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The Impact of Organizational Performance on the Emergence of Asian American Leaders

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Despite remarkably high levels of education and income, Asian Americans remain underrepresented at the top of the organizational hierarchy. Existing work suggests that a mismatch between the prototypical characteristics of business leaders (e.g., dominance) and stereotypes associated with Asian Americans (e.g., submissiveness) lowers the likelihood that Asian Americans will emerge as leaders. We predict that this reluctance to appoint Asian Americans will be attenuated when organizations experience performance decline because decision makers believe Asian Americans are inclined to sacrifice their self-interest to improve the welfare of others. We found support for these predictions using a multimethod approach. In an archival study of 4,951 CEOs across five decades, we find that Asian Americans were appointed almost two-and-a-half times more often during decline than nondecline (Study 1). Then, in three studies, we show that this pattern occurs because evaluators (a) prefer self-sacrificing leaders more when organizations are experiencing decline than success (Study 2); (b) expect Asian Americans leaders to behave in self-sacrificing ways in general (Study 3); and, consequently, (c) perceive that Asian Americans are better equipped to be leaders during decline than success (Study 4). We consider these findings in tandem with a set of exploratory analyses. This includes our finding that organizations experience decline only 12% of the time, suggesting that evaluators deem Asian Americans to be suitable leaders in circumstances that occur infrequently and are short-lived.

Keywords: race, leadership, leadership categorization theory, stereotyping, organizational decline

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Asian Americans face a disconcerting bifurcation in the workplace (Sy et al., 2010; Sy, Tram-Quon, & Leung, 2017). On the one hand, they are well represented at top educational institutions and have the highest median income of all racial and ethnic groups in the United States (including Whites; U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). On the other hand, they remain underrepresented at the top of the corporate hierarchy (Johnson & Sy, 2016). For example,

only three Fortune 500 CEOs in 2015 (0.6%) were of East-Asian descent.

The underrepresentation of Asian Americans¹ in top leadership positions is consistent with implicit leadership theories (e.g., Lord & Maher, 1993). People expect organizational leaders to have characteristics such as assertiveness and extraversion (Offermann & Coats, 2018). 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 (shy and withdrawn; e.g., Chang & Demyan, 2007; Lin, Kwan, Cheung, & Fiske, 2005; Niemann, Jen-

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¹ Throughout this article we use the label *Asian American* to refer to individuals in the United States originating from East Asia (see U.S. Census Bureau, 2010) and not those from the Indian subcontinent. This group constitutes one of the largest subgroups of the Asian American minority, and the stereotypical perceptions of Asian Americans most strongly apply to the members of this group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; Williams, 2008). Although *Asian American* is an overarching term referring to diverse subgroups, individuals of East Asian descent living in the United States largely identify with this label, share similar experiences, and face similar barriers at work (see Park, 2008; Sy et al., 2010, 2017). We expand on these parameters of race-ethnicity in greater detail in the methods.

nings, Rozelle, Baxter, & Sullivan, 1994; Wong, Lai, Nagasawa, & Lin, 1998; Zhang, 2010). Because these characteristics do not fit the typical profile of organizational leaders, decision makers are not inclined to appoint Asian Americans as leaders (Kawahara, Pal, & Chin, 2013; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Sy et al., 2010).

In this article, we integrate theory on cultural stereotypes with the idea that evaluators look for different qualities in leaders in times of decline than in times of success (e.g., Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, & Bongiorno, 2011) to argue that discrimination against Asian Americans may be attenuated during periods of organizational decline. Because organizational decline (i.e., an unambiguous drop in performance that threatens a company's survival; e.g., Mone, McKinley, & Barker, 1998) disturbs social harmony and introduces existential threat, decision makers may prefer leaders whom they expect will sacrifice personal goals for the sake of the organization (Wagner, 1995; Wagner & Moch, 1986). Consistent with the finding that cultures of East Asian origin are more collective-oriented than Western cultures, wherein the well-being of the group is more central to peoples' self-concept (Hofstede, 1984; Markus & Kitayama, 1991), we predict that decision makers will believe that Asian American leaders are more likely than Whites to engage in self-sacrificing behaviors. Given the greater need for these behaviors in times of decline, decision makers will, in turn, favor Asian American leaders more in times of decline than nondecline. We test these predictions in an archival study of 4,951 chief executive officers (CEOs) across five decades, and then we unpack the explanatory mechanisms in three additional studies (including two experiments).

Our findings contribute to the literature on leadership and discrimination. By presenting evidence that organizational decline changes how people view the suitability of Asian Americans as leaders, we build on literature that has established when and why discrimination against Asian American leaders is attenuated (Sy et al., 2010). Yet while the focus of our analysis involves identifying a single situation when discrimination against Asian Americans is attenuated, our findings also shed light on why overall discrimination against this group persists. In particular, we present supplementary findings consistent with the following pattern: Because Asian Americans are preferred in situations that occur infrequently and require attributes that depart from the norm, they likely suffer from a form of typecasting, such that they are deemed to be effective leaders in narrowly defined circumstances. We discuss how this finding builds on other work in which scholars have found a similar typecasting effect (Sy et al., 2010).

We also elaborate on how our work builds on findings from research on the glass cliff, which suggests that women are preferred more as leaders during periods of organizational decline (Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Ryan et al., 2011). We first consider how our work departs from this research by zeroing in on how cultural (rather than gender-based) stereotypes feed into leader evaluations. For instance, whereas evaluators prefer women during decline largely because they expect them to actively manage relationships through interpersonal warmth, we find that evaluators prefer Asian Americans in these periods because of their expected willingness to cede resources to prevent others from experiencing unnecessary hardship. We then consider how convergence between our work and the glass cliff phenomenon can explain how the interplay between stereotypes (i.e., overgeneralized beliefs about social

groups) and leader prototypes (i.e., beliefs about the attributes of effective leaders) affects the way evaluators perceive leaders from a variety of minority groups.

Race-Ethnicity and Leadership Evaluation

People simplify the vast amount of information in the environment by using categories (Rosch, 1978). When making categorical judgments, individuals often use *prototypes*, which are cognitive abstractions that capture the characteristics common to members of a category (Rosch, 1978; Lord, Foti, & De Vader, 1984; Lord & Maher, 1993). For instance, technical competence is more prototypical for an engineer than for a salesperson (Sy et al., 2010). Prototypes determine how strongly (or weakly) a "target" and a typical category member overlap (Rosch, 1978). As a target's prototypicality increases, it overlaps more with members of one category and less with members of other categories (Lord & Maher, 1993; Rosch & Mervis, 1975). This process of prototype-based categorization applies to both object- and person perception (Cantor & Mischel, 1979).

Leadership categorization theory (LCT) proposes that perceivers evaluate leaders in part by determining whether their characteristics "match" existing leadership prototypes (Lord & Maher, 1993). Evaluators deem individuals to be more suitable leaders to the extent that they better match these prototypes. According to LCT, peoples' prototypes of leaders are abstractions inferred from frequent experiences with occupants of leadership positions (Hogue & Lord, 2007; Lord & Maher, 1993) and are influenced by visible cues (e.g., race; Lord & Emrich, 2000; Lord & Maher, 1993). Given that Whites occupy the vast majority of top leadership positions in organizations (e.g., DiversityInc, 2014), being a White-majority group member is a prototypical characteristic of leaders (e.g., Gündemir, Homan, De Dreu, & Van Vugt, 2014; Rosette, Leonardelli, & Phillips, 2008). As such, scholars have used LCT to help explain the barriers that members of racial-ethnic minority groups encounter when they attempt to ascend to leadership positions. For instance, Rosette and colleagues (2008; Study 1) presented participants with texts depicting either a leader or an employee and asked them to guess the individual's race, choosing from a list of different racial-ethnic groups in the United States (e.g., White, African American, Asian American). Participants guessed that leaders (but not subordinates) were White. Thus, being a leader "signaled" being White.

Sy and colleagues illuminated a similar bias against individuals of Asian descent, such that Whites are perceived to be more prototypical business leaders than Asian Americans (Festekjian, Tram, Murray, Sy, & Huynh, 2014; Sy et al., 2010). Whereas a key prototype of business leaders is that they are dominant, Asian Americans are assumed to be submissive and compliant (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Sy et al., 2010; Woo, 2000; Xin, 2004). Although the stereotype that Asian Americans are intelligent (e.g., Wong et al., 1998) aligns with one key attribute of prototypical leaders, characteristics associated with dominance, such as assertiveness and extraversion, are so central to the conventional prototype of a business leader that evaluators tend to perceive Asian Americans as relatively unfit to lead (Chung-Herrera & Lankau, 2005; Festekjian et al., 2014; Landau, 1995; Woo, 2000; Sy et al., 2010).

