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## The Yellow Figment of East Asian American Women: A Case Study of the 2021 Atlanta Spa Shootings

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# The Yellow Figment of East Asian American Women: A Case Study of the 2021 Atlanta Spa Shootings

## Cover Page Footnote

The Yellow Figment of East Asian American Women: A Case Study of the 2021 Atlanta Spa Shootings  
Senior Honors Thesis Lily Zhen-Ling Stewart Dedication For my sister, Lucy (Zi-YuRong).

Acknowledgements I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Wallace for her willingness to supervise and guide my thesis. Working with Dr. Wallace has inspired decisiveness and diligence behind the countless decisions I've made throughout this process. I would also like to thank Dr. Gast for employing consistent support and challenging my critical consciousness during my thesis. Dr. Gast has met my many meticulous questions with compassion and patience for which I am deeply appreciative. Without their thoughtful supervision, this thesis would not have taken shape. It has been the greatest privilege to conduct this thesis during my final year at the University of Louisville and to have been energized by these scholars throughout this research.

# The Yellow Figment of East Asian American Women: A Case Study of the 2021 Atlanta Spa Shootings

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores how mainstream media frames the racial gendering of Asian women through a case study of the 2021 Atlanta Spa Shootings. Fifteen articles sourced from the top ten national newspaper entities published between March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and October 2021 analyze how Asian American women are subjected to at least a double feminized social location on account of their race and gender within a U.S. contemporary context. I explore how themes of race, gender, and hypersexualization intersect to produce the archetype of Asian women as exotic, docile temptresses. This analysis centers around the dynamic between Asian women and White men positioned within a heterosexual matrix. My findings discuss how the fetishization of Asian women foregrounded the targeted attack on the three Asian spas and six female Asian lives. Moreover, the influence of racial gendering of Asian women motivates the “exotic” desire for Asian women, commonly denoted as complimentary, while simultaneously legitimizing their bodies as disposable vessels for White male rage. Finally, I discuss the implications of yellow fever for Asian women within the domain of attraction and desire, exposing them to sexual, physical, and symbolic violence expressed as fetishization.

**KEYWORDS:** Asian women, intersectionality, race, gender, sexual violence, Atlanta Spa Shootings.

## INTRODUCTION

Between 2019 and September 2021, 10,370 hate incidents have been reported to Stop Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Hate amidst the coronavirus pandemic (Stop AAPI Hate, 2021). While mainstream racial discourse has highlighted the anti-Asian sentiment fueling recent hate crimes, Asian American women’s racially gendered experiences remain absent. The Atlanta Spa Shootings that took place in March 2021, involving a White man targeting three Asian owned spas and murdering six female Asian victims, have sparked dialogues regarding race and gender bias. Asian American women’s social positioning conjure obscured “positive” narratives depicting academic success and physical attractiveness which obstruct how

they transform into sexual violence. The purpose of this study is to analyze the representation of East Asian women and East Asian American women for the purposes of interrogating the one-dimensional exoticized figment<sup>1</sup> of Asian American women in Western cultures. Further, an Orientalism Theory critical lens will be utilized to produce a broader Asian-centric view of how Western cultures create and consume cultural and political knowledge of the “East.” This paper examines the socio-cultural apparatus involving race and gender for Asian American women. The aim of this research is to contribute to existing scholarship surrounding the deconstruction of racially gendered tropes of Asian American women. This requires an

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<sup>1</sup> Constructed idea within collective imaginations dependent

exploration of the construction and consumption of the “East” by the “West.”

It should be noted that the scope of this study is limited to discussion and historical context primarily surrounding East Asian women and East Asian American women. While White America’s constructed image of “Asian American” coagulates all countries within the Asian continent as “Chinese,” South or Southeast Asian women experience very little representation and are often invisible (Chou, 2012).<sup>2</sup> It should be noted, this singular representation of Asian women and Asian American women centered on those of East Asian descent is accredited to the othering of various diverse groups of people which is principal to Orientalism (Chou, 2012; Said, 1978). The use of the terms “Asian American” or “Asian” in this paper refers primarily to the East Asian American experience.<sup>3</sup>

### **ORIENTALISM**

This paper applies Edward Said’s theoretical framework of Orientalism as the premise of racial gendering of Asian American women. This binary ideology denotes the “East” as feminine and the “West” as masculine (Chou, 2012). Thus, the East is presented as uncivilized, exotic, and primitive asserting the West as its protector (Said, 1978). Construction as means of domination declares an extraterritorial divide dependent on the “East’s” passivity. The method of Orientalism as political justification for domination expresses the East as an inversion affixed to Western culture. This production preserves Orientalism through extracting an eternally fixed value of “other.” Moreover, this ostracization, inherent to the Orientalist construction, delineates Asian Americans as continual foreigners. The Orientalist construction of Asia and its peoples denoted as

the “East” valorizes racial obscurification of Asian Americans. Further, articulation of the Orient is the prerogative for the West where ostracized portrayals of Asia and its people are dissected to be palpable for Western consumption. Moreover, Asian “authenticity” elucidates the absence of Western influence asserting Asia is antithetical to the West. The East’s femininity produced through Western thought is penetrable by Western consumption.

### **THE ORIENT WOMAN**

The Orient woman references Asian women with emphasis on her “exoticness” attributed to her perceived Oriental-ness fabricated on the territorial femininity of the East. She is articulated in terms of hyper-femininity assigned to both her Asian-ness and womanhood. Asian American women are deemed as inherently sexual beings acquiescent to Western desire. This is also understood as the “great western male fantasy” which caters to male arousal of the domination of the Orient woman (Cho, 1997, p.191). Thus, her static characteristics ascribing docility and submissiveness are erotically essentialized to the perceived hyper-sexuality serving androcentric desire. The Orient woman is feminized in accordance with her race inferior to Whites and feminized in terms of her perceived gender subordinate to men.

### **THE ASIAN RACE IN THE U.S.**

Asian Americans are the fastest growing demographic in the United States. While this racial/ethnic group accounts for only 5% of the United States population, their growth rates doubled between 2000 and 2019 and is projected to surpass 46 million by 2060 (Islam et. al. 2010; Pew Research Center, 2021). Additionally, Asian Americans occupy a unique social location denoted as the Model Minority

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<sup>2</sup> The description of East Asia is defined through geographical and ethnocultural boundaries where countries include China, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, Mongolia, and Taiwan. Reference to South Asia includes countries of Myanmar, India, Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand.

<sup>3</sup> The use of East Asian and Asian American will be used interchangeably throughout the scope of this paper.

and as honorary/adjacent/surrogate Whites, concurrently characterized as perpetual foreigners (Feagin & Chou, 2008). Although Asian Americans are deemed “honorary Whites,” the term “model minority” evaluates Asian Americans’ efforts in proximity to White frameworks of achievement. Thus, the model minority posits Asian Americans against other people of color as their upward mobility corroborates the prescribed path of economic achievement towards the “American dream.” During the Civil Rights movement, the model minority myth provided a “counter-example to politically active African Americans” (Cho, 1997, p. 185). Thus, the model minority is composed as apolitical, socially passive, yet hard-working to which the entirety of their success is accredited. This valorization of self-deterministic efforts towards material gain simultaneously implants a racial wedge between Asian Americans and African Americans.

Despite the population trajectory, the Asian American experiences maintain a level of obscurity through a simultaneous process of racial valorization and civic ostracism structured through race and gender oppression (Xu & Lee, 2013). Asian Americans also occupy a status of “forever foreigner” which impedes upon their acceptance into American culture. The “controlling image” of Asian Americans operates on conditions of white supremacy bounded between Whiteness and other communities of color (Collins, 2002). This juxtaposed identity of Asian Americans within a multidimensional system of racial stratification (Xu & Lee, 2013) delineates high levels of education, economic achievement, and upward mobility. This paper utilizes Orientalism Theory (Said, 1978) which can be accredited to this perennial status of Asian Americans. Said (1978) describes the scope of Orientalism as the Western construction of the Orient that is approached systematically as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice (p 73). Said’s explanation of Orientalism is supplemental to this study as a critical lens of how the West creates and consumes knowledge of the “East.”

### **THE ASIAN WOMAN IN THE U.S.**

Asian American women endure the inextricable and mutually reinforcing systems of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989) which assume at least a double subaltern identity as occupying a subordinate position within a subordinate group (Cho, 1997). Asian women’s experiences of gender oppression are discernable by the omnipresent hyper-sexed and passive stereotypes. Racially obscuring Asian American women in terms of material success encloses them within the parameters of academic intelligence and economic success. Nonetheless, socially constructing them as racially inferior to Whites. The synergy of inferiority regarding realms of race and gender indicate servitude to dominant systems of white supremacy, ethnic patriarchy, and neo-imperialism. Thus, the “Sexual Model Minority” within a contemporary context indicates Asian American women’s ideal in their union of sex appeal with family-centered values and a strong work ethic (Zheng, 2016). The reviewed literature critically assesses the intricate construction of female Asian American identities solidified through racially gendered stereotypes. This paper inquiries about the impetus of Western hegemony and colonialism that fuel the one-dimensional exoticized figment of Asian American women. Female Asian American sexualities is reflective of Orientalism theory as its construction is crafted as the antithesis to the masculinized West, thus, predicated on the East’s innate femininity. Moreover, Asian American women face feminization twofold concerning the fusion of race and gender further valorized through the Asian sex industry, racial fetishization-Yellow Fever, and interracial intimacy.

