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# An Exploratory Study of Undergraduates' Attitudes Toward Affirmative Action Policies for Asian Americans in College

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This exploratory study examined white undergraduate students' (a) racial attitudes towards Asian Americans, (b) principled policy attitudes toward affirmative action, and (c) self-interest in relation to their support for college-based affirmative action policies for Asian Americans at a Midwestern university. A sample ( $n = 264$ , 28% male, 72% female) of white undergraduate students from a mid-sized public university in the Midwest was surveyed. The findings indicate that white undergraduate women have significantly more favorable principled policy attitudes toward affirmative action in general and for an affirmative action college policy for Asians, in particular, than do undergraduate males. Implications for issues of equity and social justice are shared.

The present study was designed to examine white university students' attitudes toward Asian Americans and affirmative action programs geared at benefiting Asian Americans (Kluegel & Smith, 1983; Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, & Krysan, 1997; Steeh & Schuman, 1992). The study was exploratory in nature due to there being little or no prior research conducted on college students' attitudes toward college-based affirmative action policies that benefit Asian Americans. As a result, this study did not make specific hypotheses to test nor make predictions to be confirmed (Stebbins, 2001); rather, the research was carried out to provide a foundation for future hypothesis generation, especially in terms of factors that may influence white college students' willingness to support affirmative action policies for Asian American students.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Asian Americans face their own stereotype: namely, that they are a model minority. They are regarded to be successful in college, owing to a strong work ethic and a unique cultural belief system that favors doing well in school (DeGuzman, 1998; Hartlep, 2013a, 2013b, 2014a, 2014b). Asian

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Americans are praised by the news media in ways that make it appear as though they are taking over college campuses (e.g., Egan, 2007; Miller, 2010), especially at elite colleges/universities (Espenshade & Chung, 2005; Unz, 2012). Snide slogans exist that embody a false sense that Asian Americans are taking over top-flight college campuses. According to Hartlep (2014a), "Some have dubbed the University of British Columbia the 'University of a Billion Chinese,' Massachusetts Institute of Technology as 'Made in Taiwan,' [and the] University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) as 'University of Caucasians Lost among Asians' (p. 32). However, research has found these perceptions to be empirically inaccurate and false (Hartlep, 2014a, 2014b; Suzuki, 1989, 2002). For instance, Asian American representation is growing the fastest on 2-year college campuses, not 4-year (National Commission on Asian American & Pacific Islander Research in Education [CARE], 2008).

Aggregate statistics contribute to the misnomer that Asian Americans are model minorities because collective differences and individual heterogeneity are masked. When data and analyses are disaggregated by Asian American subpopulations, intergroup differences become visible. The report, *iCount: A Data Quality Movement for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Higher Education*, shares why disaggregation of Asian American data is so significant in higher education settings. Disaggregating data on Asian Americans can fight against what Trimble and Dickson (2005, p. 413) label "ethnic gloss," which refers to the homogenizing of Asian Americans into one monolithic successful group. Research points out that Asian Americans are a diverse and heterogeneous population (Hartlep & Porfilio, in press).

The model minority stereotype may influence white college students' racial attitudes toward Asian Americans and promote anti-Asian American attitudes. Two other potential sources of resistance to college-based affirmative action policies for Asian American students are principled policy objections to affirmative action and college students' own self-interest as indicated by perceived intergroup competition for limited resources. These three factors, anti-racial attitudes, principled policy objections, and self-interest, are the major theories that have undergirded research on psychological studies of opposition to affirmative action with other ethnic groups (DiTomaso, Parks-Yancy, & Post, 2011; Fried, Levi, Billings, & Browne, 2001; Lowery, Unzueta, Knowles, & Goff, 2006). The literature review in the next section looks at these three independent variables.