How Leader Prototypes Are Shaped by Performance

In line with more recent views on LCT, the manner in which stereotypes affect leader evaluations is dependent on context (Lord, Brown, Harvey, & Hall, 2001). For instance, evaluators believe that Asian Americans have greater leadership potential in the context of engineering than in the context of sales (Sy et al., 2010). Among the contextual variables that change the attributions people make about which individuals are best suited to lead, one of the most important is performance (Meindl & Ehrlich, 1987). Here, we will argue that there is an interplay between situational cues (the presence or absence of organizational decline) and stereotypical expectations about individuals of Asian descent on leadership evaluations, such that evaluators believe Asian American leaders are better equipped to lead during periods of decline than periods of stability or success. To explain why, we integrate theory from the glass cliff (specifically, the idea that performance decline prompts evaluators to look for a different type of leader; Ryan et al., 2011) with arguments drawn from theory on intercultural differences (specifically, the possibility that evaluators prefer leaders whom they expect to exhibit the collectivistic trait of self-sacrifice during periods of decline).

A useful starting point for our arguments is the seminal research on the glass cliff, which has found that evaluators prefer women—a demographic group typically underrepresented in top leadership positions—to lead organizations more during periods of (perceived) decline than nondecline (Cook & Glass, 2014a; Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Kulich, Lorenzi-Cioldi, Iacoviello, Faniko, & Ryan, 2015; Ryan & Haslam, 2005, 2007). In their theoretical work, Ryan and colleagues distinguish between deliberate versus inadvertent processes driving the glass cliff phenomenon. Deliberate processes include hostile sexism and discrimination, which lead decision makers to set women up for failure by appointing them in precarious leadership positions (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Empirical work offers some support for these processes. For example, in Great Britain, women and ethnic minority politicians have been selected to run for “unwinnable” seats, reducing the likelihood that they will be elected (Kulich, Ryan, & Haslam, 2014). The bulk of empirical evidence explaining the glass cliff, however, focuses on inadvertent processes: People want to maintain interpersonal harmony during periods of turbulence, and they stereotypically presume that female leaders are better equipped than men to carry out people management tasks (e.g., defusing conflict) because of their interpersonal warmth (Rink, Ryan, & Stoker, 2013; Ryan et al., 2011). As a result, evaluators prefer female leaders more in times of decline than in times of stability or success.

In a manner that parallels the glass cliff phenomenon, we argue that evaluators prefer Asian American leaders more during periods of decline than success. Crucially, however, we suggest that the reasons why Asian Americans are preferred during decline may be distinct from the primary mechanisms featured in glass cliff research. Although specific stereotypes of women and Asians are alike in one sense (they are both viewed as low in dominance), they are distinct on the dimension of interpersonal warmth. Whereas warmth is critical for explaining why evaluators believe women are effective people managers, it cannot explain why they prefer Asian American leaders, because it contradicts the stereo-

type that Asian Americans are low in sociability and warmth (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Lin et al., 2005).

The Interplay Between Leader Prototypes and Cultural Stereotypes

Cross-cultural research has established that cultures of East Asian origin are more collectivistic than those of Western origin (Coon & Kimmelmeier, 2001; Cox, Lobel, & McLeod, 1991; Hofstede, 1994; Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002; Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990; Yum, 1994).² Further, Oyserman et al. (2002) found that Asian Americans constitute the only ethnic group in North America that is more collectivistic and less individualistic than Whites. One of the primary ways that individuals with a collective orientation express their value system is through self-sacrificing behaviors—giving up valued resources for the sake of the group. Within the leadership domain, *self-sacrificing* can be defined as “denying self-interests or personal comfort and safety, limiting personal privileges, or sharing pains and hardships with the followers” (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1998; p. 476). Such self-sacrifice can take different forms, including distancing oneself from the benefits of one’s position (e.g., giving up one’s salary or bonus) and taking up more responsibilities in the division of labor (e.g., volunteering to do extra tasks).

Because people often rely on simplistic schemas that overgeneralize differences between social groups, they are likely to expect that a given Asian American candidate is more self-sacrificing than a given White American candidate. That is, although any individual can engage in self-sacrificing behaviors, the collectivism that is central to cultures of East Asian origin may lead to the formation of descriptive stereotypes related to self-sacrifice, leading perceivers to believe that Asian Americans will be especially predisposed to act in a self-sacrificing manner (e.g., Rudman & Phelan, 2008). (Given the importance of this assumption to our arguments, we empirically verify it in one of our studies.)³

We argue that evaluators presume that Asian Americans will be effective leaders during periods of organizational decline because their predisposition toward self-sacrifice will incline them to promote within-group harmony and cooperation. A leader who sacrifices his or her own material resources, such as bonuses and perks, will tangibly help others by expanding the pool of resources available for other employees during lean times. As such, a self-sacrificing leader cedes some of his or her own material welfare to increase the likelihood that others can “make ends meet.” Perhaps more important than these tangible benefits is the likelihood that leaders’ acts of self-sacrifice will establish a culture of fairness

² Despite the apparent consensus about Western individualism and Eastern collectivism in the literature, the accuracy of this distinction is not without criticism. For example, while acknowledging a common view depicting cultures of East Asian origin (in this case Japanese) “as those who maintain harmony within an in-group by willingly conforming to the group and sacrificing themselves for the sake of the group” (p. 237), Takano and Sogon (2008) also challenged the validity of this view. The accuracy of cultural differences is beyond the scope of the current article as the focus lies on behavioral expectations that can arise from (presumed) intercultural differences. Moreover, questions around the accuracy of group-based stereotypes have been discussed in detail in prior work (e.g., Judd & Park, 1993).

³ We thank an anonymous reviewer for encouraging us to collect this evidence.

during a period when employees are likely to become more sensitive to inequality and injustice. Leader actions are critically important from a symbolic standpoint, as their example sets the tone for the organization's culture (Schein, 2010). Evaluators who are considering which leaders to select are likely to believe that leaders who enact self-sacrificing behaviors signal a commitment to organizational members during a period of risk and fragility (e.g., Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1998). Indeed, self-sacrificing behavior is "one of the most direct ways for a leader to state that he or she considers the group's welfare to be important" (Van Knippenberg & Van Knippenberg, 2005, p. 26). Accordingly, self-sacrificing leaders embody the fairness norms that people value to a greater extent when resources are lean and various stakeholders (e.g., low-level workers) are experiencing setbacks. For instance, CEOs who give up bonuses in times of decline can heighten morale among employees by signaling a devotion to their welfare.

In addition, self-sacrificing leaders may be perceived as effective during periods of decline because they may forgo the attention and status that are often inherently tied to top leadership roles, and in so doing they may stay out of the spotlight and tolerate the reputational damage often associated with being a leader during a performance downturn (Ryan et al., 2011). In short, the attribution that Asian Americans are inclined toward self-sacrifice—an expectation not at odds with the stereotype that Asian Americans are low in sociability—may give them an advantage during periods of decline.

The benefit that Asian Americans reap from being perceived as self-sacrificing is unlikely to generalize to periods of success, as self-sacrificing behaviors can appear superfluous and incongruous when organizations are prospering (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1998; Halverson, Holladay, Kazama, & Quiñones, 2004). Thus, Asian American leaders are not only perceived as lacking attributes that are essential during periods of success (e.g., dominance and assertiveness), but may also be thought to possess an attribute (self-sacrifice) that is poorly suited for these same periods. When this reality is taken together with our suggestion that the perception of self-sacrifice increases the desirability of Asian American leaders during periods of decline, it leads us to make the following two-pronged prediction: (a) evaluators will show an increased preference for Asian American leaders during periods of decline versus periods of success, and (b) this preference will be explained by the belief that they possess an attribute (self-sacrifice) consistent with effective leadership in unstable and uncertain times. We present our theoretical model in Figure 1. In all, this set of predictions builds constructively on research on the glass cliff, because we link a key precept of the glass cliff phenomenon (members of certain demographic groups are preferred as leaders more in times of decline than success) to a distinct demographic

group (Asian Americans), and we explain this effect via a causal process informed by stereotypical behavioral expectations tied to cultural attributes widely attributed to Asian Americans.