### **CONTRIBUTION AND THESIS LAYOUT**

The contribution of this research concentrates on how systems of race and gender interact with one another and existing institutions involving the scope of Orientalism, nationality, and sexuality. Further, this study contextualizes positive archetypes of Asian American women and deconstructs premises of praise and

“compliments” regarding their ascribed attributes. The aim of this paper is to dissect the dangerous ideologies which frame perceptions of Asian American women. Evaluation of Asian American women’s experiences and myriad of identities are imperative to obtain a comprehensive understanding of racially gendered relations in the contemporary U.S. context.

This study consists of a case study involving media coverage on the 2021 Atlanta Spa Shootings to analyze the influences of race and gender surrounding the media framing of the attack. This study asks three primary research questions:

1. How does the media frame the racial obscuration of Asian American women?
2. How does the media frame the racial gendering of Asian American women?
3. What are the implications of racially gendered stereotypes for Asian American women in a U.S. “post-racial” context?

These questions are answered through a qualitative coding analysis of 15 online newspaper articles sourced from 8 out of the top 10 national news publications covering the Atlanta Shootings between March and October 2021. This analysis presents how Asian American women’s experiences are always at least racially gendered. I chose to investigate the Atlanta Spa Shootings as a relevant and recent account of how racially gendered institutions relate to the murder of Asian American women in the United States.

This paper begins with a review of existing scholarship which critically assess the factors of race and gender pertaining to Asian American women. Emerging themes observed within the literature include the sex industry in East Asia, yellow fever, and interracial intimacy. I continue with a historical account of how military prostitution, sex tourism in East Asia, and anti-Asian U.S. policy engender the stereotypes of Asian women as hyper-sexual and ultra-feminine. The following section outlines the

sampling and data collection processes involving the seven codes established to analyze the 15 newspaper articles. These codes were informed by the three aforementioned themes which emerged within the literature. The findings are addressed to answer my three research questions. I begin with a discussion regarding the racial obscuration of Asian American women that is quintessential to its combination with gender forces. The main findings deconstruct the Orientalist component of the Orient woman which foregrounds the trope of the Asian temptress. I examine stereotypes of Asian women in relation to prostitution and sex work. Lastly, I conclude with a discussion pertaining to the moral threat of yellow fever and other “positive” stereotypes associated with Asian American women.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This analysis of the Asian sex industry, racial fetishization, and interracial intimacy is imperative to the deconstruction and exploration of female (East) Asian American identities and experiences. These themes consider the confluence of interlocking systems of oppression regarding race and gender. Additionally, sex, class, transnationalism, migration, and nativism will be discussed. The explored themes are instrumental in discussing how (East) Asian women are perceived within colonial and neo-colonial contexts. Further, this exploration is unique as it aims to critically assess the ambiguous and inconspicuous, yet violent attraction towards Asian women.

### **SEX INDUSTRY IN EAST ASIA**

The multi-faceted sex industry within Asia that perpetuates the hyper-sexual and docile female Asian stereotype constitutes the purchasers of bodies for sexual pleasure as predominantly White men and the sellers of their bodies for sexual pleasure as predominantly Asian women (Woan, 2008). The genesis of the white male influence on Asian women can be understood through the scope of Orientalism. Said (1978) confers that Orientalism is an exclusively male province where women are the creatures of a



male-power fantasy. He further notes, “They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing” (p. 207). The construction of the innately hypersexual, yet demure, image portrays Asian women’s devotion to white men. This is further perpetuated and politicized through the military industrial complex, mail-order bride market, prostitution, and polyamory (Chou, 2012; Abrams, 2005). These systems should be explored extensively as they are predicated upon Asian women’s perceived eagerness as their bodies are eroticized and depersonalized, but above all weaponized as a tool of white supremacy and ethnic patriarchy (Nemoto, 2004).

The growth of Asia’s sex industry involved sex tourism which proliferated during military presence in East Asian Wars, particularly World War II and the Vietnam War (Woan, 2008). Chou (2012) explains:

During the Vietnam War, the U.S. military set up sexual rest and relaxation destinations in Southeast Asia for allied soldiers with financial assistance from the World Bank. These sexual ports were created to maintain morale, so that American soldiers could maintain masculinity with the availability of prostitutes. (p. 138)

The fundamental tool of sex as a weapon of war poses the threat of sexual violence as the U.S. imperialist regime foists onto the bodies of indigenous women. Chou (2008) contends that, “The chiefly characteristic of Western armies, group machismo evolves in close-knit combat units where sexual performance is prized just as highly as combat performance” (p. 285).

Hegemonic masculinity is transferable between combat performance and sexual performance where both are situated in a colonial context (Woan, 2008). Woan’s (2008) framework deconstructs sexual-racial inequality between White men and non-White women referred to as white sexual imperialism. Further, the influence of white sexual imperialism asserts Western political, military, and economic domination that compels women, often of developing

countries, into sexual submission to White men (Woan, 2008). These female Asian experiences are always elucidated in relation to white heterosexual male hegemony. As the “great western male fantasy”—explored further within the thesis—has persisted throughout mass media and popular culture, the one-dimensional stereotypes of Asian women are internationally transferred to apply to women inside and outside of Asia (Cho, 1997). This fantasy is characterized through political power charged by colonial conquest and sexual dominance of indigenous women. Moreover, the ethnosexual and geo-political desire for Asian women involves control over their people and her body. Sexual violence is rationalized as means of civilizing the “uncivilized” through barbaric actions of rape, fetishization, sexual assault, and sexual harassment. Takinami (2016) summarizes that, “Extraterritorial desire was key in forming the West’s attraction to the Orient woman, thus predicating their relationship on distance, and in turn, excluding Oriental women from the American nation” (p. 41.) Masculine hegemony exuded through military presence and concurrent sex tour industries continues to target Asian women on account of their race, gender, and culture presumed inferior to their conqueror.

It should be noted that effeminized Asian men (Han, 2021) and hyper-feminized Asian women are intimately entwined to promote the only permissible utility of Asian women that is sexual submission within a neo-colonial context. Attractiveness comparison ratings among all races, found that Asian Americans as a racial group, rank Asians highest among women but lowest among men (Lewis, 2012, as cited in Zheng, 2016). Nevertheless, colonial and military domination are interwoven with sexual domination (Kwan, 1998, as cited in Woan, 2008).

### **YELLOW FEVER AS RACIAL FETISHIZATION**

Research surrounding the fetishization of different racial groups use the term “racial

fetish” advisedly. Zheng (2016) states that the intention is to not invoke the medicalized meaning of fetish as a psychological disorder, but rather reflects the popularized colloquial social aspects and implications regarding attraction preferences. This paper adopts the same intended use of a “racial fetish” as it is understood in the social realm of attraction, love/intimacy, dating, and marriage. There is much contention around racial fetishes as merely a preference. Zheng (2016) refers to this as the Mere Preferences Argument (MPA) which posits that racial fetishism is morally unobjectionable as merely a “personal” preference (Zheng, 2016). However, she states that “racial fetishes always rely on racial stereotypes rather than pure aesthetic features” (p. 405). Thus, yellow fever as racial fetishization is always morally objectionable as employed onto Asian women.