### Anti-Asian American Attitudes

Previous literature, such as Yee (1992), Spring (2001), Zhou (2004), Devos and Banaji (2005), and Wing (2007), has established that Asian Americans are seen as being un-American, but at the same time, they also are considered to be "honorary" Whites (Tuan, 1998). The body of research that points to the perception that Asian Americans are un-American also seems, at times, to contradict the body of research that indicates Asian Americans are model minorities who are well accepted and well integrated into the dominant society. This possible contradiction may be explained by the perception of race in the United States, which is socially constructed using a black and white binary schema (Guess, 2006; Wing, 2007). Because Asian Americans tend to fall outside of those two dichotomized races—black and white—at times they are criticized as being un-American, while other times they are praised for "Outwhiting" the Whites (Chen, 2004, p. 147).

Although a fair amount of research has looked at white college students' attitudes toward such minorities as Blacks (Carmines & Sniderman, 2002; Minatoya & Sedlacek, 1984; White

& Sedlacek, 1987; Wilson, 1996), Hispanics (White & Sedlacek, 1987; Wilson, 1996), Jews (Wilson, 1996), and Arabs (Sergent, Woods, & Sedlacek, 1992), much less research has looked at white college students' attitudes toward Asian Americans (Cabrera, 2014).

Of the extant literature, Leong and Schneller's (1997) study is particularly revealing. Using a modified form of the Situational Attitude Scale (SAS), they found that white undergraduates' attitudes toward Asian Americans ranged from positive to negative and that these attitudes changed depending on the social situation. Similarly, Liang and Sedlacek's (2003) research, which used the Student Services Questionnaire (SSQ)—a revised version of the SAS—to measure the attitudes of student affairs professionals toward Asian Americans, found that white undergraduate attitudes toward Asian Americans differed significantly in a positive direction when compared to attitudes toward people in situations wherein race had not been identified. As a result, Liang and Sedlacek's (2003) research supports the possibility that Whites' attitudes towards Asian Americans derive from the context or situation.

Meanwhile, Ho and Jackson's (2001) research on a sample of white undergraduates in the Midwest also supports the possibility that white college students' attitudes towards Asian Americans are contextually derived. Their analysis concluded that positive attitudes toward Asian Americans were the result of positive stereotypes about Asians, whereas negative attitudes toward Asian Americans were the result of negative stereotypes.

Finally, Lin, Kwan, Cheung, and Fiske (2005), using analytical samples of white undergraduates, investigated attitudes toward Asian Americans and constructed the Scale of Anti-Asian American Stereotypes (SAAAS). They found that attitudes toward Asian Americans are less positive because they are perceived as having low sociability, not because of their stereotyped excessively high competence.

### Principled Policy Objections to Affirmative Action

Lowery et al. (2006) state that principled policy objections to affirmative action refer to opposition driven by the belief that affirmative action violates the principle of meritocracy—the ideal that people should be rewarded on the basis of talent and effort as opposed to group membership. Proponents of this logic would presumably be more likely to oppose Asian Americans receiving affirmative action if they believe that Asian Americans are successful model minorities. Opponents of affirmative action may use the model minority stereotype—the belief that all Asian Americans are doing well—to advocate for its abolishment.

DiTomaso, Parks-Yancy, and Post (2011) interviewed 246 randomly sampled white Americans between the ages of 25 and 55 from New Jersey, Ohio, and Tennessee in order to study white attitudes toward affirmative action. They found that most Whites tended to affirm the principle of equal opportunity but rejected implementing programs, such as affirmative action, by way of actualizing it, perceiving this approach as preferential and disruptive of meritocratic ideals. This trend is supported by the existing literature. For instance, according to Kuklinski, Sniderman, Knight, Piazza, Tetlock, Lawrence, and Mellers (1997), “[W]hites overwhelmingly reject affirmative action if it involves preferential treatment” (p. 411).

Park (2009), using data from two national surveys—the 2000 Freshman Survey and its post-test, the 2004 College Student Survey—measured changes in attitudes toward affirmative action for white undergraduates from their first or freshman year to their fourth or senior year. Park

measured these attitudes using a scale of 1 (disagree) to 4 (agree strongly) for the following survey item: "Affirmative action should be abolished in college admissions." She found that males, generally, and white students, particularly, more strongly favor abolishing affirmative action than females and students of color.