Hypothesis 1: Asian American leaders will be preferred more in times of organizational decline than nondecline.

Hypothesis 2: A desire for self-sacrificing leadership behaviors will explain the relationship between decline and the preference for Asian American leaders.

In our tests of these predictions, we will compare evaluators' perceptions of Asian Americans to their perceptions of leaders from the following groups: Whites (Studies 1–4), Hispanics (Study 1), and African Americans (Studies 1 and 4). This allows us to highlight that our predicted patterns for decline versus nondecline hold for Asian American leaders and not for targets with different racial and cultural backgrounds. In the general discussion, we further discuss (the lack of) these effects for leaders from other cultural groups.

Overview of Studies

We tested the hypotheses in four studies, using a multimethod approach to provide both internal and external validity. In Study 1, we used archival data to examine whether Asian American leaders are appointed more frequently when organizations experience decline (Hypothesis 1). In Study 2, our goal was to experimentally replicate the relationship between organizational decline and the preference for Asian American leaders (Hypothesis 1) and show that this relationship was explained by a heightened preference for a self-sacrificing leader (Hypothesis 2). To further support our reasoning, we ran two more studies in which we gauged evaluators' explicit beliefs about Asian Americans. We first establish that Asian Americans are stereotyped as more self-sacrificing than Whites (Study 3) and then we show that Asian Americans, but not Whites or African Americans, are deemed to fit leadership roles better during periods of decline than nondecline (Study 4).

Study 1

Method

We conducted a study with high external validity (sampling from every North American industry, as listed in Compustat North America), high ecological validity (involving the selection of upper echelon leaders following recent changes in organizational performance), and moderate internal validity (such that the temporal ordering between performance decline and CEO selection would reduce concerns related to reverse causality).

Sample. We sampled CEOs from publicly traded companies. Because the data are publicly accessible, this study did not involve an institutional review board review. We obtained data on CEO hiring and tenure from Execucomp and company performance from Compustat North America, which we used to reflect our focus on Asian American CEOs. Our initial sampling frame included every organization and CEO available in both data sets. We removed all data points in which 6-month Treasury Bill returns were not available, because this information was necessary to assess whether firms experienced decline (we describe our opera-



Figure 1. Theoretical model.

tionalization of decline in detail below). We also removed organizations that had invested capital, total assets, or total liabilities equal to 0, as we were not able to perform calculations related to the potential for bankruptcy, or, in turn, decline, for these organizations.

Of the 7,391 CEOs in the Execucomp database, we sampled every CEO for which we could obtain the financial data from Compustat necessary to compute the independent variable, leading to a total of 4,951 CEOs (2.75% women), dating to 1967. Because we obtained data from Compustat North America, all organizations were located in North America. The data are highly representative of industry, drawing from 357 unique industries according to Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes and 586 industries according to North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes, and all 10 major industry sectors, according to SIC codes. The vast majority of the companies (about 96%) are from the United States, with some firms from Canada and Mexico. In the United States, the proportion of firms in each region in our sample mapped closely onto the proportion of firms in the population: 29.16% Midwest, 29.16% Northeast, 16.67% South, and 25.0% West.⁴

Dependent variables. Although it is often difficult to determine race-ethnicity with certainty, we used multiple steps to obtain convergent evidence, such that multiple cues reinforced our coding decisions. We had two overriding objectives—to ensure that all Asian American CEOs were categorized as Asian American (preventing “false negatives”), and to ensure that all non-Asian American CEOs were not categorized as Asian American (preventing “false positives”). Both of these objectives required a discrete series of steps.

We first determined which nationalities could be classified as East Asian. The East Asian cultural sphere (or Sinosphere) is recognized as countries from the Eastern subregion of the Asian continent—especially China, South Korea, and Japan—many of which are rooted in Confucianism and Buddhism (Hui & Graen, 1997; Huntington, 1996; Reischauer, 1974). Although individuals of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese descent together comprise the largest proportion of Asian Americans in North America (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), we performed checks to also account for CEOs who descended from other nations in East or Southeast Asia (e.g., Vietnam).

To categorize CEOs on race/ethnicity, we used two easily accessible attributes that perceivers often use to determine whether people are of Asian descent (e.g., Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick, & Esses, 2010; Lippmann, 1922; Tajfel, 1982), specifically surname and physical appearance, both of which have distinct patterns in East Asian culture.

We first individually assessed the surname of every CEO in the dataset to determine whether they met characteristics that Taylor and Taylor (2014) noted are indicative of names from China, Japan, and South Korea. Specifically, we followed Taylor and Taylor (2014) by assessing phonemes, graphemes, syllables, and morphemes common to East Asian languages. We then sifted through every CEO in the dataset a second time by comparing each name against the most common names in these three countries according to both a validated academic source (Lauderdale & Kestenbaum, 2000) as well as public databases from each of the three countries: Xinhua News for China, Meiji Yasuda Life Insurance Company National Same Family Name Investigation for Japan, and the South Korean National Statistical Office for South Korea.

We then sifted through each CEO on an individual basis for a third time to account for variations in surnames that may have resulted if individuals changed names for the purposes of facilitating integration and assimilation into American culture, or, in rarer cases, for the purposes of immigration policy and legality. An illustrative example is the surname “Lee.” This surname is common for both Asians and non-Asians, and individuals of Chinese ancestry occasionally switch this surname from a spelling of “Li” to “Lee” (as well as other variations, including “Rhee” and “Ree”). Thus, for all CEOs with the surname “Lee” or other close variations of this name, we carefully examined photographs to assess the presence of facial features common to individuals of East Asian descent (using, for example, the MR2 database; Strominger et al., 2016) as well as biographical evidence (emphasizing place of birth), to determine whether they were of East Asian descent.

We then gathered extra biographical and photographic evidence for each woman in the dataset in case she got married and changed her last name. In ambiguous cases we referred to biographical sketches online in which women self-reported their ethnic background. Finally, we cross-checked our assessments by examining websites that have featured notable Asian American CEOs of publicly traded companies. We found that we had coded all instances of individuals featured on these lists, providing greater assurance that we did not omit any Asian American CEOs.

To prevent the occurrence of “false positives” (categorizing individuals as Asian American when they were not), we took extra steps to verify that CEOs who we identified as having surnames of East Asian descent were indeed of East Asian descent by referencing photographs and biographical information. Because it was difficult to find biographical information in many cases, we sought to ensure that we had at least one piece of biographical information for every CEO we coded as being Asian American. To do this, we used multiple sources, including where their parents were from, where they were born, where they were raised, where they received their education, and where they lived (Sy et al., 2017). Given that we relied on a broad set of criteria, we were able to triangulate by using at least two different sources—one photograph and one piece of biographical data—for each individual we originally coded as an Asian American CEO. All of our initial codes were confirmed by this evidence, thus we did not make any changes to our coding process at this point. The final sample, which included every CEO for which full information was available from both Compustat North America and Execucomp, included 41 Asian American CEOs (0.8% of the full sample). In the online supplemental material, we provide a table with a list of all Asian American CEOs in the sample. As shown in Table S1 in the online supplemental material, the majority of Asian American CEOs had surnames that were not shared by anyone else in the dataset. Among these 41 CEOs, there were three modal surnames shared by more than one person (e.g., “Chen”).

We followed a similar method to code for Black and Hispanic CEOs, including sifting through all names to determine individuals of Hispanic and African American origin, drawing on lists of surnames from government databases (“Most common last names

⁴ We calculated regional statistics based on a subsample of 50 randomly chosen firms.

for Blacks in the U.S.," n.d.; "Most common last names for Latinos in the U.S.," n.d.) and lists of Hispanic and African Americans who have held a position as a CEO (Biles, 2013; "Black Chairman & CEO's of Fortune 500 companies", n.d.; "Black executive profiles", n.d.; Garcia, 2015; Hymowitz, 2016; Pabst, 2013; Varela, 2015; Wallace, 2015; Zweigenhaft, 2013).