Boris (2003) suggests that race is gendered, and gender is racialized. Thus, gendered racial stereotypes rely on racial differences among women and men and racialized gender stereotypes are based on gender differences among groups defined by race, ethnicity, or nationhood (Boris, 2003). Galinsky et. al.’s (2013) six separate studies explore the intersection of racial and gender stereotypes through interracial dating, leadership selection, and athletic participation analysis. Studies 1 and 2 capture implicit and explicit notions of gender content utilizing the Princeton Trilogy. Their research found that Asian stereotypes were delineated as more feminine and the Black stereotypes as more masculine. Notably, Study 3’s survey results found that heterosexual White men preferred Asian women over Black women while heterosexual White women preferred Black men over Asian men. Study 4 conducted an analysis of the 2000 U.S. census data regarding interracial marriages. The results portrayed similar patterns among interracial relationships of Study 3. Among Asian-White

marriages, 75%<sup>4</sup> had a White husband and Asian wife. A stronger pattern among Asian- Black marriages portrayed 86%<sup>5</sup> of the marriages between a Black husband and Asian wife. The researchers conclude that the documented association between racial and gender stereotypes, combined with masculinity-femininity preference in mate selection, provide a parsimonious explanation for the gender composition of interracial marriages composed by Census data (Galinsky, et. al., 2013). Lastly, survey results from Studies 5 and 6 showed that Blacks were more likely to be chosen for a masculine leadership position and were heavily represented in more masculine sports, relative to Asians, as the masculine leadership role required candidates to be “fierce, competitive, and contentious” (Galinsky et. al., 2013, p. 503). The archival analysis of the NCAA Student-Athlete Ethnicity Report delineated the masculinity of a sport based upon if Blacks were more likely to be college athletes in that sport relative to Asians. Controlling for the individual or team nature of the sport had no significant effect on the relative numbers of either Blacks or Asians in that sport. They suggest the masculinity of a sport predicted the relative number of Black and Asian college athletes within that sport. It is suggested that categorization takes places on the basis of gender before race (Galinsky et. al., 2013). The researchers note the gender content of racial stereotypes is not static, thus, their discussion represents a contemporary context within the United States. However, their research is limited to Black and Asian racial identities.

Zheng (2016) expands on the realm of gendered races relevant to female Asian experiences. Asians as a racial group are stereotyped as feminine, and women are sanctioned to a single standard of the feminine performance perpetually inferior within patriarchal hegemony. Moreover, hegemonic femininity is a handmaiden to hegemonic masculinity (Chou,

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<sup>4</sup> (380,475/504,119) derived from 2000 U.S. census dating portraying Asian wives and White husbands.

<sup>5</sup> (27,520/21,992) derived from 2000 U.S. census dating portraying Asian wives and Black husbands.



2012). Thus, Zheng (2016) suggests a “double feminization” of the Asian woman which in turn castrates Asian men. The sexual capital of Asian women is fueled through processes of othering and objectification distinct, but simultaneously valorizing, concerning race and gender. Sexual images and stereotypes are embedded in ethnic images and stereotypes (Nagel, as cited in Chou, 2012). Fetishizing Asian women on account of their race, preying on their perceived assumed femininity, is depersonalization conflated with social progress dependent on controlling images. For Asian women, navigating sensitive spaces of heteronormative attraction and intimacy always involves the consideration of race in ways that White women do not experience, at least not on account of their whiteness (Zheng, 2016). Thus, Asian women’s presumed unlimited sensuality threatens the established order of Western patriarchy positing White woman as the embodiment of ideal femininity. Cho (1997) details, “Asian women as subordinate to Whites because of their race and enslaved to Chinese men because of their gender” (p. 188). They imbue Oriental elements that suggest a level of “primitiveness” submitting a perennial desire to be sexually conquered. Moreover, hegemonic masculinity utilizes Asian woman’s femininity as a point of reference for its masculine performance. Further, the purity myth within patriarchy constitutes Asian women’s bodies and sexuality as intrinsic to their sense of morality.<sup>6</sup>

Mental and emotional bandwidth is required, strained, and tested when distinguishing genuine interest from interest resting on fabricated constructions of an othered person (Chou, 2012). The synergetic attributes of docility and exoticness attributed to Asian women, confers Asian women as a malleable vessel for male domination. Their

“submissiveness” maintains the fundamental attraction of sexual domination aligning with the passive framework of womanhood within hetero patriarchy.<sup>7</sup> The sexual capital of Asian women titillates an equilibrium of Asian femininity that is erotically stimulating, yet, innately subservient. Asian women are grounded in “essential” Asian purity and simultaneously endorsed by boundless promiscuity. While the co-existence of idealized attributes of purity and promiscuity formulate a great concupiscence, Asian women’s intense “promiscuity” condones sexual conquer and contaminates White frameworks of idealized sexuality. Yellow fever is not an exclusive preference as attraction towards Asian women does not necessarily obstruct attraction towards women with different racial/ethnic backgrounds. More so, it can be conceptualized as forms of attraction e.g., romantic, sexual, intimate influenced by Asian women’s ethnicity, gender, and nationality. Yellow fever is colloquially used to reference male, heterosexual attraction and pursuit of Asian women.

### INTERRACIAL INTIMACY

Chou (2012) depicts of all the races, Asian American women are the most likely to marry outside of their race. Further, they make up 75% of these Asian American intermarriages (Chou, 2012). Asian Americans occupy a unique racial location as they are coined honorary Whites within the contemporary “post-racial” context of the United States. Zheng (2016) further contests that because of their positive associated stereotypes, Asian Americans often remain invisible within mainstream narratives of different forms of racist discrimination and prejudice faced by more conspicuously marginalized groups such as Blacks and Latinx. Interracial relationships are often marked as promising indicators of the elimination of

women equating inaction, expressed as chastity, to their morality. This suggests women are not moral actors and are evaluated by the ethics of passivity.

<sup>6</sup> The purity myth refers to the perception of women’s value as inextricable from their bodies. Further, it denotes their ability to be moral actors is dependent on their sexuality (Valenti, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Valenti’s (2009) passive framework of womanhood confers the maintenance of “purity” is of paramount value ascribed to

racism (Nemoto, 2004). However, others contest that racist sensibilities can motivate interracial intimacy. Racist sensibilities refer to the attitudes and behaviors influenced, consciously or sub-consciously, by race. More specifically, intermarriage between Asian Americans and Whites is explained as the “material outcome of an interlocking system of sexism and racism” (Hamamoto, 1992, p. 42, as cited in Nemoto, 2004). Interracial intimacy as a symbol of racial progression has committed the institution of marriage and dating culture to blindly accept racially integrated relationships as representations of unity and equality. “Post-racial” America conflates partner union with political unity, arguably more so within environments and relationships of intimacy. Nevertheless, while marriage may shrink social distance between partners, it does not eliminate the salience of racial difference for their natal families, the broader society, or even the partners themselves (Childs 2005; Chong 2013; Root 2001; Song 2009; Steinbugler 2012; Vasquez 2015, as cited in, Shiao, 2017).

The racial location of Asian Americans in close proximity to White males regard female Asian American interracial intimacy as the desire to marry “up” and “out of” their race in terms of cultural hierarchy (Nemoto, 2004). White male occupation of the superordinate position can explain motivations for Asian American women’s exogamy as economic and cultural. Male white partners do not merely imbue preferential attitudes for Asian American women as love and attraction are shaped by Western male hegemony. Appeal for Asian women is often “*because she is Asian or in spite of it*” (Chou et. al., 2015, as cited in Zheng, 2016). Asian women are presumed to embody excessive sexuality and unconditional will against a White female norm (Woan, 2008). This process of othering alienates and holds Asian American women to an alternative standard relative to white femininity while eroding their sense of self-agency. The construction of white forms of gender as normal

and superior posits Asian women in contrast to White women (Takinami, 2016; Chou, 2012).

The growing attraction for Asian American women can be accredited to the White women’s liberation movement during the 1970’s (Woan, 2008). Moreover, as White women were criticized for being “radical and career-oriented,” Asian women served as the celebrated antithesis to the White American women. (Woan, 2008). Takinami (2016) writes that by “casting Asian women as too feminine and Black women as not feminine enough, both conceptions serve to construct White forms of gender to be ‘normal’ and superior.” As the role of White men is constructed to epitomize an ideal of masculinity and fatherhood, domesticated White women are also protected through racial privilege and ideal embodiment of femininity (p. 15). Ultimately, Asian American women are particularly valued in a sexist society because they are discerned to be the antidote to visions of White liberated career women (Woan, 2008).

The reviewed literature on Asian American women deconstructs the misconceived “compliment” of their one-dimensional hyper-feminized and hyper-sexualized stereotypes. Because its genesis lies within an ethnosexual perspective created by and for Western consumption, symbolic violence against Asian American women is distinguishable in its ambiguity and positive disguise in proximity to other women of color’s experiences and identity. Expressing a preference for members of another racial group, especially if one is White, is morally objectionable regardless if it is reliant on positive or negative stereotypes. In the U.S.’s contemporary political environment which promotes color-blindness and Asian American’s racial location deemed as surrogate Whites, Asian American women face an enshrouded journey towards liberation.

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The purpose of this section is to provide a historical account of the racially gendered

archetypes which are later discussed relative to the Atlanta Spa Shootings. Further, this review politicizes the origin of stereotypes towards Asian women as engendered through military prostitution, perpetuated by Asian sex tourism, and valorized through U.S. anti-Asian miscegenation and immigration policies. Moreover, Asian female sexuality as “immoral and lewd” (“Page Law,” 2019) are echoed throughout this paper regarding Asian women as temptresses. The presented historical background demonstrates the fluency of racial sexism through domains of the institution of marriage, militarism, sex, and immigration policy.