### Self-Interest Resulting from Realistic Group Competition

Another potential explanation of white opposition to affirmative action programs that benefit Asian Americans stems from potential detriments to white individuals' own self-interest. White Americans who perceive that Asian Americans are overly successful (in accordance with the model minority myth) might hold negative attitudes toward Asian Americans because they view them as competitors for high grades and good jobs. In other words, affirmative action programs that are geared toward assisting Asian Americans will be perceived as unfairly benefiting an already successful group to the detriment of the white students (Omi & Takagi, 1996).

For example, O'Brien, Garcia, Crandall, and Kordys (2010) studied 60 white university students who attended Kansas State University. The researchers found that the white students expressed a concern for the intended beneficiaries of affirmative action in a way that seemed to further the interest of their own group. Therefore, it is important to understand white attitudes toward affirmative action programs for Asian Americans in light of the fact that Asian Americans might be construed as competitors for a limited amount of resources (e.g., admission seats and scholarships). The relationship between self-interest and realistic group competition is addressed in other research (Bobo, 1983; Gilbert, Fiske, & Lindzey, 1998). Bobo's (1983) research indicates that realistic group conflict motives help explain Whites' opposition to affirmative action. This is also consistent with Bell's (1980) interest convergence theory.

While many news stories have been written insisting that Asian Americans are taking over college campuses (especially in California) (Egan, 2007; Jiménez, 2014; Miller, 2010), to our knowledge, follow-up studies have not been conducted that explicitly examine white attitudes toward affirmative action programs that benefit Asian Americans. However, as already mentioned at the beginning of this article, a recent poll found that affirmative action programs for Asians garnered the most opposition (CBS/New York Times, 2011). What might account for this opposition to affirmative action for Asian Americans? If Asians/Asian Americans are perceived to be model minorities, they may be seen as hypercompetitive. For example, a quote in Givens' (1984) *Newsweek On Campus* article, "The Drive to Excel: Strong Families and Hard Work Propel Asian-Americans to the Top of the Class" is a particularly noteworthy example of how Asians are cast to be academic machines:

On one issue, no one disagrees—the willingness of Asian-American students to pay almost any price to get ahead. With Asian-Americans in a class, "you've got some competition," says Georgetown physics Prof. Joseph McClure. "They'll work you into the ground. They aren't out on Saturday night getting drunk—they're hitting the books." Even when they lay down the books, Asian-Americans seem not to overlook the academic. (pp. 7–8)

Thus, if Asian Americans are seen as academic threats on college campuses, it may suggest that Whites oppose programs that are tailored to serving Asian Americans. In fact, some research

supports this assumption. Maddux, Gallinsky, Cuddy, and Polifroni (2008) examined this issue at four different colleges,

The perception that Asian Americans or other groups have certain *model minority* traits—including *being hardworking, intelligent, and ambitious*—leads to a sense that such groups pose a threat to other groups in terms of educational, economic, and political opportunities.” (p. 86, italics added)

Therefore, the perceived success of Asian Americans interferes with the self-interests of white college students.

In sum, research into white college students’ attitudes toward Asian Americans appears to suggest that attitudes—whether positive or negative—are shaped by situational contexts. Thus, if white college students perceive Asian Americans to be model minorities, they may be opposed to them receiving affirmative action since it would violate their ideals of meritocracy<sup>1</sup> in the context of a college-based environment. Two research questions guide the study:

1. To what extent are general attitudes toward affirmative action, prejudice against Asian Americans, and self-interest predictors of support for college-based affirmative action policies for Asian Americans?
2. To what extent do demographic variables affect support for college-based affirmative action policies for Asian Americans?

## METHODS

### Participants

This study took place during the spring semester of 2013 at a mid-sized public university in the Midwest. According to the university’s 2012–2013 enrollment data<sup>2</sup> by racial/ethnic designation, 384 students were Asian and 16,519 students were white. An e-mail was sent to all undergraduates who had indicated they were willing to receive e-mails from university researchers ( $n = 16,024$ ). Two hundred, sixty-four ( $n = 264$ ) white undergraduate students (28% male and 72% female) responded to this invitation. The age distribution of the sample participants was as follows: 14% were 18–19 years of age; 43% were 20–21 years of age; 17% were 22–23 years of age; and 26% were 24 years of age or older. In the study sample, 7% were freshmen, 16% were sophomores, 46% were juniors, and 31% were seniors.