The measure for the full sample of 4,951 CEOs was 0 (*non-Asian American*) versus 1 (*Asian American*). In the discussion we revisit limitations of this method, including the reality that we may not have been able to account for individuals who have multiple ethnic backgrounds. We also report robustness checks to account for cases in which an individual's race was ambiguous. Finally, we test whether firms are more likely to hire Whites, Hispanics, and/or African Americans in periods of decline versus nondecline.

Predictor. Of all forms of organizational decline, financial decline is the most critical for the organization's survival. Thus, focusing on financial decline would ensure that we had sufficient variance in a variable that is recognized by different organizational stakeholders as threatening to the organization's well-being. Financial decline is also a reliable measure because it can be proxied via publicly available financial indicators. Because the notion of decline suggests that the organization's performance runs counter to a prior phase of greater success, our measure accounts for how the organization's performance entered a markedly distinct downturn relative to its previous trajectory (of success or stability). We were interested in decline that was internally generated, such that it was not purely the result of broader economic and industry-wide trends. Finally, our measure should capture downturns that were severe enough to create the sense among decision makers that inaction would likely result in the demise of the organization.

Several studies have used three basic criteria to assess whether an organization experiences this type of decline (Barker & Barr, 2002; Barker & Mone, 1998; Barker & Patterson, 1996; Barker, Patterson, & Mueller, 2001; Francis & Desai, 2005). We replicated the exact formula from these studies to proxy organizational decline (see Barker & Patterson, 1996, Appendix A, for a detailed justification and breakdown of each criterion). The first criterion is whether a firm experienced a marked shift in trajectory—from a period of sustained health (or, at a minimum, nondecline) to a period of financial turmoil. Following the above-cited studies as well as protocol that financial experts use (Fan, Wong, & Zhang, 2007), we categorized an organization as being in decline when it experienced at least two consecutive years of return on investment (ROI) above the risk-free rate (determined using 6-month treasury returns) followed by 3 or more consecutive years of ROI below the risk-free rate. Tying performance to an external metric accounts for the organization's performance relative to its industry as well as its vulnerability to being influenced by broader economic trends. For instance, a firm in a healthy financial state may experience decline in performance for 2 years but still be in a strong financial position overall, especially relative to competitors, if its ROI is above the risk-free rate. Thus, the risk-free rate is a barometer that provides a broader context for evaluating performance trends, thereby increasing the likelihood that key organizational stakeholders will attribute the organization's decline as severe and as driven by internal functioning rather than external (macroeconomic) trends. We referenced the firm's fiscal year to perform these calculations.

The second criterion for determining whether an organization is experiencing financial decline involves assessing objective performance. Following the same set of studies cited above, we categorized a firm as experiencing a threat to its survival if it experienced at least 1 year of negative net income during the period of decline. The focus on 1 year of objective decline for both of these measures is not only consistent with the above-cited work on organizational decline, but also with literature on the glass cliff (e.g., Ryan & Haslam, 2005). The third criterion reflects whether there are signs that the performance decline threatens the firm's survival. To assess this, we rated firms as under threat when they possessed an Altman bankruptcy prediction Z-score of less than 3.0 for at least one year of the decline (Altman, 1968). This score is a composite that accounts for the features of organizations that are most likely to signal immediate financial jeopardy. Following precedent from prior literature, we coded firms as in decline if they met all three criteria. The measure was dichotomous: 0 (*nondecline*) versus 1 (*decline*).

To ensure the validity of our predictor, we collected additional data (e.g., quotes from newspaper articles) to verify whether decision makers who appointed an Asian American CEO perceived that their organizations were experiencing the performance trajectory that we inferred based on the above-stated formula. We include this information in the [online supplemental material](#), where we also explain the methodology we followed to select and code these quotes.

Controls. We accounted for CEO gender because prior research has found that organizations are more likely to hire women in periods of turmoil (e.g., Haslam & Ryan, 2008). We also controlled for the year the CEO was appointed as well as fiscal year. Both of these latter measures account for idiosyncratic elements of global financial patterns. Although we report coefficients with these control variables, we conducted sensitivity analyses with other control variables selected according to research on the interplay between decline and top management turnover (e.g., fixed effects for industry; Barker & Patterson, 1996).

Results and Discussion

Given that our data are structured such that performance decline is assessed prior to CEO hiring, concerns regarding reverse causality are reduced. Because the outcome variable was dichotomous, we tested Hypothesis 1 (that organizations would be more likely to appoint Asian American CEOs in periods of organizational decline than periods of nondecline) with binary logistic regression. The result was significant, $b = .90$, $SE = .37$, $Wald = 5.99$, $p = .014$, $Exp(B) = 2.46$. The odds ratio of 2.46 suggests that the effect was powerful: organizations were almost two-and-a-half times more likely to hire Asian American CEOs during periods of financial decline than during periods of nondecline. Firms in decline were not more likely to hire Whites ($b = -.42$, $SE = .29$, $Wald = 2.15$, $p = .142$), Hispanics ($b = -.18$, $SE = .53$, $Wald = .11$, $p = .740$) or African Americans ($b = .05$, $SE = 1.07$, $Wald = .00$, $p = .964$) in periods of decline versus nondecline.⁵

We conducted several robustness checks. Although the absolute number of Asian American CEOs ($n = 41$) was not necessarily problematic (Allison, 2012), they are still proportionally underrepresented because they are less than 1% of the sample of CEOs. To

⁵ These analyses were run without controls, however the results remained substantively the same when controls were included.

ensure that this was not skewing the results, we conducted a rare events logistic regression (Allison, 2012; King & Zeng, 2001), which circumvents bias introduced by maximum likelihood estimation (which is the default setting for conducting logistic regression). We found the same pattern using this analysis, $b = .91$, $SE = .37$, $p = .013$, $Exp(B) = 2.47$, such that organizations were about two-and-a-half times more likely to hire Asian American CEOs during periods of financial decline than during periods of nondecline. We then conducted robustness checks to account for two ambiguous cases—one CEO who was of Asian descent but whose nationality was challenging to decipher and one CEO whose race was difficult to determine. In both cases, results remained substantively the same. Results also remained robust when including other control variables potentially related to the interplay between firm decline and CEO selection (e.g., Barker & Patterson, 1996). For example, the effect sustained when adding fixed effects for industry to the model, $b = .81$, $SE = .37$, $p = .029$, $Exp(B) = 2.24$. We also collected extra data to assess the possibility that organizations experiencing decline are more likely to be bought by Asian companies, which, in turn, may be more likely to appoint Asian CEOs. We did not find any cases in which organizations that experienced decline and then appointed Asian CEOs were taken over by Asian-owned companies at any point in their companies' history prior to decline.

We conducted further supplementary analyses to provide broader context for interpreting our results. Specifically, we were interested in how our findings could be understood vis-à-vis trends related to the hiring and retention of Asian American CEOs during times of nondecline. Among individuals in our final sample for which we were able to compute their tenure as CEO ($N = 2,948$), Asian Americans who were chosen to be CEOs during periods of decline did not retain their positions for longer than Whites who were chosen to be CEOs during periods of decline ($b = -.94$, $SE = 1.78$, $p = .596$). Further, Asian Americans who were appointed as CEOs during times of nondecline experienced shorter tenures than Whites selected as CEOs during periods of nondecline ($b = -2.79$, $SE = 1.35$, $p = .038$). Indeed, among CEOs appointed during periods of nondecline, the average tenure of Asian American CEOs (3.25 years) was about half of the average tenure of White CEOs (6.04 years). These supplementary findings suggest a confluence of factors that perpetuate discrimination against Asian American leaders. First, evaluators show an increased preference for Asian Americans in a circumstance that is rare (organizational decline). Indeed, only 12% of firms in our dataset were experiencing decline when CEOs were hired. This frequency statistic is likely to be robust given that it is based on a sample of all of the publicly traded companies in North America over the past five decades, for which information is available from Execucomp and Compustat North America. Second, Asian Americans who are selected during periods of decline do not remain in office longer than Whites who are selected during periods of decline, suggesting that the advantages that help them get selected into leadership positions do not help them maintain those same positions at a greater rate than leaders from other races. Third, Asian Americans who are selected during periods of stability face systematic discrimination.

Study 2

Following the logic of constructive replication via multiple methods (Chatman & Flynn, 2005), we replicated Study 1 by testing the same causal relationship between performance and the selection of Asian American leaders (see the solid line in Figure 1) while also unpacking the mechanism that explained the effect (a preference for self-sacrificing leaders; see the dashed lines in Figure 1). We also constructed a scenario—evaluators considering their company's recent financial performance and then selecting a new CEO—that closely mirrored that of Study 1, thereby enhancing ecological validity.