This historical account explores the socio-political relationship involving intimacy between Asian American women and White men. This background is supplemental to the case study as it establishes undertones of racial-sexual imperialism which has manifested into Yellow Fever and salient patterns of intermarriage among Asian American women. Content that will be analyzed are sourced from the University of Louisville Library including books and articles pertaining to Orientalism, the genesis of Asia America, and Asian American women published since the 1970’s. This research should be focused on discerning meaning through a relational process concerning the intersection of race and gender. I look for themes related to racially gendered stereotypes of Asian American women and analyze relationships between those themes. Theories that may be explored include critical race theory,<sup>8</sup> racial triangulation theory,<sup>9</sup> and assimilation theory.<sup>10</sup> Although these theories

are applicable, the main theory in which this study is dependent upon is Orientalism theory.

### **MILITARY PROSTITUTION**

Military prostitution refers to the system of prostitution and related forms of sex labor consumed by military forces (Lee, 2007). Interactions often take place between indigenous women of East Asia and military men of the West fixated within the military industrial complex (Chou, 2012). East Asian wars including the Korean War, Vietnam War, and WWII delegated male presence into the geo-political context between primarily heterosexual White men and indigenous women and girls. Woan (2008) explains that, “Although prostitution around any U.S. military base is commonly seen, military prostitution around Asian Pacific bases occurs in a colonial context, which largely distinguishes it from such prostitution in the U.S. and Western locations” (p. 285). Thus, the grounding theory applicable and relevant to the deconstruction of female Asian “controlling images” (Collins, 2002) concerns the scope of Orientalism (Said, 1978). Moreover, the establishment of the “Orient” concerns the Western construction of the “East” by and for the consumption of the “West.” Thus, countries of Asia are relegated as underdeveloped spaces to be conquered in terms of militarization and sexual domination.

The term, “sexual slavery” popularized by feminist Kathleen Berry (1984, 94 as cited in Kempodoo), refers to conditions which women endure under patriarchy predicated on the assertion that sex is the primary basis for power and authority within society. However,

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<sup>8</sup> Critical Race Theory is conceptualized as a set of principles grounded in U.S. legal scholarship to analyze racialized social systems and foregrounding intersectionality (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Crenshaw, 1991 as cited in Christian, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Racial Triangulation Theory argues that Asian Americans are racialized relative vis-à-vis Blacks and Whites within a field of racial positions. The field is composed of two dimensions: “the ‘superior/inferior’ axis refers to the process of racial valorization, by which groups are ranked

hierarchically based on cultural and/or racial grounds; the ‘insider/foreigner’ axis refers to the process of civic ostracism or to what extent a group is considered to be unassimilable as opposed to being considered ‘insiders’” (Xu & Lee, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Assimilation Theory refers to the decline, and subsequent disappearance, of an ethnic/racial distinction and cultural and social differences it expresses (Alba & Nee, 1997).

Kempadoo (2001) explains that: Reducing sex work to a violence inflicted upon women due to notions of a universality of patriarchy and masculinist ideologies and structures, or through the privileging of gender as the primary factor in shaping social relations, dismisses the great variety of historical and socio-economic conditions, as well as cultural histories, that produce sexual relations and desire. (p. 38)

It is understood that sexual labor for Asian women is discernable from sex labor conducted in a Western context by White women. Asian sexual labor entails socio-cultural experiences that are induced by varying geo-political conditions between Asia and the United States involving forces of imperialism, militarism, and racism (Kempadoo, 2001). While these conditions do not preclude coercion, they offer a more accurate account of Asian sexual labor that dismisses the notion of a universally understood expression of prostitution. Moreover, the global arena of sex trade is not always defined by the sex act itself, but rather the conditions that sex workers encounter often on the basis of survival and livelihood (Kempadoo, 2001).

Militarism refers to the ideology of a growing military influence in national and international affairs characterized by the instrumental use of force of prevalence and political power, especially in civilian affairs (Thee, 1977). Thus, militarism is understood positioned in relation to gendered nationalism, international politics, and sexuality which construct and maintain the system of military prostitution in accordance with the global sex trade (Lee, 2006). Further, gendered nationalism confers that discourse surrounding the nation or sense of nationalism adhere to male interests simultaneously employed as justifiable trends upholding hegemonic masculinity (Lee, 2006).

In regard to Orient women, Western conquest or physical control of the "East" is transcribed in terms of sexual consumption. Woan (2008)

confers that, "When women's sexuality is surrendered, the nation is more or less conquered.' Thus, the sexual conquest of Asia's women correlates with the conquest of Asia itself" (p. 282). Both Asian nations and U.S. militants commodify Asian women's bodies in exchange for economic, cultural, and political capital (Lee, 2007). Further, military control utilizes Asian women's presumed subjectivity as key in formulating a symbolic and political penetration of the "other." Ralston explains:

"Military masculinity is both reinforced and defined within and against her 'otherness.' She represents the racial inferiority of non-whites, the sexual inferiority of women, and the heterosexuality that makes her sexual submission to the "Military Man" natural and justified. (703)

Military prostitution as an androcentric institution functions to exploit and subordinate Asian women. The gendered nation fuses with gendered globalization and capitalism along a stream of cultural asymmetries which masculinity and femininity relevant to military prostitution is dependent upon. Boundaries of the nation and its penetration by external military forces illustrate how interpersonal transactions between military men and Asian female prostitutes are secured through their relational gender performances. Western desire for domination of the Orient woman simultaneously ostracizes and hyper-feminizes an exotic figment portrayed as a necessity for stationed men (Woan, 2008).

### **SEX TOURISM IN EAST ASIA**

Sex tourism refers to the industry of consensual and non-consensual work of sexual services including prostitution, trafficking, sex entertainment, etc. most prominently taking place in "exotic" (i.e., "Third World") countries (Lee, 2007; Kempadoo, 2001). Western conception of Asia denotes "underdevelopment" as key in formulating its feminine, thus, feeble features. Tourism in Asia has largely appealed to Western androcentric audiences with sexual



desire as means of attraction. Moreover, the sex tour industry that sprouted in East Asia was a result of American military presence in tandem with state complicities facilitated by Asian governments as a source of economic production (Woan, 2008; Kempadoo, 2001). Sex tourism in Asia relies upon the countries' sexual capital where Asian governments deliberately rely upon the historical racial sexualization of Asian women (Kempadoo, 2001). Moreover, it's understood that "perpetrators of violence against Asian women can be members of their own ethnic communities" (Abraham, 2000 as cited in Hwang, 2021, p. 568). While Asian men are also feminized on account of their race, Asian masculinity is constructed through male domination regarding their complicity with hyper-sexualized stereotypes of Asian women. While sex tourism in East Asia undertones the central force of Western, White men onto Asian women, this does not preclude the acquisition of the tropes involving Asian women by Asian men perpetuated within the sex tourism industry. "Comfort stations" refers to full-scale military brothels established by Japanese imperial rule during the 1930's and 1940's (Lee, 2006; Kempadoo, 2001). Thus, "comfort women" has been widely used in relation to sexual slavery "drafting" women from Korea, China, Taiwan, Indonesia, Thailand, Japan, and the Philippines (Kempadoo, 2001). Other sex institutions include the proliferation of Rest and Recreation or Rest and Recuperation (R&R) centers. These included signed agreements between Thailand, Hong Kong, and the Philippines as their governments agreed to provide R&R centers for U.S. military personnel (Ralston, 1998, p. 693). These centers and stations were common places for military personnel to consume sexual services and/or performances of Asian indigenous women.

Colonization of Asian countries is further valorized by the colonization of female Asian bodies. Lee (2007) posits that, "The instrumentalization of women's sexuality for the use of the military originating during Japanese

colonial rule system laid the basis for U.S. policy (p. 453). Government complicity of Asian governments including, South Korea and Japan, in tandem with U.S. imperialist influences reflect the synergetic forces reliant upon the hyper-sexualization and fetishization of Asian American women. Moreover, Asian women are often stereotyped in two main ways: "the 'duplicitous dragon lady' or 'lotus blossom'; the latter including China Doll and Geisha girl" (Ralston, 1998, p. 686). Further, while *geisha* translates to "arts person," the use of "geisha girl" is understood in terms of the realm regarding sexuality as performance and entertainment don't always denote the act of prostitution. However, the conditions of both concern exchange of sexual capital presumed inherent to the feminine performance.

