu, the Chinese waiter called her an outsider. “I was Chinese, but I didn’t properly act Chinese,” Yeoh says to explain the circumstance, as well as her resulting guilt and feelings of separation from the native Chinese community. Ultimately, she concludes, “the waiter was right. We are not the same.” Thus, it leaves Chinese Americans once again with no middle ground, being too Chinese to be American, and too American to be Chinese. This constant mindset of feeling unable to fit in either category once again brings the issue back to a lack of representation or guideline for Chinese American people to follow.

Chinese Americans need a middle ground where they can feel a sense of belonging, regardless of where they land on the scale between extreme poles of “Chinese” and “American.” One way to establish this middle ground, besides increased representation in media as described previously, is to be politically engaged and have a political stance. A PSA video featuring Crazy Rich Asians stars Constance Wu and Jimmy Yang states that according to a 2012 post-election survey, only around 56 percent of eligible Asian-Americans registered to vote, and only 84 percent of that percentage actually voted (Lee). The PSA, produced by We Stand United and the New Virginia Majority Campaigns, aimed to encourage Asian Americans to vote, especially for the then-upcoming 2018 midterm elections. This is an example of a series of events that led to better outcomes, starting from increased representation of Asian-American actors and actresses and respective cultural narratives in major Hollywood film productions. As a result, Constance Wu and Jimmy Yang, along with many of their other castmates, are now highly influential public figures with large platforms, and are able to magnify their voices for Chinese Americans and Asian Americans at large.
The democratic process requires the participation of ordinary citizens in order to be considered a healthy democracy, as it allows individuals to gain representation and receive the resources they are owed for being American citizens (Jeong 128). Reports have shown that ethnic minorities are less likely to participate in taking political stances and participating in the democratic process in the U.S. in comparison to other dominant ethnic groups. However, among the Asian-American subgroups in the U.S., Chinese Americans have been reported to be the least active ethnic group. According to the U.S. Census Bureau in 2000, “Chinese Americans are the largest segment of the Asian-American population in the U.S.” and, moreover, “their numbers increased from 2,432,585 in 2000 to 3,347,229 in 2010” (Jeong 116). In the 1880s, the Chinese were “one of the first of the immigrant populations in Asia to emigrate to the U.S.” (116). Thus, given the fact that Chinese Americans and Chinese immigrants have had a decently long history in the United States, it would make more sense that these people should have a more powerful political voice. If minority groups like the Chinese Americans do not participate in the political process, then only the dominant ethnic groups take control. As a result, the nation’s largest opportunity for inclusion lacks the voice of ethnic minorities who “constitute important members of a multicultural society” (128).

In an article published in 2017, called “Chinese Americans’ Political Engagement: Focusing On The Impact Of Mobilization,” Hoi Ok Jeong explains that this drastic difference between the years of relevancy and the lacking amount of participation could be decreased, as she notes that there was a correlation between increased mobilization by political parties and increased political engagement by Chinese Americans. The study demonstrates that increased levels of contact by political parties resulted in increased
levels of “interest in politics, activity in non-voting activities, voter registration, and voter turnout” (129). These results indicate that “reception,” or the acceptance of immigrants by the host society, plays a significant role in Chinese Americans’ political engagement, and that minority groups like Chinese Americans are encouraged when the political environment considers them to be important participants in the political process. Additionally, Jeong also points out and condemns the fact that there has been an “extremely scant” amount of research conducted on Chinese American and Chinese immigrants’ political attitudes and behaviors, despite their long history in the U.S. (116). The results found in this study, however, are not applicably limited to Chinese Americans, but they can also help further develop understanding on the political and sociocultural incorporation of other minority groups in the U.S. to create a more inclusive multicultural social climate. Thus, increasing the amount of research being conducted on Chinese Americans and other minority groups can also help increase awareness and help others become more understanding of their issues politically and socially, aside from the necessary genuine reception of minority groups from political organizations. Political participation not only gives minority groups a political voice; in turn, their participation has the ability to make a significant impact on voting results on policies and increase candidates’ support in elections. In this mutualist situation, both the people and the governmental process are benefitted, supporting the fundamentals of a democratic nation. For this reason and others named in this paper, the U.S. at large should treat the struggles of Chinese Americans and other minority groups more seriously.