Method

Participants. We recruited participants through Amazon's Mechanical Turk, an online crowdsourcing platform that offers a large and diverse participant pool that completes surveys and tasks for payments. Both MTurk and web-based research in general are highly reliable and yield results that are similar to more conventional samples and data collection strategies (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Krantz & Dalal, 2000; Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010).

Two hundred twenty-seven individuals participated (109 men, 118 women; $M_{age} = 35.15$, $SD_{age} = 10.64$). All participants were United States residents. The racial-ethnic composition of the sample was 158 White, 21 Latin/Hispanic American, 18 Asian American, 20 African American, seven biracial, and three other. All participants were employed and worked at least 32 hr a week. This and the following studies were approved by University of Amsterdam's Institutional Review Board (#8011).

Procedure. The study was advertised as a task in which people would evaluate individuals in senior management positions. Participants read information about a fictitious company "TLP." TLP was depicted as a gender-neutral stationary company (see Rink et al., 2013) searching for a new senior leader. To maintain consistency with the archival study, we focused on CEOs, who carry more power, authority, and status than other organizational leaders and thus are seen as most responsible for "righting the ship" in times of organizational decline (e.g., Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996). After a general introduction, participants read a newspaper article describing TLP's performance. In the successful performance condition, the article was titled "From Strength to Strength: TLP's Outstanding Stock Performance" and stated "10 years in a row, TLP has continued recording financial gains." In the performance decline condition, the title of the article was "Going Down: TLP's Disastrous Stock Performance" and informed the participants that "10 years in a row, TLP has continued recording financial losses." The texts were highly similar to texts used in prior research manipulating organizational performance (see Haslam & Ryan, 2008). The materials can be found in the online supplement.

After reading about the company, participants read descriptions of behaviors related to leader self-sacrificing and indicated the extent to which they preferred that the CEO of TLP engage in these behaviors, ranging from 1 (*not desirable at all*) to 7 (*very desirable*). We measured leaders' self-sacrifice through the following behaviors: "Giving up his/her bonus for the upcoming years" and "Working over hours and weekends even though this means he/she misses out on engaging in his/her favorite hobbies,"

$r = .44, p < .001$. The items were based on measures used in prior work as well as on sample behaviors used to depict the construct of interest in previous research (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1998; Van Knippenberg & Van Knippenberg, 2005; Wagner, 1995; Wagner & Moch, 1986).⁶

Next, participants imagined that they worked for TLP and that they were members of a committee deciding on hiring a new CEO. Prior to the interviews, they received information summarizing the candidates' backgrounds. Participants saw information sheets for two equally qualified candidates: an Asian American or a White man ("Alex Wong" or "Anthony Smith"). Both the order and the content of the information sheets were randomized (see the [online supplemental material](#) for the full text). For the candidate, participants answered the following question, "To what extent would you want to hire [candidate name] for the position of CEO at TLP?", on a range of 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very*). Participants completed the manipulation check by recalling information in the newspaper article: "How would you describe the performance of the company TLP?," ranging from 1 (*very unsuccessful*) to 7 (*very successful*).

Results and Discussion

Manipulation check. Participants in the decline condition rated the company's performance as less successful ($M = 2.21, SD = 1.51$) than those in the strong performance condition ($M = 6.61, SD = 0.66, t(159.42) = -28.72, p < .001, d = 3.78$).

The impact of decline on intentions to hire Asian American CEOs. To test Hypothesis 1 (decline would increase a preference for an Asian American leader), we performed an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis. As predicted in Hypothesis 1, in times of decline the willingness to hire an Asian American candidate as the new CEO was significant, $b = .44, SE = .18, t(225) = 2.46, p = .015$. For the White candidate, there was no direct effect of the performance context on a willingness to hire, $b = .30, SE = .19, t(225) = 1.61, p = .109$.

Indirect effect. To test Hypothesis 2, we conducted a regression-based path analysis to test the predicted indirect effect from decline to a willingness to hire an Asian American candidate as the CEO via the importance that evaluators attached to self-sacrificing behaviors. We used the PROCESS macro (Model 4; Hayes, 2013) to estimate the indirect effect, calculating bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs) based on 5,000 bootstrap samples (Hayes, 2013; Preacher & Hayes, 2004). When the CI excludes zero, the null-hypothesis regarding the indirect effect can be rejected. The indirect effect of decline on the willingness to hire an Asian American leader through self-sacrifice was significant, indirect effect = $.21, SE = .08, 95\% CI [0.073, 0.402]$. The path coefficients (shown in Figure 2) establish that both (a) the path in which organizational decline predicted a preference for a self-sacrificing CEO and (b) the path in which a preference for a self-sacrificing CEO predicted a preference for an Asian American CEO were significant, and the direct relationship between organizational decline and a preference for an Asian American leader became nonsignificant when self-sacrifice was included in the model. The indirect effect of decline on the willingness to hire a White candidate was not significant, indirect effect = $.13, SE = .09, 95\% CI [-0.023, 0.318]$.

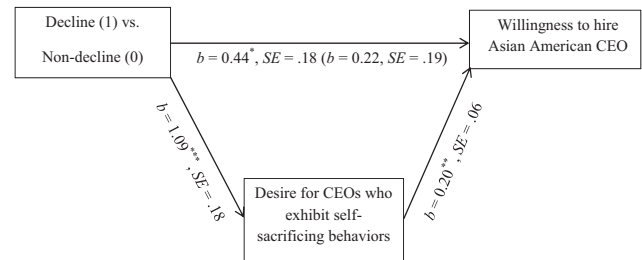


Figure 2. Path coefficients for the mediation analysis in Study 2. The value in parentheses represents the direct effect after including the mediator. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Study 2 reveals that organizational decline causes evaluators to prefer Asian American leaders. This study also provides evidence for the prediction that decline heightens a need for self-sacrificing behaviors in leaders and that the desirability of these behaviors explains the preference for Asian American leaders in times of decline. This study thus provides support for our model.

Our findings from Studies 1 and 2 lead us to one final consideration. We sequenced the constructs in our theory to reflect the causal relationships in real organizational settings as closely as possible, such that organizational performance triggers the search for a specific type of leader, which, in turn, influences the selection of leaders (see Figure 1). Therefore, to ensure conceptual-operational connection, we modeled performance as the independent variable, leader selection as the dependent variable, and the preference for self-sacrificing leaders as the mediator. Yet although we found support for this causal model, it necessitated a tradeoff. Although our mediator and dependent measures capture how a situational trigger (performance) shapes what people look for in a leader as well as the reality that evaluators must choose one CEO from a pool of candidates, these measures are not direct indicators of peoples' beliefs about Asian Americans. That is, even though our results are consistent with the argument that Asian Americans are (a) seen as self-sacrificing and, as a result, are (b) believed to be more effective leaders during periods of decline than success, we did not explicitly measure whether evaluators hold these two perceptions of Asian Americans. We ran two other studies to address these limitations. By complementing our finding that performance determines evaluators' preference for Asian American leaders (Studies 1 and 2) with an examination of whether evaluators believe Asian Americans are self-sacrificing (Study 3) and, in turn, better fit for senior leadership positions in times of decline versus success (Study 4), we cumulatively unpack the distinct cognitive processes that underlie how performance influences the emergence of Asian American leaders.

Study 3

We sought to empirically establish that perceivers generally (i.e., independent of the performance context) expect Asian Amer-

⁶ For reasons of completeness we tested other types of variables that have been associated with collective-orientation (Hofstede, 1994; Wagner, 1995): (a) a preference to work together, (b) sense of duty and loyalty, and (c) encouraging an interdependent work climate. Exploratory analyses showed that decline did not increase the desirability of these behaviors.

ican leaders to engage in self-sacrificing behaviors more than Whites. There are two ways to show that people think race is diagnostic of self-sacrifice. The first, which we demonstrated in Study 2, involves showing that peoples' preference for a self-sacrificing leader is related to a concomitant increase in their desire for Asian American leaders. The second, which we demonstrate in this study, involves showing that people explicitly report that they believe Asian Americans are more self-sacrificing than people from a Western culture (in this case, White Americans). Whereas the first effect involves causal inference, the effect we test here involves a direct measure of beliefs.