### Measures

We were unable to find any established measures for assessing perceived intergroup competition in the literature. Nor were we able to find established measures of support for a college affirmative action policy. Therefore, based on ideas from the literature, as well as our knowledge of factors pertinent to college students, we developed the Perceived Intergroup Competition Scale (PICS) and the Support for Asian Affirmative Action College Policy Scale (SAAACPS) to measure these two constructs, respectively. We also modified Dinh, Weinstein, Nemon, and Rondeau’s (2008) Attitudes Toward Asians Scale (ATAS) and Fried, Levi, Billings, and Browne’s (2001) Principled

Policy Attitudes Toward Affirmative Action Scale (PPAAS) to make them more applicable to a college context. Below are descriptions of each scale.

#### *Attitudes Toward Asian Scale (ATAS)*

This scale, originally developed by Dinh, Weinstein, Nemon, and Rondeau (2008),<sup>3</sup> was designed to assess white American college students' general attitudes toward Asian/Asian American students. However, their scale was used only once with a sample drawn from only one public university. Therefore, we conducted a full reliability analysis on the scale with our own sample and successively eliminated four items that significantly reduced the overall reliability of the scale using the methodology described below. Our final scale contained six items with responses on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) "strongly agree" to (5) "strongly disagree." Therefore, the total scale score ranged from 6 to 30. Responses were scored so that the lower the score, the more positive the attitudes toward Asians. Cronbach's alpha was .82 for this study's sample.

Wille's stepwise procedure (as cited in Raubenheimer, 2004) was used to select items. Designed for scales that have already been validated by item-total intercorrelations or EFA, Wille's stepwise procedure examines and modifies a scale using its internal consistency. A scale's reliability is maximized by removing the least reliable item, as indicated by the expected increase (if any) in alpha for the subscale. The reliability analysis is then repeated, the increase in reliability noted, and the next least reliable item removed. This process is repeated until removing none of the remaining items would lead to an increase in the scale's alpha.

#### *Perceived Intergroup Competition Scale (PICS)*

The authors developed this scale to assess participants' perceived competition from their Asian American classmates. It contains three items, as the scale tests, to what extent participants believed it would be harder for them to (a) procure financial aid/scholarships, (b) obtain good grades, and (c) gain graduate school admission or jobs because they would be competing with Asian Americans. Responses are scored on a 5-point Likert scale from (1) "strongly agree" to (5) "strongly disagree." Therefore, the total scale score ranged from 3 to 15. The coefficient alpha for this sample was .86. Responses were scored so that the lower the score, the higher the degree of perceived intergroup competition.

#### *The Principled Policy Attitudes Toward Affirmative Action Scale (PPAAAS)*

This scale was developed using the four items from Fried, Levi, Billings, and Browne (2001), with two items slightly modified to make them more relevant to the college environment. A sample item is "Affirmative action promotes equal opportunity in college admissions." Responses are on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) "strongly agree" to (5) "strongly disagree." Therefore, the total scale score ranged from 4 to 20. Coefficient alpha for this sample was .89. Responses were scored so that lower scores represent more favorable attitudes toward affirmative action policy.

### *Support for Asian Affirmative Action College Policy Scale (SAAACPS)*

The authors developed this 4-item scale to measure the extent to which participants support college affirmative action policies for Asian American students. The items are: (a) "Colleges should have quotas limiting the number of Asian American students"; (b) "Colleges should provide special support services for Asian American students"; (c) "Colleges should require higher SAT/ACT scores for admission of Asian American students"; and (d) "Colleges should provide special academic scholarships for Asian American students." Item responses are on a 5-point Likert scale from (1) "strongly agree" to (5) "strongly disagree" and are scored so that lower scores represent higher support for Asian affirmative action policies. The total scale score ranged from 4 to 20. Coefficient alpha for this sample was .52.

## RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to determine the relative importance of three potential explanatory variables on white college students support for affirmative action college programs for Asian American students: (a) their racial attitudes toward Asian Americans, (b) their principled policy attitudes toward affirmative action, and (c) their self-interest derived from perceived intergroup competition. Correlational analysis was used to explore the effects of these independent variables on the dependent variable. The role of demographic variables (age and gender) in support of affirmative action college programs for Asian Americans also was considered. To examine the role of demographic variables, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) comparing mean differences between age and gender groups, as well as correlational analyses broken down by age and gender were employed.

### Analysis of Group Differences for Age and Gender

Descriptive statistics for all scales are shown in Table 1.

Table 2 shows the results of Analysis of Variance by gender and age categories. Results of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) by gender indicate that women have significantly more favorable principled policy attitudes toward affirmative action ( $F = 26.67, p = .05$ ) as well as significantly greater support for an Asian affirmative action college policy ( $F = 4.02, p < .05$ ) than men do.

TABLE 1  
Descriptive Statistics for All Scales

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Coefficient Alpha	Number of Items
Attitudes toward Asians	14.47	3.65	.82	6
Perceived intergroup competition	10.73	2.82	.86	3
Principled policy attitudes toward affirmative action	11.33	3.90	.89	4
Support for college affirmative action policy	10.03	2.47	.52	3

TABLE 2  
Analysis of Variance of Differences in Gender and Age for All Scales

Scale	Gender			Age		
	Male <i>M (SD)</i>	Female <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>F</i>	18–21 <i>M (SD)</i>	22+ <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>F</i>
Attitudes toward Asians	13.91 (4.10)	14.73 (3.44)	2.79	14.69 (3.74)	14.25 (3.51)	0.94
Perceived intergroup competition	10.45 (2.83)	10.84 (2.82)	1.07	10.39 (2.77)	11.18 (2.85)	5.23*
Principled policy attitudes toward affirmative action	13.21 (4.41)	10.61 (3.43)	26.67**	11.29 (3.90)	11.39 (3.92)	.05
Support for college affirmative action policy	10.53 (2.78)	9.86 (2.33)	4.02*	10.30 (2.53)	9.72 (2.38)	3.71

\**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01

There were no significant gender differences in attitudes toward Asians (*F* = 2.79, n.s.) or in perceived intergroup competition (*F* = 1.07, n.s.).

For analyzing the effect of age differences on support for an Asian college affirmative action policy, the variable age was dichotomized into “18–21” and “22 and older”: 57% of the sample are in the 18–21, category and 43% are in the 22 and older age category. Results by age indicate that older students report more perceived intergroup competition from Asian Americans (*F* = 5.23, *p* < .05); however, there are no statistically significant differences by age in attitude toward Asians (*F* = .94, n.s.), principled policy attitudes toward affirmative action (*F* = .05, n.s.) or support for an Asian affirmative action college policy (*F* = 3.71, n.s.).

### Correlates of Support for Asian American Affirmative Action College Policy

Tables 3 and 4 present the correlations among the independent variables and the support for an Asian American affirmative action college policy for males and females, respectively. For both males and females, greater perceived intergroup competition is significantly negatively correlated with having positive attitudes toward Asians (*r* = -.45, *p* < .01, males; *r* = -.32, *p* < .01, females), and perceived intergroup competition also is significantly negatively correlated with positive principled policy attitudes toward affirmative action (*r* = -.34, *p* < .01, males;

TABLE 3  
Correlations among Scales for Males

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Support for college affirmative action policy	1.0	.66**	-.51**	.44**
2. Attitude toward Asians		1.0	-.45**	.19
3. Perceived intergroup competition			1.0	-.34**
4. Principled policy attitudes toward affirmative action				1.0

\**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01



TABLE 4  
Correlations among Scales for Females

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Support for college affirmative action policy	1.0	.44**	-.48**	.08
2. Attitude toward Asians		1.0	-.32**	.11
3. Perceived intergroup competition			1.0	-.16*
4. Principled policy attitudes toward affirmative action				1.0

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

$r = -.16$ ,  $p < .95$ , females). There are no statistical significant correlations between attitudes toward Asians and principled policy attitudes toward affirmative action for either males or females.