### U.S. ANTI-ASIAN POLICY

The United States has preserved anti-Asian sentiment through policy regarding immigration, naturalization, and interracial marriage. U.S. legislative processes have mediated an ostracized, yet erotically desirable, narrative of Asian American women. Anti-miscegenation laws and contemporary salient trends of interracial, heterosexual marriage involving Asian American women are both predicated upon gendered racial stereotypes. Restrictive naturalization targeted the Chinese in 1870 upon the amended Naturalization Act of 1790 denying Chinese immigrants naturalization and extending the right only to African Americans (Abrams, 2005). Throughout the 1850's, Chinese laborers were accused of performing the type of slavery known as coolie labor: "indentured servitude through long-term labor contract" (Abrams, 2005, p. 651). Abrams (2005) explains that anti-Chinese labor sentiment "linked the practice of indentured servitude explicitly both to an undermining of white labor and of bedrock principles of American democracy" (p. 652). Further coolie labor was posited as antithetical to the U.S. enterprise of free labor. U.S. postwar self-image as a free nation utilized the abolition of slavery towards racial justification for anti-



Chinese politics (Abrams, 2005). Chinese men were later blamed by White laborers for the economic decline experienced in California during the 1870's (Abrams, 2005). White fear of Chinese men taking away their place in the labor force foregrounded nativist politics including "Yellow Peril" propaganda.

The first restrictive federal immigration law in the United States was the Page Law of 1875 which Abrams (2005) explains, "banned the immigration of women who had entered into contracts for 'lewd and immoral purposes,' made it a felony to import Asian women into the United States for purposes of prostitution and included enforcement mechanisms specifically targeting Chinese women" (p. 643). This statute further legitimized Asian women's bodies as a political playground homogenizing all Chinese women as prostitutes (Takinami, 2016). As Chinese male immigration remained permissible due to their labor utility, the U.S. capitalist economic conditions at the time were met (Takinami, 2016). While the Page Law purportedly hindered trafficking of Asian women (Cho, 1997), the anti-Asian immigration impetus concluded they would "bring in 'especially virulent strains of venereal diseases, introduce opium addiction, and entice young white boys to a life of sin'" (Chou, 2012, p.16). Further, Congress excluded Asian women by defining them as outside the boundaries of legal marriage while simultaneously creating an environment of state-controlled sexuality for Asian women (Abrams, 2005; Chou, 2012). The protective sphere of marriage, racially withheld from Asian women, relegated them as prostitutes by default. The scarce number of Asian women in proportion to Asian men permitted into the United States placed borders within exogamic and endogamic intimacy.

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 allowed the United States to "regulate, limit, or suspend" immigration of Chinese laborers (Abrams, 2005, p. 695). While the Page Law targeted Chinese women, the Chinese Exclusion Act extended into the male labor force further

valorizing anti-Chinese sentiment. Further, this legislature invoked stereotypes of Chinese men to be sexually deviant bachelors preying on middle-class White women (Kwon, 2011). Eugenicist ideologies brought forth anti-miscegenation laws involving Asian women and men fearing biological reproduction. Thus, interracial or endogamic behaviors within U.S. borders were thought to subsequently foster integration of Asian culture into the Western political landscape (Kwon, 2001; Abrams, 2005).

The institution of family employs rationale for familial protection and the notion of civilization through established borders (Turner, 2020). Moreover, interracial marriage was presented as the means for immigration regulation. Abrams (2005) goes onto describe family as:

The quintessential symbol of localism – a private phenomenon that, while it may mimic the power dynamics of the public sphere, is nonetheless fundamentally separate. Yet regulation of marriage and the family and the implementation of population policy are at the root of much of American immigration. (Hasday, 1998, as cited in Abrams, 2005, p. 647)

Asian American women and wives are held to Western ideals of family and domesticity. Thus, their "alien" status delineates them as un-assimilable as the threat of ethnic and racial reproduction was presumed antithetical to American democracy (Turner, 2021; Kwon, 2011).

Nevada became the first state to enact anti-miscegenation laws specifically between Asians and Whites in 1861 (Sohani, 2007). Violation of this misdemeanor resulted in imprisonment between one to two years (Sohani, 2007). Further, inter-cohabitation and fornication faced imprisonment between one to six months and/or a fine between one hundred dollars to five hundred dollars. Idaho, Arizona, Oregon, California, Utah, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, South Dakota, Wyoming, Virginia, Georgia, and Maryland were of the

states to establish state Asian anti-miscegenation legislature leading up to 1935 (Sohani, 2007). Over the next century, anti-miscegenation laws and naturalization laws restricted Asian intermarriages. The National Origins Act of 1924 deemed all persons of all Asian nationalities ineligible for naturalization prohibiting entrance for returning and new Asian immigrants (Kwon, 2001). However, Asian women married to American men were qualified with “non-quota immigrant” status allowing their migration between their origin countries and the U.S. to remain unaffected

(Kwon, 2001).

This background explores the construction of racially gendered stereotypes concerning Asian women engendered and reified through military prostitution, Asian sex tourism, and U.S. anti-Asian miscegenation and immigration policies. It is understood that the hyper-sexualized and hyper-feminized stereotypes imposed upon Asian women which dictated their immigration and marriage states in the U.S. are the same narratives which subject them to racial fetishization and scheme of sexual violence.

Figure 1.

Military Prostitution → Sex Tourism → U.S. Anti-Asian Policy → Yellow Fever and Interracial Intimacy  
*Figure 1 portrays how racially gendered stereotypes of Asian women are engendered and reified throughout different processes and trends.*

## METHODOLOGY

The proposed methodology aims to investigate how the media frames the racial gendering of Asian American women in the U.S. contemporary context. After reviewing the history of Asian sexual politics in regard to racial fetishization, I conducted a qualitative case study of media coverage on the 2021 Atlanta Spa Shootings. My study explores the media framing of race, gender, class, and other systems that characterize Asian women’s social locations. A qualitative study is most effective due to the explorative nature of this research. The in-depth scope of this study will aid in analyzing the complex and inextricable social factors that shape framing of Asian American women. As previously noted, this study primarily extends to women of East Asian descent. The value of this research is not to prove the existence of racism and sexism towards Asian American women despite the notion that Asian Americans are exempt from such systems of oppression. Instead, a qualitative evaluation proves most useful in investigating how these systems manifest in ideologies on Asian feminist traits. Exploring female Asian American experiences through the investigation of the Asian sex industry, racial fetishization, and interracial intimacy provides

leverage on the larger topic of controlling images as a violent mechanism of upholding oppressive systems.

Scholars who have previously studied this topic have taken similar qualitative approaches including in-depth interviews, content analyses, and questionnaires. This study utilizes both a case study and content analysis approach in an attempt to sufficiently capture the complexity of framing surrounding Asian American women. This study asks three primary research questions:

1. How does the media frame the racial obscuration of Asian American women?
2. How does the media frame the racial gendering of Asian American women?
3. What are the implications of racially gendered stereotypes for Asian American women in a U.S. “post-racial” context?

A historical background is structured to establish the premise of the preceding case study.

The conducted case study examines the connection between the violence of racial fetishization and news framing the March 2021 Atlanta Spa Shootings using nationally sourced newspaper articles released between March to

October 2021. When coding the newspaper articles, I used themes of race, gender, and hyper-sexualization based on my review of the literature and historical background. Thematic content analysis is appropriate as it enables primarily race and gender related elements to guide the investigation within Asian American women's social position that may provide further explanation to larger social structures and concepts. I anticipated finding trends of othering and ethnosexual objectification portrayed throughout existing scholarship and secondary data, which connect to historical and political narratives that continue to capitalize off Asian American women's social position in the contemporary context of the United States.

### **SAMPLING PHASE**

I utilized purposive sampling of online newspaper articles on the March 2021 Atlanta Spa Shootings published between March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and October 2021 to analyze racial gendering of Asian American women. This purpose of this non-probability sampling method is to select articles relevant to the three research questions. Articles were sourced from national online newspaper publications with the aim to capture mainstream media's narrative on the shootings. Further, a small number of articles were located through hyperlinks within other articles.

The sample criteria I developed aimed to determine a relevant and manageable sample. First, I chose articles from national newspaper publications. National newspapers were conceptualized as any serial publication that is widely nationally circulated throughout the United States based on the total digital population of readers in thousands. The data measuring the total number of unique visitors was collected by the Pew Research Center during January 2015. This study aimed to utilize the top 10 publications listed including Yahoo-ABC News, CNN Network, NBC News Digital,

Huffington Post, CBS News, USA Today Sites, BuzzFeed, The New York Times Brand, Fox News Digital Network, Mail Online/Daily Mail. However, only 8 out of 10 publications were used in the final sample excluding BuzzFeed and Fox News. Second, articles must include discussions pertaining to race, gender, or sex, which I determined after conducting the following search strategies.

I began by searching "Atlanta Spa Shootings" in each of the news publication websites.