Method

Participants. We recruited 101 individuals (66 men, 35 women; $M_{\text{age}} = 34.32$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.03$) on MTurk. All participants were U.S. residents. The racial-ethnic composition of the sample was: 72 White, six Latin/Hispanic, 12 Asian, eight African American, and three biracial. All participants were employed and worked at least 32 hr a week.

Procedure and materials. The study was advertised as a task on perceptions and evaluations. All participants were presented with short personnel information sheets of two fictitious managers. One was Asian American ("Alex Wong") and the other was White ("Anthony Smith"). The order in which participants saw the managers, as well as the content of the information sheets, were randomized. The information sheets can be found in the [online supplemental material](#).

Participants rated the likelihood that leaders would engage in self-sacrificing behaviors using the same items as in Study 2 ("Giving up his bonus for the upcoming years for the good of his company" and "Working over hours and weekends for the good of his company even though this means he misses out on engaging in his favorite hobbies"; $r = .42$, $p < .001$). Participants indicated their responses on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Anthony Smith is much more likely to do this than Alex Wong*) to 7 (*Alex Wong is much more likely to do this than Anthony Smith*), with the midpoint of the scale (i.e., four) representing an equal expectation that the Asian American and the White leaders will engage in self-sacrificing behaviors.

Results and Discussion

Participants recorded an average of 4.50 ($SD = 1.14$). A one-sample t test showed that this score was significantly higher than the midpoint of the scale, $t(100) = 4.42$, $p < .001$, $d = .44$, indicating that perceivers expect an Asian American leader to engage in self-sacrificing behaviors to a greater extent than a White leader. In light of theory on cultural perceptions, this finding supports our reasoning that individuals expect that Asian Americans will be more likely to focus on the welfare of their organization, even if it comes at a personal cost. When this finding is considered in tandem with the finding from Study 2, we provide two sources of evidence that people believe race proxies self-sacrificing behavior.

Study 4

Having established that evaluators have an explicit expectation that Asian Americans will engage in self-sacrificing behaviors in

Study 3, we now consider the final phase of our test of explanatory mechanisms: whether evaluators believe that Asian Americans are better fit to lead in periods of decline than nondecline.

Method

Participants. After removing participants who incorrectly answered the forced-choice manipulation check on target race ($n = 13$), the sample included 199 individuals (109 men, 90 women; $M_{\text{age}} = 37.06$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.33$). All participants were United States residents recruited through Amazon's MTurk. The racial-ethnic composition of the sample was: 161 White, 10 Latin/Hispanic, 11 Asian, eight African American, eight biracial and one other. One hundred fifty-two participants were employed, on average working for 38.03 hr a week ($SD = 8.93$).

Procedure and materials. The study was advertised as a study on how personnel decisions are made based on small amounts of information. Participants imagined that they worked for a fictitious company called TLP and that they were members of the committee deciding on the hiring of the new Senior Financial Director. Prior to the interviews, they would receive information sheets about the candidates to form a first impression. These sheets summarized the candidates' backgrounds. The texts were based on previous research, which manipulated race in the United States (Festekjian et al., 2014; Lai & Babcock, 2013). Depending on the condition, the candidate was Asian American, African American, or White. All candidates were male. The manipulation of performance was identical to Study 2. The text can be found in the [online supplemental material](#).

We measured perceptions of leader fit through six items that gauged candidates' leadership prototypicality, anticipated effectiveness, and perceived suitability (based on Cronshaw & Lord, 1987; Giessner & Van Knippenberg, 2008; see the [online supplemental material](#) for details). A sample item is "The candidate will be a good leader," and responses ranged from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*), $\alpha = .94$.

Participants also completed manipulation checks. To account for the race manipulation, participants answered the forced-choice question, "What was the racial-ethnic background of the candidate whose information sheet you read earlier?," choosing from three options corresponding with each condition. To control for the performance manipulation, participants were asked, "How would you describe the performance of the company TLP?" (1 = very unsuccessful, 7 = very successful). Finally, participants filled out their demographic information (e.g., age, gender, race) and were debriefed.

Results and Discussion

Performance manipulation check. Participants in the performance decline condition scored lower on the performance manipulation check ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.52$) than those in the strong performance condition ($M = 6.44$, $SD = 0.95$), $F(1, 193) = 502.72$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .72$. Neither candidate race nor its interaction with organizational performance affected responses on the performance manipulation check ($F_s < 1.16$, $p_s > .32$). Partici-

pants' gender and race did not have main or interactive effects on perceptions of leader fit.

The effect of experimental conditions on leadership fit evaluations. We conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) with candidates' race, organizational performance, and their interaction as independent variables and perceptions of leader fit as the dependent variable. This analysis showed a nonsignificant main effect of candidate's race, $F(2, 193) = 1.64, p = .198, \eta_p^2 = .02$, and a nonsignificant main effect of organizational performance, $F(1, 193) = 0.01, p = .921, \eta_p^2 = .00$. The two-way interaction between the candidate's race and organizational performance in predicting perceptions of leader fit was significant, $F(2, 193) = 3.28, p = .040, \eta_p^2 = .03$. An analysis of the simple effects showed that Asian American candidate received more favorable leadership fit evaluations when the organization was going through decline ($M = 5.37, SD = 0.96$) than when it was experiencing success ($M = 4.72, SD = 1.40$), $F(1, 193) = 4.56, p = .034, \eta_p^2 = .02$. Perceptions of fit of the African American candidate as a leader did not differ between decline ($M = 4.92, SD = 1.32$) and success ($M = 5.21, SD = 1.00$), $F(1, 193) = 0.94, p = .334, \eta_p^2 = .00$. Perceptions of fit of the White candidate as a leader also did not differ between decline ($M = 4.58, SD = 1.22$) and success ($M = 4.88, SD = 1.11$), $F(1, 193) = 1.06, p = .305, \eta_p^2 = .01$.

Thus, the Study 4 findings demonstrate that decision makers perceive Asian American, but not African American or White, leaders as better fit to lead in times of decline.

General Discussion

Our findings redirect research on the challenges faced by Asian Americans, a demographic group that has received relatively little attention from organizational scholars compared to other minority groups (Livingston, Rosette, & Washington, 2012; Rosette & Livingston, 2012; see Ospina & Foldy, 2009; Sy et al., 2010). We found that evaluators preferred Asian American CEOs more in times of decline than in times of nondecline. We established external validity by demonstrating this effect with data on leaders of every publicly traded North American company listed in Execucomp and Compustat North America since 1967 (for which full data on CEOs were available)—a sample of several thousand CEOs, and internal validity by studying this effect in three additional studies. We now discuss how our findings advance theory on discrimination against Asian Americans as well as how we contribute more broadly to research that examines the interplay between diversity and leadership—especially with respect to how we integrate research on glass cliff with theory on cultural stereotypes, contributing to both lines of inquiry by examining their intersections.

Implications for Research on Discrimination Against Asian American Leaders

The current work sheds new light on specific career challenges experienced by Asian Americans. Perhaps as a result of their educational and professional success (Hurv & Kim, 1989; Wong et al., 1998), research on the challenges that Asian Americans face in their career advancement has remained limited, especially compared to the amount of research on other large racial-ethnic minority groups in the United States (e.g., Carton & Rosette, 2011;

Marquardt, Brown, & Casper, 2016; Rosette & Livingston, 2012; for exceptions see Berdahl & Min, 2012; Sy et al., 2010, 2017). However, the perception that Asian Americans are a “model minority” likely oversimplifies and obscures the challenges members of this group face in their career development (Woo, 2000). Below, we discuss how our findings inform understanding of both (a) what attenuates and (b) what perpetuates discrimination against Asian American leaders.

When and why is prejudice against Asian American leaders attenuated? A dominant assumption in the literature on diversity is that Asian Americans do not match the prototype of a conventional leader (who is viewed as dominant) as well as Whites do (Burriss, Roya, Che, & Min, 2013; Sy et al., 2010). As a result, scholars have found that Asian Americans have limited opportunities to lead organizations (e.g., Festekjian et al., 2014; Sy et al., 2010). We introduced a theoretical model to identify both (a) when and (b) why this effect reverses. Specifically, we found that evaluators judge Asian Americans to be better suited to lead in times of decline than in times of stability or success, and that this effect is explained by the fact that evaluators believe that Asian Americans are likely to enact a class of behaviors (acts of self-sacrifice) that are especially effective for leading during decline. In the light of attributes associated with cultures of Asian origin (Hofstede, 1994), people may assume that Asian American individuals are inclined to put other members of their organizations before themselves. We do not suggest that attributes associated with their culture of origin make Asian American leaders inherently self-sacrificing, but rather that cultural attributions can create filters through which decision makers perceive and evaluate Asian American leaders.