Looking over the entirety of issues that Chinese Americans face, socially and culturally, it’s evident that not everyone in the community can be represented by one set
of problems and one set of solutions. Only by having more people aware of the situation and more people understanding and accepting differences between people through increased representation, would the damages caused by racial discrimination, generalizations, and stereotypes be decreased. For those who are under mental stress and those who suffer from cultural identity confusion, more abundant representation of their stories in any aspect of society that is visible to them could potentially provide a constant reminder to Chinese American children and adults that there are many people in the same boat and that it is perfectly acceptable to create a middle ground if there isn’t one to belong to. Hopefully, then, their struggles could perhaps be decreased, at least to some extent. They could better face the world with confidence, void of some of the uncertainty and rejection.

**Conclusion**

Asian-Americans in general experience unique, subtle, and blatant racial discrimination that is detrimental to their development, especially in adolescents (Atkin et al. 2). The online article published in 2018 titled “What types of racial messages protect Asian American adolescents from discrimination? A latent interaction model” expresses how Asian-American racial discrimination “is often minimized because of the polarization of racial discourse as a Black and White issue” despite negative consequences that micro-aggression causes to Asian and Asian American populations in the U.S. (Atkin et al. 1). As the Asian-American population becomes the fastest-growing in comparison with all other ethnic and racial groups in the U.S., “it is time that the racialized experiences of these 20 million individuals be included in our conversations on race” (Atkin et al. 1).
In recent years, there has been major progress in increasing the amount of Asian-Americans’ exposure in the media and on the big screen. As the first break-through Hollywood film in 25 years to feature an all-Asian cast since *The Joy Luck Club*, *Crazy Rich Asians* brought light to the cultural differences between Chinese American and native Chinese cultures, as well as Singaporean culture, for the first time focusing on an Asian-American facing conflicts due to differences in beliefs and values (Ho 42). Of course, *Crazy Rich Asians*, a single film cannot represent all of Asia, or even all of China. Rather, a film like *Crazy Rich Asians* is a stepping stone to creating a more wholesome representation of the Chinese American community. Indeed, its momentum has led to the creation of other filmic stories about the Asian American experience, such as *The Farewell* (2019), *The Half Of It* (2020), and *Minari* (2020), all award show nominees or award winning creations in the American film industry (Lacey 2021). Aside from simply just increasing representation for the sake of it, I hope that increased exposure to these struggles would open opportunities for those who are struggling deeply and suffering with mental health illnesses to better receive the help that they need.

Because younger people intake information at high rates to learn about society and learn about themselves and peers and the fact that children spend a significant amount of time at school in a diverse environment, I believe that adjustments can first of all be made at the school environment level. As previously mentioned in Yamamoto and Holloway’s article about Asian and Asian-American academic parenting being focused on the effects of effort rather than innate ability, studies on Asian academic parenting styles should be deeply explored in research. However, not only should parents’ views on academics be studied, the article also suggests that teachers’
understanding of their differences should also be focused on. Furthermore, teachers, especially those that teach children in the ages typical for going through identity establishment, should be more thoroughly trained on the topic of handling racial discrimination in the classroom. There should be more funded awareness campaigns and required training programs for teachers to go through periodically to increase their understanding of the dynamic process from parental culture-specific beliefs to the students’ interpretations of those beliefs, in order to be better able to assist students who have to deal with very high (typical in Asian-American families) or very low parental expectations.

In addition, regarding the learning material that children have access to, namely picture books, which show valuable images that children imprint in their minds, changes can be made in this direction as well. In the 2016 article “Confucian Principles: A Study of Chinese Americans’ Interpersonal Relationships in Selected Children’s Picturebooks,” Ivy Haoyin Hsieh explains how the amount of critical analysis of children’s literature about Chinese Americans and written by Chinese Americans is lacking, especially when compared to children’s literature about other minority groups in the United States (217). Hsieh stresses the importance of obtaining the correct information about Chinese Americans and ethnic minorities in a historical time period and how cultural authenticity allows children to see accurate images of immigration represented through literature. Hsieh notes:

Cultural authenticity allows children the opportunity to see a reflection of real experiences within a book instead of stereotypes or misrepresentations... It is important to reflect cultural accuracy in literature to help children develop clear
concepts of self and others by providing precise cultural and physical characteristics of people... It impacts a child’s view of cultural diversity. (217)

This shows that a more proactive inclusion of diversity is needed in the various picture books targeted for children to positively expose them early to cultural diversity.