As the focus of this paper involves race, sex, and gender, I added keywords of "misogyny" and "racism" to "Atlanta Spa Shootings" in the titles of news articles within each publication website to narrow relevancy regarding trends of racial gendering observed through the literature review. The Huffington Post site did not present a search option; thus, articles were derived from a Google search placing "Huffington Post" before each of the aforementioned keyword searches. News publication sites that included a filter feature were adjusted to display news stories. I narrowed my search by skimming articles listed on the first five pages of search results keeping a manageable sample size in mind. Further, I selected articles that included any of the three keyword searches in the title or short description and that discussed either race or gender relevant to the intersectional focus of this paper. I skimmed articles for discussions on stereotypes of Asian women and took notes on what degree race, gender, and/or sex related material was mentioned. My notes included whether or not articles discussed only one or a combination of the aforementioned topics. Other articles that I included in my final data sample were located through hyperlinks within articles from my initial keyword searches, as noted in Table II. The aforementioned keywords and established criteria yielded a total of 15 (n=15) articles.



								Time s		
“Atlanta spa shootings”	2	1*	0	1**	1	1	0	1	0	0
“Atlanta spa shootings racism”	0	1	1	0	1	1*	0	1	0	0
“Atlanta spa shootings misogyny”	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Table 3. \*Articles were found through hyperlinks within an article found using the keyword searches. \*\*Article was found through Google search engine.

**DATA COLLECTION PHASE**

After narrowing the sample to fifteen articles in the above news publications, I read all articles in their entirety. I noted their respective dates of publishment, thus, generating a timeline of the newspaper coverage in correspondence to the ongoing trial developments. Further, I took notes on the following themes and questions: How are the female Asian American victims depicted? Is race, sex, or gender discussed? If so, how and to what extent is race, gender, or sex being related to the shootings?

**CODING AND DATA ANALYSIS**

The coding phase of this study employed a content analysis of the collected data. Content analysis refers to the systematic and categorical approach for determining trends, patterns, frequencies, relationships, structures, and discourses of textual information (Mayring,

2000; Pope *et al.*, 2006; Gbrich, 2007, as cited in Vaismoradi *et. al.*, 2013). This study conducts a thematic content analysis understood as a descriptive analysis of relatively comprehensive units of qualitative data such as themas, themes, or combined categories (Anderson, 2007 & Murray, 1943; Holsti, 1969; Aron, 1950, as cited in Smith *et. al.*, 1992).

I used the coding software, Quirkos, to conduct all coding of the data. A deductive coding approach was employed in this study to build upon previous literature. I created a list of seven codes before conducting the thematic content analysis following reoccurring themes observed within existing literature regarding the construction of the Orient woman. Each code pertains to one of the three research questions and was assigned to the broad themes of race, gender, and hyper-sexualization.

Table 4. Article Codes

Research Question	Theme	Code	Description	Components	Examples	Quotation
RQ1: How are Asian American women racially obscured?	Race	Racial bias	Motivation on the basis of differentiated races	Actions, attitudes, or behaviors grounded in racial stereotypes, tropes, or narratives.	Racial motivation Racist Racism Racial factor Racial influence	“Their investigation did not show Long had any bias or prejudice against Asians, and so prosecutors would not have sought a hate crime



				Can be subconscious or conscious.		enhancement based on race” (CNN, July 2021).
	Race	Xenophobia	Prejudice of others perceived to be foreign.	Characterized by influences of imperialism differentiating characteristics associated outside of one’s national borders.	Western imperial/colonial influence or context Foreign(er)	“The cultural view of Asians as foreigners and all of us being the same wasn’t created by the pandemic” (USA Today, March, 2021).
	Gender	Gender bias	Motivation on the basis of differentiated genders.	Actions, attitudes, or behaviors grounded in gender stereotypes, tropes, or narratives. Can be subconscious or conscious.	Misogyny Sexism Sex Patriarchy	“There is a long arc of racialized sexism, racialized misogyny that’s directed at Asian American women that’s at play” (CBS, March, 2021).
RQ2: How are Asian American women racially gendered?	Gender	Sex work	Labor of sexual entertainment/services consumed in exchange of money, goods, or capital.	Consensual and non-sexual acts.	Prostitution, pornography	“Racist and sexist concerns that Chinese “prostitutes” would bring in “especially virulent strains of venereal diseases ... and entice young white boys to a life of sin” (NBC, March 2021).
	Gender	Fetish	Desire contingent upon its abnormal degree or specific attributes.	Abnormal degree is understood as the guiding and/or central precursor to desire.	Yellow Fever Racial preference Racial gendering	“The fetishization of Asian women, and a corresponding emasculation of Asian men, have long histories shaped by United States law and policy” (NY Times, March, 2021).
What are the implications of racially gendered stereotypes for Asian American	Hypersexualization	Submissive	Compliance of action, behavior, attitude in accordance with dominant instruction of other(s).	Readily available to receive outside influences or conditions (e.g., responsibility, control).	Docile	“It also singled them out as exotic and both sexually submissive and oversexed” (Huffington Post,) March, 2021.

women in a U.S. “post-racial” context?	Hyper - sexualization	Exotic	Different from the usual contents of exposure	Perceived to be foreign or unusual	Erotic Temptress	“Prostitution industry that provided inexpensive sex to American servicemen in Korea, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, compounding stereotypes of Asian women as exotic sex objects or manipulators trying to entrap American husbands” (NY Times, March, 2021).
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Table 4. Code report used in qualitative analysis.

Table 5: Frequency Table

Code	Racial Bias	Xenophobia	Gender Bias	Sex Work	Fetish	Submissive	Exotic
Frequency	81	17	85	32	14	7	8

Table 5 depicts the frequency of the seven codes observed within the data.

**METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS**

The limitations of this study involve limited timeframe of the study. The legal proceedings of the spa shootings are ongoing. However, this sample of news articles is limited to seven months of data after the March 16, 2021 shootings. Recent developments of the past five months are not covered due to the timeline of this study. An additional limitation concerns the use of purposive sampling which subjects the validity of this study to researcher bias. However, the purposive sampling approach was adopted due to the research questions and the nature of this case study’s structure. Finally, the sampling process is inconsistent due to the

single Google search of Huffington Post’s newspaper publications.

**FINDINGS**

**RACIAL OBSCURIFICATION**

The model minority myth provides insight to how East Asian Americans are racially obscured through positive narratives. While racism in contemporary U.S. environment is largely understood in terms of negative assumptions and attitudes, racism towards Asian Americans must be analyzed through a U.S. “post-racial” lens to dissect the genesis of the model minority trope. This discussion assesses how the positive disguise of racism transpires in the context of the Atlanta Spa Shootings. Furthermore, this

review will provide an instrumental component of the main analysis regarding the juncture of race and gender.

Newspaper coverage portrays contention within the investigation regarding the motivation of the Atlanta Spa Shootings as the perpetrator and investigators assert only one motive is appropriate. ABC News (2020) reports, “The Cherokee County Sheriff’s Office said that ‘Long told investigators the crimes were not racially motivated... It may be targets of opportunity. We believe he frequented these places.’” All 15 articles analyzed describe the police investigation’s statement regarding the absence of racial motivation. Police went on to describe their investigation of interviews conducted with the shooter’s Asian and non-Asian acquaintances which influenced their decision of no racial bias by the shooter. Moreover, NBC explained that none of the interviewees had seen the shooter exhibit anti-Asian bias or previously acted in a “racially offensive way” throughout their personal interactions with him (Yuen, 2021). Yam (2021), from NBC, also reported looking into his background and personal emails as routine procedures when investigating for racial bias within crimes. Cherokee County District Attorney Shannon Wallace concluded the investigation by stating, “The evidence collected by the FBI and our sheriff’s office, failed to show any type of history this defendant had with any form of racism towards any other ethnicity,” as reported by NBC (Yam, 2020). While the investigation was searching for “racially offensive behavior,” Stanley Mark with the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund depicted in NBC’s, “Why Atlanta spa shooter's Asian 'acquaintances' can't tell us much about his racial biases,” explains that such behavior would still not be enough evidence to incite hate crime chargers (Yam, 2020). Further, the failure to find “racially offensive behavior” suggests that this assessment does not capture to inconspicuous expressions of racism towards Asian women.

The conclusive statement voiding the factor of racial motivation framed in the media,

illuminates the common experience of being excluded from mainstream racial discourse for Asian American women. Choimorrow, of the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum, depicted by CNN explains that “the narrative gets lost because we're seen as the 'model minority,' where they think we're all lawyers and doctors and engineers, but look into it a little deeper and many of the women in our community work in frontline service-based sectors” (Kaur, 2021). Ultimately, Asian American women are bounded by two stereotypes of the high achieving “model minority” and the perpetual foreigner which both serve to minimize claims of racism by the community”, as explained in USA Today’s article, “Who gets to decide what is racism, hate? Atlanta shootings renew debate over white violence, privilege” (Ramirez, 2021).