Why does prejudice against Asian American leaders persist? Although we identified an occasion when prejudice against Asian American leaders weakens, our findings can also provide initial clues about why Asian Americans continue to face discrimination, as evidenced by the reality that they are strongly underrepresented in top leadership positions. Our results suggest that even though the stereotype of self-sacrifice carries a positive overall connotation and increases opportunities for Asian American leaders in one circumstance (periods of decline), it may have a net effect of impairing their ability to be selected and retained as leaders. To understand this implication, it is useful to compare the length of time Asian American CEOs retain office during periods of nondecline and decline, which we uncovered in our supplementary analyses in Study 1. During periods of nondecline, Asian Americans experience tenures that are about half of those of Whites. During periods of decline, although the perception that Asian Americans are uniquely suited to lead increases the rate at which they are appointed as CEOs relative to other racial demographic groups, this ostensible advantage is short-lived: among leaders who are selected as CEOs in times of decline, Asian Americans do not have a longer tenure as CEOs than Whites. Thus, the attribute that “opens the door” for Asian Americans during periods of decline does not “keep the door open” during these same periods, suggesting that what appears at first to be a silver lining for Asian American leaders provides no lasting advantage. Considering these findings in tandem, it is possible that the self-sacrificing leadership stereotype may hinder Asian American leaders' advancement in times of nondecline because it mutes the status signals (such as power, attention, status, and wealth) that allow top leaders to

maintain a hold on power. Accordingly, the belief that Asian Americans are self-sacrificing may limit their opportunities to lead in periods of nondecline because it makes them appear even more at odds with conventional leader prototypes (Lord & Maher, 1993).

When the reality that Asian Americans are deemed to possess an attribute that positions them to be evaluated positively during periods of decline yet as a misfit during nondecline is combined with the reality that decline occurs much more rarely than nondecline (12% of the time in our Study 1 sample), it can be inferred that evaluators believe Asian Americans possess qualities that are counternormative and thus less suitable for leading in conventional times. Accordingly, our results indicate that Asian Americans may suffer from a “typecasting effect” insofar as evaluators deem them to be equipped to lead primarily in narrow circumstances. This notion echoes work showing that evaluators unduly believe that Asian Americans are primarily likely to succeed as employees (Leong & Hayes, 1990) and leaders (Sy et al., 2010) in restricted contexts, such as those related to engineering rather than sales.

Further exacerbating this typecasting effect is the reality that organizational decline is an aversive context—one that organizational members are perhaps most eager to avoid. It is also limiting: leaders who take the helm during decline have fewer resources and less discretion than those who operate in other times (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). They also often suffer from unfair expectations, as evaluators often do not properly calibrate what is possible for leaders to achieve after a period of loss (Pearson & Clair, 1998; Ryan et al., 2016). Moreover, by their precarious nature, these positions pose personal risks to appointees, such as high levels of stress, negative publicity, blame for continuing failure, and lost opportunities for board memberships (Ferris, Jagannathan, & Pritchard, 2003; Ryan & Haslam, 2007).

Taken together, our findings suggest that Asian American leaders are preferred under circumstances that are narrowly defined, short-lived, aversive, and provide them with little freedom to establish that they possess attributes that make them effective leaders in all circumstances—not merely during periods of decline. This may provide clues as to what upholds discrimination in a modern environment in which there are an increasing number of forces in place against deliberate, overt discrimination, and even a growing awareness of implicit forms of prejudice.

The Interplay Between Diversity, Stereotypes, and Prototypes in Leader Evaluation

It is important to consider our findings within the context of research that has explored the evaluation of leaders from other demographic groups in different performance contexts. As an initial step, we compare our findings to those on the glass cliff phenomenon—the finding that women are deemed to be effective leaders in times of decline (Cook & Glass, 2014b; Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Kulich et al., 2015; Ryan et al., 2007). We first consider how our findings are distinct from those on the glass cliff phenomenon to further clarify our unique theoretical contribution, and then consider how points of similarity between our findings and the glass cliff phenomenon illuminate more general insights that reside at the nexus of diversity and leader evaluation, especially those

pertaining to the cognitive processes that affect how leaders from various social categories are evaluated.

Distinctions between the current findings and the glass cliff phenomenon. One key distinction between our research and that on the glass cliff pertains to the underlying mechanism: the primary class of gender-based stereotypes that researchers have uncovered to explain why women are preferred in times of decline (i.e., warmth-based stereotypes, which speak to how they handle interpersonal interactions with attributes such as expressiveness; Ryan et al., 2011) could not be used to explain why Asian Americans are coveted as leaders in times of decline because they run counter to the stereotype that Asian Americans are reserved and lack social dexterity (e.g., Lin et al., 2005). The stereotype of self-sacrifice can explain how Asian American leaders fulfill the expectations of leaders of failing organizations while remaining consistent with other stereotypes of Asian Americans. Leaders who engage in self-sacrificing behavior can maintain intergroup harmony by establishing a climate that seems fairer and more egalitarian—values that organizational stakeholders believe are important during times of decline (Carson, 2016). But the stereotype of self-sacrifice does not presuppose that Asian Americans have the social dexterity to manage interpersonal relationships directly. Instead, acts of self-sacrifice involve ceding resources to ensure that others are protected as well as symbolic gestures that signal norms related to fairness (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1998). As such, evaluators may believe that Asian Americans can perform these acts while maintaining social distance from others.

In addition, the attribution that Asian Americans are inclined toward self-sacrifice does not run counter to the stereotype that Asian Americans are highly competent. Thus, evaluators could believe that Asian Americans will engage in self-sacrificing behavior without compromising another set of skills expected of CEOs: overseeing the implementation of the plans and procedures that are necessary to guide the firm toward a resurgence by setting clear goals and solving pressing problems. If evaluators assume that Asian Americans will complement their consideration for the well-being of others (via self-sacrifice) with effective task-related guidance, then they may be especially inclined to select Asian American leaders because these capabilities reflect two categories of behavior (sometimes labeled “consideration” and “initiating structure”) that are assumed to be integral for effective leadership (Fleishman, 1998). In short, although our findings are similar to those of the glass cliff phenomenon in terms of when evaluators’ preferences change, they are distinct with respect to how these preferences change.

Redirecting research on diversity and leader evaluation. Despite the differences between our findings and the glass cliff phenomenon, there are important similarities that can inform research on the cognitive processes that dictate how evaluators judge the suitability of leaders from multiple demographic groups, including Asian Americans, women, African Americans, Whites, and Hispanics. One theme involves the centrality of organizational performance for shaping leader prototypes. When coupled with research on the glass cliff, our findings build on research showing that leader prototypes can be shaped by task type (Sy et al., 2010) and cultural context (Sy et al., 2017) by establishing that organizational performance is a central driver of the plasticity of leader prototypes. This advance is notable because performance may represent a link between leadership categorization theory (Lord et

al., 1984) and attribution-based theories of leadership evaluation—especially romance-of-leadership (Meindl & Ehrlich, 1987)—which focus on how people make attributions about leader effectiveness according to performance. More specifically, whereas research on the relationship between performance and leader evaluation has shown that people refer to how well their organizations have performed to judge the effectiveness of their leaders (Meindl & Ehrlich, 1987), our findings, when considered in tandem with those from research on the glass cliff, suggest that people also refer to performance to determine who is a prototypical leader. Namely, failure prompts people to search for a different type of leader than does success, and this search may be guided by a broad set of stereotypes, including those tied to gender, race, and culture.

