

Spring 5-2019

Asian American Representation on Social Media Platforms

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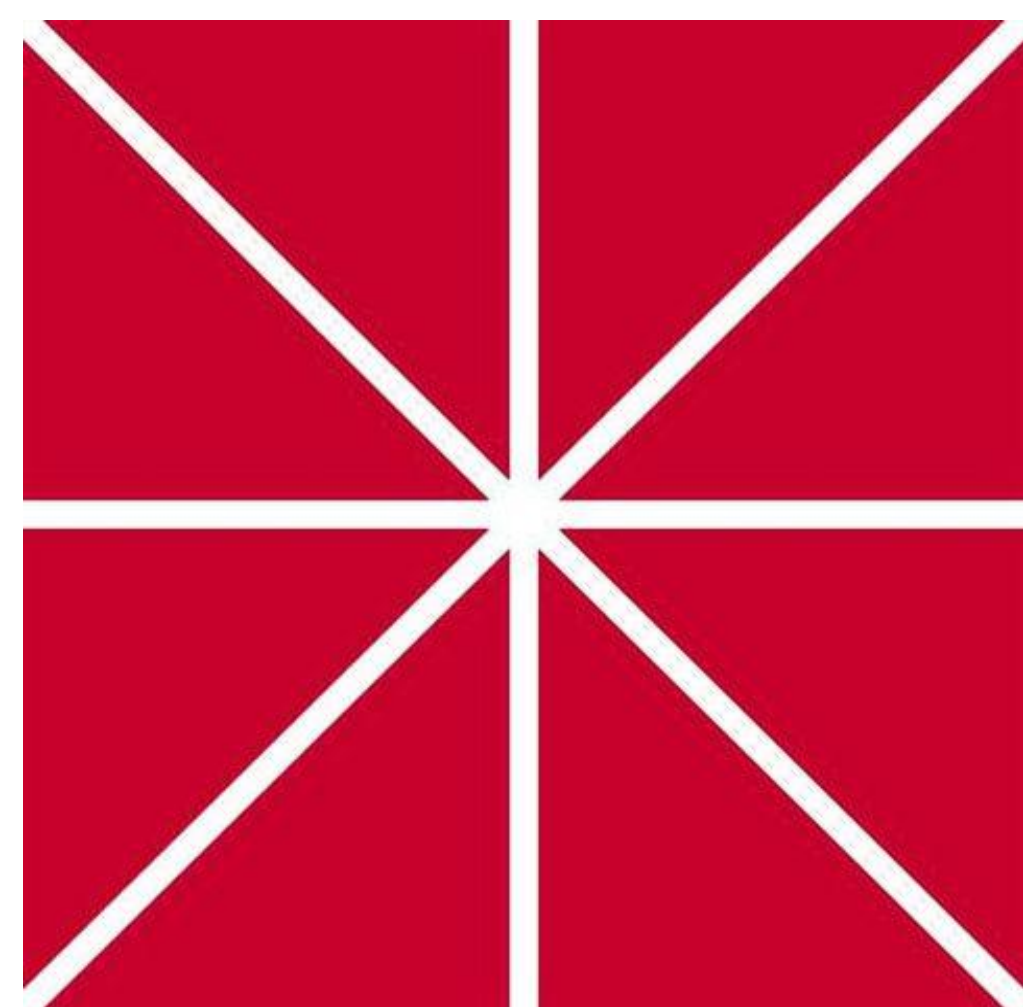
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Lee, Ashley, "Asian American Representation on Social Media Platforms" (2019). *Student Scholar Symposium Abstracts and Posters*. 342.
https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/cusrd_abstracts/342

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ASIAN AMERICAN REPRESENTATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Ashley Lee, *Chapman University*

Introduction

With the lack of Asian American representation in mainstream media, we aim to examine the type of Asian American representation happening on other platforms. Now with the advancement of technology, YouTube has become the platform for individuals to create all sorts of entertainment for people to enjoy just by a click away. In the beginning years when YouTube began, Asian Americans were prevalent producers and creators on the platform. It ranged from musicians, dancers, make up artists, and many more. This new platform acted as a gateway for Asian Americans to express their talent and passions through producing videos.



YouTube is a popular social media platform where anyone can make an account and post any kind of content. Since YouTube launched in 2005-06, it has allowed minorities easier access to create stories in an industry that has a history of exclusion and whitewashing, specifically speaking about Asian Americans. Asian American content creators, such as Wong Fu Productions, Michelle Phan, Ryan Higa, and many others use YouTube as an outlet to adapt existing stereotypes into entertainment while resisting whitewashing in Hollywood. By analyzing their large influence online, we try to better understand who consists of their target audience, either it be Asian Americans or more broad. This will bring up the question: does this cause non-Asian American viewers to adapt their existing beliefs, or does this ultimately reinforce preconceived notions?