In addition to the negation of racial bias behind the shootings, the perpetrator’s motivations reported by NBC stated that “he was motivated by ‘sexual addiction’ ... Police claimed that Long said the spas were ‘a temptation for him that he wanted to eliminate’” (Walker et. al., 2021). This claim functions to absolve racial responsibility of the shooter by pathologizing his attack on Asian women. NBC confers this defense of eliminating women as temptations has been used by “white men to absolve themselves of responsibility for their behaviors and ‘as an excuse to pathologize misogyny’” (Yam, 2021). It is understood that Asian women’s “inherent” and unlimited sensuality created through Western hegemonic masculinity holds the six victims responsible as “temptresses” and for their own murder. Further, asserting that racial bias is mutually exclusive from a proclaimed sex addiction asserts that race, sex, and gender are impermeable separate entities that do not interact. Additionally, this suggests that the shooter’s “sex addiction” is not subject to the conjuncture of social forces concerning race and gender. This example from the data is understood by terms where race is stigmatized, and sex is pathologized. Sharp (2021) from ABC’s article, “Georgia sheriff's department under fire after official says spa shootings

suspect has ‘really bad day,’” further reports the country sheriff’s explanation for the shooter’s actions as being “pretty much fed up and had been, kind of, at the end of his rope. And yesterday was a really bad day for him, and this is what he did.” This justification trivializes the gravity of not only the attack, but the implications for Asian women. It displaces responsibility of the inherent social privilege of the shooter and reifies the normalized racial sexual violence towards Asian women.

The self-proclaimed statement declining racial bias from the shooter is supplementary to the racial obscuration of Asian women. The model minority stereotype is conveniently applied to demean other communities of color’s achievements and efforts, thus, predicated upon Asian women’s assimilative path towards material success. Yet, the model minority also diminishes the negative racial implications posited towards Asian women, in this case a murderous attack. The model minority obscures the implications of this myth for Asian women as their proximity to White standards of success operates to excuse the negative expression of racism. Although the female Asian victims were service workers, the social implications of the model minority narrative still influence the lack of visibility concerning race issues in the media centering Asian American women’s perspectives. Further, as discussed throughout the literature and historical background, tropes which influence Asian women’s experiences are always at least racially gendered. For Asian women, neither race nor gender surpasses one another. Rather, their Asian-ness and perceived femininity are reoccurring mechanisms which continually function in tandem.

### **RACIAL GENDERING**

This section discusses the main findings of this study regarding how media framing of racially gendered forces impacts Asian American women. The shooter’s claim delineating his victims as temptations is analyzed in regard to racialized sexual violence of Asian women’s historical fetishization and hyper-sexualization. In the political climate of the pandemic, CBS

portrays that Asian American women reported nearly 65% of anti-Asian hate incidents between March 2020 and March 2021 (CBS, 2021). However, the NY Times explains that “Hate crimes against Asian women are almost certainly undercounted... one reason is that those with a sexual dimension tend to be classified as sex offenses, in effect erasing the racial aspect” (Dewan, 2021). Thus, for Asian women racism and sexism remains evaluated as separate forces suggesting it must be one or the other and never both. Reporting hate crimes restrict Asian women between their Asian-ness and gender as irreconcilable thus, obstructing the pertinence of their intertwined social locations.

### **ASIAN WOMAN AS TEMPTRESS**

The media reports the racial gendering of Asian women as temptresses predicated on their compounded racial and gender locations. All 15 articles mentioned the perpetrator’s statement elaborating on self-proclaimed sex addiction where he told investigators that he saw the spas as ‘a temptation ... that he wanted to eliminate,’ as reported by NBC (Yam, 2021). The term “temptation” echoes the racialized archetypes of the dragon ladies and the lotus blossoms, whose value is only in relation to men’s fantasies and desires” (Yam, 2021). Racial gendering of Asian women concerns a particular form of oppression that is synergetic on the basis of their race and gender. Further, the article, “Racism, sexism must be considered in Atlanta case involving killing of six Asian women, experts say,” from NBC report that “what’s often lost in the discussion is how Asian women experience a very specific form of sexism, shouldn’t be conflated with the misogyny that other groups, like white women, may confront” (Yam, 2021). The existence of Asian American women in the United States has always been framed around the hyper-sexualization of their bodies and looks, reported by CBS (Sundby, 2021). Hyper-sexualization of Asian women is conducted in terms of their gender and “foreign” race. For example, Poo (2021) from USA Today explains that Asian women are painted



specifically as “forever foreign and not to be trusted, as objects of desire or servitude, never fully belonging or fully human.” This illustrates the tropes of submissiveness and foreignness imputed by their racially gendered social position. Asian women’s perceived foreignness operates as the fundamental rationale for their “attractiveness” subsequently, subjecting them to racialized sexual violence. The NY Times article, “How Racism and Sexism Intertwine to Torment Asian-American Women,” posit that their feminized foreignness embolden aggressors and as the object that won’t fight back (Dewan, 2021). Moreover, Asian women embody hyper-femininity adjunct to their perceived submissiveness on the basis of race, gender, and “foreignness.” While the Asian temptress’ “foreignness” galvanizes sexual attraction, it reveals the grounds upon which she is expendable. Further, the White male shooter’s description of his victims as eliminated temptations, imposes responsibility upon Asian women for White male rage. The claim of the victims as temptations, in consideration of the historical racially sexual vulnerabilities of Asian women preyed upon by White men, is a reminder of how cultural domination of the “East” motivates the sexual attraction for Asian women and transfers into the emission of physical violence. Western hegemonic masculinity is reified through the shooter’s claim as it permits White male privilege through homicide while foisting blame upon six Asian women even after their lives were taken.

CBS further explains that “Long blamed the victims for his inability to control his impulses” (2021). The media framing of the racially gendered impetus behind the shootings directs focus to the legacy of hyper-sexualized narrative of Asian women. Further, “killing Asian American women to eliminate a man’s temptation speaks to the history of the objectification of Asian and Asian American women as variations of the Asian temptress...” (Yam, 2021). The Asian temptress is bounded to male servitude and satiating sexual desires. Thus, “giving the impression that Asian women

are ‘just good for those certain things’ while perpetuating the stereotype of sexual deviants” (Yam, 2021). Desire for the Asian temptress is developed through her perceived foreignness eliciting an eroticized figment of the “unknown” which NBC describes as “exotic erotica, a fetish for Asian women” (Yam, 2021).

The Asian temptress is enveloped by “White American male fantasy” defined through the pursuit of the tantalizing imagery of Asian women, reports the Daily Mail (AFP, 2021). Thus, the legitimization of stereotypes around Asian women as exotic, hypersexualized and submissive. NBC notes they “create a perception that they are less of a threat and easier to take advantage of and that they aren’t going to fight back” (Yam, 2021). Moreover, the Asian temptress archetype regenerates the illusion of sexual access as her hyper-sexuality presupposes a required and warranted male consumption arranged through hetero patriarchy. In other words, perennial permission to Asian women’s bodies is granted to White male consumption. Consumption in the context of this study is understood as the White man’s murder of six Asian women. Racial gendering of Asian women in the media presents the permissible violence on account of their social positioning. Hyper-sexualization and hyper-feminization suggest hyper-submissiveness predisposing Asian women to combined social vulnerabilities contingent upon race and gender. USA Today writes, “When we accept that women of color are less valuable or more disposable, we also accept violence against them” (Poo, 2021). Delineating the female Asian victims as temptations, contextualized by their historical fetishization and hyper-feminization in accordance with White men, is understood as a violent expression of desire. Moreover, hyper-sexualization of Asian women is the rationale for both desire and murder.

## **SEX WORK**

The Atlanta Spa Shootings are an incident of race, gender, class, and sex work as Asian American womanhood has historically been equated with sex work which remains visible in



the discussion surrounding the Atlanta Spa Shooting victims explained by The Huffington Post (Wong, 2021). The shooter described receiving sexual services at the massage parlors prior to the shooting as depicted by CNN, however it is not confirmed that any of the three spas were illicit massage business (Walker et al., 2021). The NY Times recounts the Asian women in sex trade brought to the United States as brides where some of them who were later separated or divorced from their husbands started massage parlors has perpetuated the perception of all Asian run spas as illicit and the women who work in them as sex workers (Dewan, 2021). Further, suggesting these massage parlors provide sexual services is a racist assumption, stated by CNN, (Kaur, 2021) that “perpetuates the unconscious bias of prioritizing the perspective not of the victims but instead that of those who marginalize them” (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021, p. 570). This assumption functions to sustain the criminalization of sex work and exacerbated racial impacts which promoted the murder of six Asian women. As the Daily Mail reports, “the

shooter could have stopped at strip clubs, pornographic video stores or multiple shops lined with wall-to-wall dildoes, but he chose businesses where the employees were not just women but Asian women, not just Asian women but lower-wage Asian women in a fetishized profession” (Afp, 2021). Regardless if the shooter received sexual services prior to the shootings, attributing the victims to sex work and committing the killings to “punish sex industry workers” aims to chastise and police Asian female sexuality as explained by The Huffington Post and The New York Times (Faussett, 2021; Wong, 2021).