Significant differences were found between males and females in their support for an Asian American affirmative action college policy. For males, attitudes toward Asians ( $r = .66$ ,  $p < .01$ ), perceived intergroup competition ( $r = -.51$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and principled policy attitudes toward affirmative action ( $r = .44$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were all significantly correlated with support for a college affirmative action policy for Asian Americans. That is, those males with more positive attitudes towards Asians were more supportive of affirmative action for Asian Americans; those who perceived more intergroup competition from Asian Americans were less supportive of affirmative action for Asian Americans, and those who supported the principled policy of affirmative action were more supportive of affirmative action for Asian Americans. However, for females, while both attitude toward Asian Americans ( $r = .44$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and perceived intergroup competition ( $r = -.48$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were correlated with support for college affirmative action for Asian Americans in the same direction as for the males, there wasn't any significant association between principled policy attitudes toward affirmative action and support for a college affirmative policy for Asian Americans.

There were no significant differences in the correlates of support for a college affirmative action policy for Asian Americans by age. Attitude toward Asian Americans is significantly positively correlated with college affirmative action policy for both younger and older age groups ( $r = .45$ ,  $p < .01$ , younger;  $r = .56$ ,  $p < .01$ , older). Principled attitudes toward affirmative action ( $r = .26$ ,  $p < .01$ , younger;  $r = .22$ ,  $p < .01$ , older) and perceived intergroup competition ( $r = -.51$ ,  $p = .01$ , younger;  $r = -.44$ ,  $p < .01$ , older) also are correlated with support for a college affirmative action policy for Asian Americans. In other words, for both age groups, those with more positive principled attitudes toward affirmative action were more likely to support the policy for Asian Americans while those with more perceived intergroup competition were less likely to support the policy.

## DISCUSSION

Fulfilling the aim of this study by looking at the impact that age and gender may have on support for affirmative action college programs for Asian Americans revealed that women have significantly more favorable principled policy attitudes toward affirmative action, as well as significantly greater support for an Asian affirmative action college policy. The data analyzed

indicate that white college undergraduates' attitudes toward Asians depend partly on gender and age.

For both male and female college students, racial attitudes toward Asian Americans as well as self-interest as measured by perceived intergroup competition were highly significant predictors of support for a college-based affirmative action policy for Asian American students. Both of these findings are consistent with those of previous research on predictors of support for affirmative action (Lowery, Unzueta, Knowles, & Goff, 2006). The findings indicating that attitudes toward affirmative action are more positive among women than among men are also consistent with previous research (e.g., Hughes & Tuch, 2003; Moscoso, García-Izquierdo, & Bastida, 2012) as well as with Bell's (1980) interest convergence theory since, as a minority group, women have a common interest in affirmative action programs.

There was no significant association among female students between principled policy attitudes toward affirmative action and support for a college affirmative action policy for Asian Americans. This might mean that female students are more willing to put aside their general attitudes toward affirmative action when considering it for a specific group, such as Asian Americans. This is an interesting and important result that merits further investigation as it could potentially mean that: (a) the theory of support for college affirmative action needs to be modified to incorporate gender as a moderator variable of policy attitudes on affirmative action and/or (b) intervention programs for increasing support for college affirmative action programs, at least among females, could be targeted more to increasing positive attitudes toward the specific group and less toward changing negative policy attitudes toward affirmative action.

Another important research finding of this study is that greater perceived intergroup competition is significantly negatively correlated with having positive attitudes toward Asian Americans ( $r = -.45, p < .01$ , males,  $r = -.32, p < .01$ , females) and perceived intergroup competition also is significantly negatively correlated with positive principled policy attitudes toward affirmative action ( $r = -.34, p < .01$ , males,  $r = -.16, p < .95$ , females). This points to perceived intergroup competition as an important factor in white students' attitudes toward affirmative action for Asian American students and possibly in their general attitudes toward Asian American students, as well; although, correlational analysis doesn't permit us to ascribe causality to these results; it also is possible that negative attitudes toward Asian Americans cause greater perceived intergroup conflict.