Key Concepts

Orientalism

The representation of Asia, especially the Middle East, in a stereotyped way that is regarded as embodying a colonialist attitude.

Perpetual foreigner

A persistent view of Asian Americans as not quite “real” Americans; a view that provokes the common question: “Where are you originally from?”

Bamboo ceiling

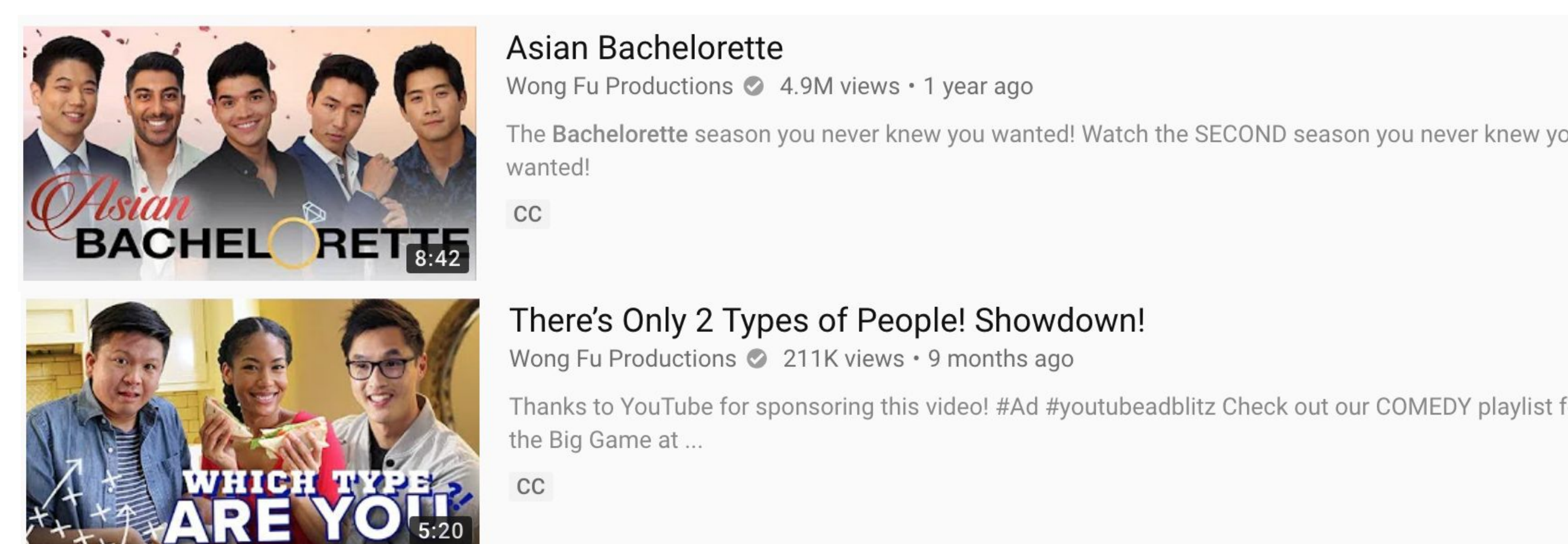
Especially in America, a social barrier to further promotion or progression, in employment and elsewhere, for a person of East Asian ethnicity.