However, personally, I believe that there’s another point to make. Hsieh only mentions the historical aspects of immigrants and roots of Chinese Americans. However, the reality is that there are not many children’s books that feature Chinese American children that do not swarm around the nuance of Chinese culture solely. Being informative about other cultures is indeed helpful and essential, but the continuous demonstration of Chinese American children as characters that only get the spotlight or have significant value when they are tied to their ethnic background is demeaning to their identity as Americans as well. It would be beneficial to see Chinese American characters with stories that can be relatable to any other American child and be seen as Americans as well.

In addition to adjustments that can be made in the surrounding social systems, like schools and institutions, parents can help Chinese American adolescents by transmitting messages about race and by teaching them how to identify and navigate racial discrimination, known as the process of parental racial-ethnic socialization (Atkin et al. 2). In an increasingly diverse country like the U.S., “socializing children about race is central to their development” (2). Thus, it is essential that parents of Chinese Americans and Asian-Americans teach their children to cope with discrimination by instilling “cultural pride and knowledge about their cultural community” (1). Currently, studies on the socialization process express that “continuing to study parental racial-ethnic socialization can help clarify these relationships and aid in the development of
interventions that teach parents effective racial-ethnic socialization methods to protect Asian American adolescents from psychological distress” (Atkin et al. 7). This is a topic area that should continue to be explored through research in depth to gain more understanding of one’s struggles associating multiple cultures into their identity and be able to provide more support systems in the future using the new knowledge obtained.

An increase in awareness of the discrimination issues that persist in society due to Chinese American children being perceived as the “model minority” would hopefully bring better regulations and training for school settings. Raising awareness and understanding of Chinese immigrant parenting styles and those of other ethnic minorities can lead to more effective teaching and even intervention programs that can provide sensitive services to particular immigrant families in the United States (Yu). Overall, increasing the public’s exposure to Chinese cultural beliefs and values by increasing Chinese American representation of Chinese Americans in society would be beneficial by spreading more awareness (Yu).

Alongside representation in media and in children’s literature and awareness and understanding of Chinese immigrant culture, the Chinese American political scene is a convergence point for the start of problems and hopefully the end to them as well. It is to be remembered that Chinese immigrants have historically been subject to racial discrimination since the building of the transcontinental railroad, during which migrant workers from China were shipped to the U.S. for their labor (Nguyen 2020). Later, White mobs who had sensed competition for occupations drove Chinese immigrants out of towns, burned down their community, and murdered many (Nguyen). Finally, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, at the peak Chinese American racial discrimination became “the first racially discriminatory immigration law in American History” (Nguyen).
However, discrimination was not limited to the Chinese immigrants. The “model minority myth” and the dissemination of racism embodied by steep rises in hate crimes against Asians and Asian Americans during the global pandemic have both been a result of systemic racism perpetuated by White supremacy (Nguyen). Essayist and poet Cathy Hong describes that cultural artifacts such as food, clothes, language, fashion though were supposed to provide identity to her heritage, in fact made her feel a sense of shame since it made her “foreign” (Nguyen). Feelings of shame, but brushing them off because they were “minor feelings”, feelings of invalidation since White supremacy in the Black community had a drastically different effect compared to the Asian community, and feelings of unimportance with the continuous “historical status as the perpetual foreigner in the U.S., made Asian Americans weak in their political power (Nguyen). It is also what allowed continuation of thoughtless slander-filled phrases, such as “Chinese virus” or “kung flu,” to be thrown around (Nguyen). Thus, the problem remains systemic. That being said, to alleviate the tension and progress towards resolution would take time. However, by increasing political participation among large groups such as the Chinese American population and other minority groups, would be an effective method of gaining back a political voice in a healthier democracy.

Lastly, cultural, social, and political disturbances are all at play when it comes to the maturation of Chinese American adolescents. The school environment, the books that children read, the media that teenagers consume, the cultural and political history that is taught, the immigrant parents, and the groups political presence are all elements that have tremendous effects that have strikingly high potential for further research in order to better support the adolescents’ formation of cultural identities in not only Chinese Americans, but other adolescents raised in bicultural settings as well. An
increased representation of these minority groups may be able to set an example and help catalyze more ethnic minority group representation in the United States, bringing more benefits to an even greater number of people in our progressive world.

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