The targeting and murder of the Atlanta Spa victims is racialized just as much as it is gendered. The intersection of race and gender subjected six Asian women to the threat of hyper-sexualization exacerbated by their class and immigration positioning in the service sector. CNN describes that the perceptions of Asian and Asian American women as submissive, hypersexual and exotic can be

traced back centuries (Kaur, 2021). Further, Yam (2021) from NBC, explains that whether the shooter made a conscious or unconscious selection, he made a decision to attack Asian women within the same structures that reproduce dangerous tropes police Asian women on account of their perceived racially gendered position costing them their lives. While the female Asian victims of the Atlanta Shootings were employed within the personal services industry, the factor of class vulnerability further exacerbates the conditions of the environment exposing them to violence. CNN’s article, “Fetishized, sexualized and marginalized, Asian women are uniquely vulnerable to violence,” highlights that Asian women murdered were “working highly vulnerable and low-wage jobs during an ongoing pandemic speaks directly to the compounding impacts of misogyny, structural violence, and white supremacy” (Kaur, 2021). Race and gender are relational as the hyper-sexualized and fetishized stereotypes accelerate upon their convergence to antagonize Asian women.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR ASIAN WOMEN**

While police deny racial bias as a valid component of the Atlanta shootings, NBC contests that it is politically inaccurate to divorce race from the discourse, given the historical fetishization of Asian women (Yam, 2021). Thus, fetishization of Asian women are adopted and reproduced through heteronormative interactions with men of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, including Asian men explained in the NY Times (Dewan, 2021). The media portrayal by NBC reflects the power dynamic, present in the Atlanta Shootings, between Asian women and a White man evokes the social stain of normalized racialized sexism facing Asian women for more than a century (Yam, 2021). The NY Times mentions there are many women who have died of racialized sexual violence, but seldom has it been on the scale where the entire country is talking about it (Yam, 2021). NBC’s article, “Atlanta spa

shooting suspect's 'Bad Day' defense, and America's sexualized racism problem," expands on this by mentioning that police are "less likely to add 'hate crime' charges in cases of rapes and sexual assaults targeting Asian women, thus, valorizing the disengagement of race from sex ultimately reproducing gender difference and inequality directed towards Asian women. (Yuen, 2021). Moreover, the NY Times continues by describing racism often takes the form of unwanted sexual come-ons and racist sexual harassment (Yam, 2021). Whether the shooter believes his actions were racially motivated is irrelevant as the impact of the crime speaks for itself and the collective trauma it has incited among primarily East Asian American women. Consequently, the positive narrative of attraction, love, and desire yields a unique dilemma for Asian women when inquiring about the double-edged sword of the conditions of their "attractiveness."

CNN's article, "Prosecutor seeks hate crime charges, death penalty in Atlanta spa shootings," discusses that racial fetishization impelled the shooter's selected targets as his expression of them as "temptations" captures the historical fixation of Asia women formulated by White men (Walker et. al., 2021). Alleviation of "yellow fever" is expressed in terms of murder analyzed through the Atlanta Spa Shootings. NBC confers that the historical fetishization of Asian women, which has made them uniquely susceptible to sexual and physical violence, represents their lives as disposable (Yam, 2021). Fetishization of Asian women is racist, states the Huffington Post (Wong, 2021). Wong (2021) continues, by describing the depictions of Asian women in media and popular culture as "faceless, quiet and invisible, or as sexual objects." Nevertheless, yellow fever is not complimentary nor flattering as the attraction is contingent upon racially gendered fabrications. Racial fetishization of Asian women generates an oppressive channel of desire predicated upon their marginalized identities within the domain of heteronormativity that is in and of itself racist (Wong, 2021).

This research has displayed the social stain of racial fetishization, hyper-sexualization, and hyper-feminization of Asian women as observed in the literature. The Atlanta Spa Shootings involving a White man's murder of six Asian women valorizes the violence and constant threat articulated through attraction. The exotification towards Asian women is conflated with racial progression as it deviates from the mainstream conceptualization of racism as negative ideologies and behaviors. Military prostitution in East Asia facilitated by the United States government, whereby Asian governments remained complicit, has engendered stereotypes of Asian women as submissive, erotic, and inherently sexual. These have been reified through the sex tourism industry throughout East Asia, induced into U.S. policies, and perpetuated through accounts such as the 2021 Atlanta Spa Shootings. The discussed salient trends in the U.S. contemporary context of interracial intimacy regarding Asian women underscores the racially gendered desire for Asian women operating on fabricated archetypes. The heinous acts of the Atlanta Spa Shootings are an extreme expression of the hyper-sexualized tropes that haunt Asian women. Microaggressions towards, including "compliments," or murder of Asian women regarding their race and gender, overtly or covertly expressed, maintain the structures which reproduce the racist, sexist, and misogynistic desire for Asian women. The shooter's claim positing Asian women as villainous "temptresses" as grounds for their murder catalyzes an androcentric premise of death by desire.

## **CONCLUSION**

Positive stereotypes of Asian women are morally objectionable and discern different social implications depending on the social location of whom it is that employs such biases. To dispute this notion is to affirm racism within the U.S. contemporary context as a linear system indicated by explicit racial hatred and/or negative attitudes. Not only does this dissipate the fluid complexity of race in conjunction with

other systems of oppression, but also disperses opportunity for race analysis on how positive stereotypes of Asian Americans negatively impact themselves as a racial group and function to persecute other communities of color by harboring the landscape of “oppression Olympics” (Hancock, 2011). Further, positive stereotypes are relative to ideology of White male supremacy inherent to the capitalist U.S. system. While these stereotypes appear to be harmless and arguably beneficial, they ultimately perform to perpetuate the same systems of oppression that foster negative stereotypes towards other people of color. Asian female sexuality is bounded to the straitjacket of insatiable femininity characterized through hyper-sexualization providing the moral rationale for sexual violence and murder imposed upon Asian women. This manifestation of the Asian woman as temptress presents a threat to the established constructions of idealized White femininity and hegemonic masculinity. Because the female Asian sexuality is of abundance, it is deemed ultimately irreconcilable with hegemonic masculinity. Thus, racialized sexual violence is the process by which “social disorder” imputed by the Asian temptress is subsided. The sadist desire to “assist” society through sexual oppression and execution of Asian women, as depicted in the Atlanta Shootings, reestablishes the unequal power dynamic between White men and Asian women. The racial sexual violence between the White, male shooter and Asian female victims emulates the historically political continuum of ethnosexual violence and oppression foisted upon Asian women.

The salience of yellow fever romanticizes attraction for Asian women as trendy and celebrative of racial progression positioned in the current U.S. political climate. Yellow fever is legitimized as a morally acceptable expression of attraction and conflated with “anti-racist” attitudes. However, it is conferred that yellow fever is supplemental to color-blind ideology within the U.S. “post-racial” context. The assertion that yellow fever absolves or eradicates racist potential relocates dissonance

adhering to a positive racial script in contrast to the historical legacy of anti-miscegenation and anti-immigration within the U.S. Yellow fever centers the proponent being attracted inconsiderate to the implications for the recipient of attraction thus presenting a transaction that is fundamentally inequalitarian. “Compliments” of racial fetishization of Asian women are continually created and reproduced through constructed stereotypes. The conceptualization of compliments asserts a presumed notion of positively associated attributes or characteristics which are socially constructed and sanctioned. Racial fetish “compliments” towards Asian women pose an obligation of gratitude for the very elements which render their intersectional oppression. Positive stereotypes regarded as unarmful further perpetuate the institutional logic which polices Asian female sexuality. Eroticizing Asian women is voyeuristic inciting erasure of self-autonomy and consent. For Asian American women, “Hatred does not preclude desire. “Hatred legitimizes the violent expression of desire” (Cheng, 2021).

This study has examined how primarily East Asian women are racially gendered in terms of fetishization and model minority trope. An Orientalist lens provided the fundamental theory of this research which constructs Asian women in opposition to Western ideals. The Atlanta Spa Shootings have illuminated the specifically intricate processes of racial gendering that yield Asian women to racialized misogyny and sexism. Oppression of Asian American women is misconstrued with cultural and/or racial appreciation regarding the realm of attraction, thus, trivializing the potency of the intersectional mechanisms which police Asian female sexuality.

## STUDY LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this research involve the neglect of the social influences of immigration and class. While I touch on the factors of the victim’s class and immigration statuses, adequate discussion of how these components further interact with racially gendering of East

Asian American women is not provided. Thus, hindering a more extensive analysis of the exacerbated vulnerabilities the Asian Atlanta victims were subjected to. Moreover, this paper is confined to the domains of race and gender pertaining to Asian American women. However, this is not a comprehensive investigation of the

other relevant social locations occupied by female Asian identities which are re-contextualized when situated in accordance with class and immigration. Another limitation involves the small sample size which make my findings difficult to generalize.

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