Yellow fever

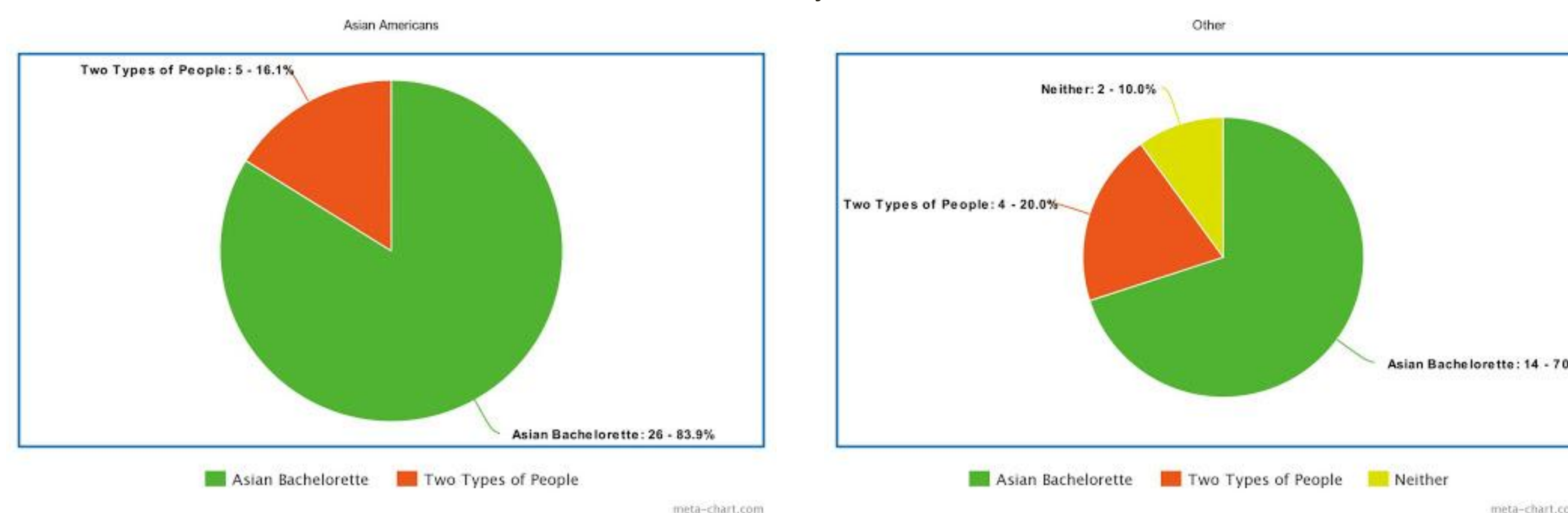
Sexual obsession felt by a non-Asian (usually white, usually male) towards Asians of the opposite gender.

Survey

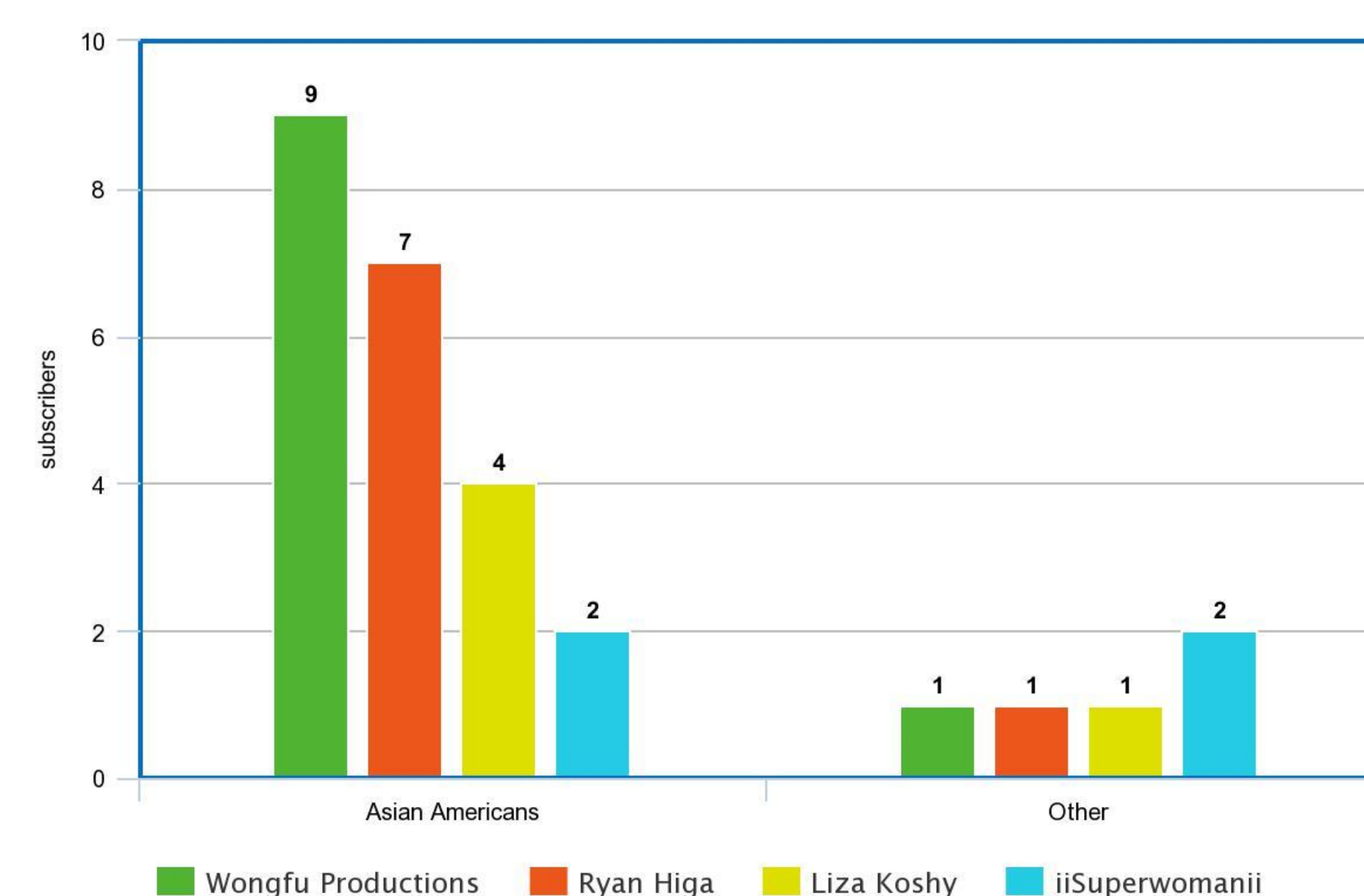
Summary: I conducted in-class surveys to see how individuals respond to content created by Asian Americans on YouTube. For the survey, two videos were played in classroom settings and around 50 participants were asked to fill out a survey to document their reactions and thoughts.