The notion that performance determines leader prototypes provides symmetry to current understanding of how individuals evaluate leaders in times of success versus decline via two basic cognitive categories: stereotypes (oversimplified beliefs about the attributes of specific social groups) and prototypes (simplified beliefs about the attributes of an ideal category member—in this case, a leader). Research has established that evaluators explain the success versus failure of minority leaders by emphasizing stereotypes that are unrelated to leadership in the context of success (e.g., Black leaders are successful because they are charming) and stereotypes that are related to leadership in the context of failure (e.g., black leaders fail because they lack competence), thereby preserving their preconception that even successful minority leaders do not possess attributes commonly associated with prototypical leaders (e.g., competence; Carton & Rosette, 2011). As such, prior findings establish that evaluators switch between two stereotypes while adhering to a single leader prototype (e.g., effective leaders are competent). Our findings are the mirror image of this effect: evaluators emphasize a prototype of one kind of leader in the context of nondecline and a prototype of a different kind of leader in the context of decline (e.g., self-sacrificing), thereby preserving their preconceived belief that minority leaders possess attributes that are only prototypical in narrow circumstances. As such, our findings establish that evaluators can also switch between two leader prototypes while adhering to a single stereotype.

In short, our findings reinforce work demonstrating that evaluators are flexible in the process of using categories to evaluate minority leaders but extend this work by suggesting that the precise nature of this flexibility changes depending on the role that evaluators play. When individuals are responsible for evaluating minority leaders based on known past performance (a passive, backward-facing role), they exhibit flexibility in how they use stereotypes of minorities rather than prototypes of leaders because they need to make sense of how stigmatized minorities have led their organizations to success in some cases and failure in others (Carton & Rosette, 2011). Yet when evaluators are responsible for selecting minority leaders based on anticipated future performance (an active, forward facing role), they exhibit flexibility in how they use prototypes of leaders rather than stereotypes of minorities because they strive to determine the type of individual who is best suited to lead and then find someone who best matches this prototype. The upshot is that our work, when combined with that on the glass cliff, not only provides a new way to understand how leader evaluations are influenced by the interplay between prototypes of leaders and stereotypes of demographic groups (e.g., Asian Americans and women), but also provides a platform for

understanding global themes that can explain how stereotyping perpetuates discrimination against leaders from a variety of demographic groups.

Managerial Implications

The results of the current study have implications for selection- and promotion-related decision-making practices in companies. We recommend that decision makers increase awareness of leadership appointment biases in times of decline and intervene at multiple stages in order to effectively manage outcomes and expectations. Managers making leadership appointments should be aware that performance decline can affect their evaluations of candidates with different racial and cultural backgrounds. Such awareness is instrumental for two reasons. First, it can increase the quality of their decision making by encouraging them to evaluate candidates in a more individualized and less stereotyped manner. Second, it helps management and other employees calibrate expectations regarding the extent to which a newly appointed leader is likely to improve a troubling situation. That is, stereotypical perceptions of Asian American leaders can encourage unrealistically high expectations, which can evoke feelings of disappointment and a willingness to return to a more traditional leader (i.e., White male, Cook & Glass, 2014b). This chain of events can be detrimental for future Asian American candidates' evaluations and perpetuate discriminatory practices, as organizational failure may be unfairly attributed to this group's leadership potential and effectiveness.

Limitations and Future Directions

Our work has some limitations. Our experimental approach in Studies 2 and 4 may have created a somewhat simplistic decline context. Actual instances of organizational decline are often more complex, wherein the co-occurrence of multiple threatening events simultaneously affects different actors and groups. Moreover, although we based the time span for calculating organizational performance on prior research recommendations and practices, we acknowledge that other measures of decline are possible as well. In addition, our measure of self-sacrifice through two representative behaviors (e.g., Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1998) in Studies 2 and 3 may be somewhat restrictive. The use of a longer scale that incorporates a greater number of behavioral indicators may be useful. Moreover, common method variance (CMV) may have affected the relationship between the mediator and the dependent measure in Study 2. However, given that the remaining three studies are less likely to be impacted by CMV, the overall threat of this potential limitation to our findings and interpretations may be restricted.

Although our experimental approach is crucial for making inferences about causality, it cannot perfectly simulate the complexity of reality. Thus, our findings should be replicated in more realistic settings to establish greater ecological validity. However, given the results of Study 1, which are based on archival data, the experimental findings are likely to apply in more realistic corporate settings as well. One limitation of our archival study is the reliance on CEO names to infer racial group membership. We considered multiple factors in an attempt to ensure an accurate categorization of race, such as accounting for variations of common surnames and consulting photographs. Despite this approach,

a limitation of using names is that we may not have been able to identify all individuals who have changed their name, have non-prototypical names, and are mixed-race.

The current studies focused on a single attribute—self-sacrifice—as the explanatory mechanism for the preference for Asian American leaders during decline. Although the current work presents consistent archival and experimental support for our main hypotheses, our suggested mechanism may not be able to exhaustively explain the relationship between stereotypes, performance context, and leader emergence. For example, analyses of our archival data show that African American leaders are not preferred in times of decline, and an experiment (Study 4) corroborates this finding. This is notable given that some research suggests that African Americans, as a group, also score high on collective orientation (Coon & Kimmelmeier, 2001), which may give rise to expectations that they are self-sacrificing. One potential explanation for this finding could be that evaluators do not perceive African Americans to be as high on collectivism as Asian Americans, because African Americans also score particularly high on individualism, a dimension that correlates negatively with collectivism (Coon & Kimmelmeier, 2001). In line with this, a meta-analysis suggests that Whites' level of collectivism does not differ from African Americans and African Americans score higher on individualism than Whites (Oyserman et al., 2002). Another potential explanation is that CEOs' self-sacrificing behaviors (e.g., working overtime) during decline may be primarily valued when they are members of a group that is also stereotypically perceived as highly competent. Thus, competence-related prejudice toward African Americans may have undercut the impact of self-sacrifice in this specific context. Additionally, our work does not directly illuminate whether expectations with regards to self-sacrificing behaviors could explain the glass ceiling for women (Ryan et al., 2011). Given that self-sacrifice is consistent with the nurturing stereotype associated with women, it may be an additional factor that could explain the finding that female leaders are preferred more when organizations experience decline. We thus encourage future scholars to explore underlying mechanisms in more detail for Asian Americans and how the mechanism we introduced may or may not extend to female leaders.

The current work encourages various avenues for future research. One possible area involves the consequences that follow the appointment of Asian American leaders during decline. For example, as organizations begin to move away from the fragile climate that often characterizes the initial period of decline, it is possible that evaluators begin to see Asian American leaders as out of step with the climate of their companies as they engage in a process of "normalization." That is, the expectation from Asian American leaders to act in self-sacrificing ways may no longer be perceived as necessary. Alternatively, individual Asian American leaders may not lead in ways that are consistent with evaluators' initial expectations (i.e., not engaging in salient self-sacrificing behaviors). This may evoke backlash given the prescriptive nature of stereotypes (Berdahl & Min, 2012), enhancing decision-makers' willingness to replace the Asian American leader with a more traditional one (i.e., White male; see Cook & Glass, 2014b). Future research could shed light on these potential outcomes of CEO appointments during decline.

Another potential future direction is the inclusion of different types of organizational decline. Although performance decline is

arguably the most important form because it threatens the very survival of organizations, the source of decline can vary. For instance, when decline is caused by internal relationship conflicts and disagreements, a collective oriented leadership style may be preferred more strongly than when decline is caused by external threats. The latter circumstance may increase the need for a more dominant, agentic leader prototype (e.g., Jehn, Greer, Levine, & Szulanski, 2008; Van Vugt & Spisak, 2008). In line with this possibility, recent research on the glass cliff phenomenon has shown that a preference for women during periods of decline occurs when decline can be attributed to poor internal leadership rather than external economic trends (Kulich et al., 2015). Accordingly, variations in the origins of decline could also predict how members of different minority groups may differentially fit activated leader prototypes. For instance, an increased need for agentic, dominant leadership in some contexts might positively affect the evaluations of African American leaders (e.g., Livingston et al., 2012). Finally, providing perceivers with more individualized information about leadership candidates may override the effects of group-based stereotypes. For instance, a White candidate with a proven self-sacrificing leadership style may be preferred in times of decline, whereas an Asian American candidate with a less salient self-sacrificing leadership style may not be preferred.

Conclusion

Asian Americans—a remarkably successful group, with high levels of income and education—continue to face challenges in attaining leadership positions. In several studies, we established one condition under which Asian American leadership is preferred: organizational decline. In addition to identifying a situation when discrimination against Asian American leaders is attenuated, our results provide clues about the invisible mechanisms that hold broader patterns of discrimination in place, providing a new vantage point on the unique challenges faced by Asian American leaders.

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