With regard to age, while older students perceive more intergroup competition from Asian American students, this doesn't significantly correlate with support for affirmative action policy. The findings were that older students had a statistically greater degree of perceived competition than younger students. Therefore, older students who are closer to graduation and therefore coming to the point of either applying to graduate schools or jobs, might be more sensitive to competition from Asian students than younger students who were at an earlier point in their college education. On the other hand, older students did not differ significantly from younger students in their attitudes toward college affirmative action policies toward Asian students. This could be explained by the fact that since these older students would be graduating sooner, changes in college policy would be much less likely to directly affect them and therefore, they would have no more reason than younger students to be either for or against such policies. These results indicate that white college undergraduate students' attitudes toward affirmative action for Asians/Asian Americans depend at least partially on gender and age differences.

## Limitations

The results of this study need to be interpreted with caution as the study has a number of significant limitations. One limitation is that the results are based on correlational analyses that assume linear relationships among variables and, therefore, do not account for nonlinear relationships. Another limitation includes the possibility of spurious correlations since this statistical model can only suggest, but never prove, causality. Neither can this statistical approach account for the potential role of mediating variables. The low reliability of the support for affirmative action scale also should be considered a study limitation; however, this low reliability might be partially attributable to the small number of items in the scale. Finally, contact between white and Asian American students is a potentially moderating variable that might improve white attitudes (Dinh, Weinstein, Nemon, & Rondeau, 2008), although an examination of this, as well as other potentially important variables, was beyond the scope of this study. For example, analyzing data from 801 white university students, Aberson (2007) concluded that diversity participation—in other words, engaging in activities encouraging interracial contact—promoted more positive attitudes toward affirmative action. The setting also was a limitation to this study. For instance, the findings may not apply to larger, more diverse, and heterogeneous universities or private universities with significantly larger numbers of Asian American students.

## Future Research

The United States Commission on Civil Rights (1980) states, “If a minority group is viewed as successful, it is unlikely that its members will be included in programs designed to alleviate problems they encounter as minorities” (p. 19).<sup>4</sup> The model minority stereotype of Asian Americans is a persistent problem precisely because it partially explains why Asian Americans are sometimes not eligible for affirmative action programs (Wu, 1995). The authors of this study believe that individuals who are committed to fair and equitable access to higher education, and social justice scholars who are opposed to the model minority stereotype of Asian Americans, should continue to work to justify why research on Asian Americans continues to be needed in higher education contexts (e.g., see Museus & Chang, 2009; Yu, 2006).

From a social justice perspective, more research is also needed in K-12 education settings. Currently 85% of the nation’s K-12 teaching force is white and female (Feistritzer, 2011), while the Asian American population is the fastest growing racial/ethnic population (Wang, 2013). These two trends—a largely white female teaching force and a fast-growing racial/ethnic group—lead to the reality that there will be many white female K-12 teachers who will have Asian American students in their classrooms.

White students’ acceptance of the model minority myth embodied in a lack of support for affirmative action programs for Asian students could not only hurt these students but also adversely affect the psychological well-being of white students (Dinh, Holmberg, Ho, & Haynes, in press). While many Asian Americans are highly successful in college, many are not. Although affirmative action programs might not be the only or even the most important way of addressing access and equity for disadvantaged Asian American students, it is undoubtedly one important tool. Illuminating the determinants of support for affirmative action

policies for this group is therefore an important research endeavor to provide a research foundation to promote social justice policies, which could improve access and equity for Asian American college students and improve the psychological well-being of their white college peers.

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## NOTES

1. We thank the anonymous reviewer who pointed out that we should qualify what we mean by "meritocracy." While we do not presume to know what White university students' ideals of meritocracy are, there is research that suggests that White university students' ideals of meritocracy are predicated on what appears to be in their material best interests (Samson, 2013). We add that while these points seem to lend themselves to a legal analysis, such as Critical Race Theory, this article is driven by psychological literature.
2. Please contact the first author for a copy of this enrollment data.
3. Khanh Dinh, Ph.D, provided a copy of the scale to the authors.
4. We thank the anonymous reviewer who pointed out that related to this discussion is Sharon Lee's (2008) notion of de-minoritization: when Asian Americans' eligibility to access minority services and programs in higher education are taken away from them because they are racialized as being overly successful or overrepresented.

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