Which video did you like more?

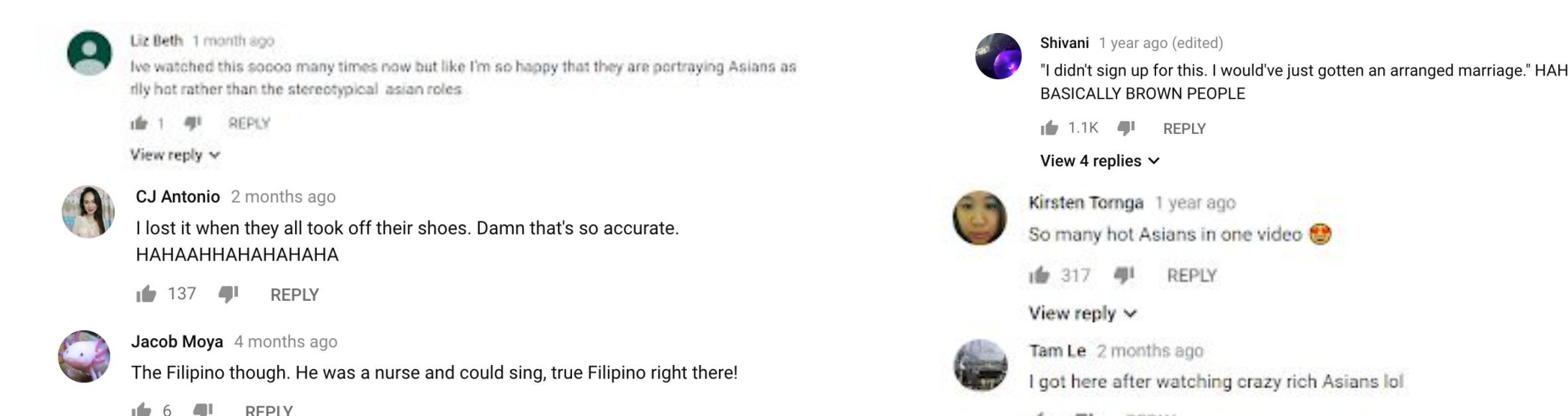


What Asian American YouTube channels are you subscribed to?



Findings

Being that “Asian Bachelorette” was the more popular video, I analyzed the comments to see if the survey results correlated with what the students had mentioned.



After the survey, I analyzed more Asian American YouTube channels to explore the various content. Ryan Higa, currently at 21 million subscribers, has posted very few videos on the topic of Asian Americans. These are the thoughts he shared in his 2015 video “Are Asian Stereotypes True?!”



“I personally do not get offended by Asian stereotypes anymore, because if you think about it stereotypes, all stereotypes, are somewhat based on truth. Instead of getting offended by it and trying to deny it, I think it's better if we accept the stereotypes so we can break through them instead. Now before my fellow Asian people attack me for this opinion, just think about it. I know most Asian stereotypes are hugely over exaggerated ... but in general, stereotypes come from some truth....”

Concluding Thoughts

Asian Americans have been and are still discriminated against in America, and giving them a chance to use their voices in a historically white entertainment industry is very important. YouTube and other social media platforms are accessible to all, but we can still critically consume our media and ask ourselves if the content helps or harms the goal of equality for Asian Americans. Even when the content comes from Asian Americans, it can still reinforce existing stereotypes that keep many Asian Americans perpetual foreigners to this day.

- Although we cannot know the specific race demographic of YouTube subscribers, from our research it seems that most Asian American content creators have majority Asian American audiences, similar to Crazy Rich Asians.
- Due to the lack of Asian American representation in mainstream media, these online Asian American content creators are using a voice that rarely gets used, and we should celebrate that.

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