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Shifting mediates gendered racial microaggressions and perceived racism among Asian American women

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Abstract

Introduction: Microaggressive attacks on Asian American women increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. The present study tested whether Asian American women's shifting, a coping strategy employed by some women of color to alter their self-presentation in response to perceived racism, mediated the association between gendered racial microaggressions and self-perceived subtle and blatant racism.

Methods: A convenience sample of 253 Asian American adult women completed the gendered racial microaggressions scale for Asian American women (GRMSAAW), the Asian American women's shifting scale (AsAWSS), and the subtle and blatant racism scale for Asian American college students (SABR-A²).

Results: Results from a structural equation model indicated a partial mediation effect; experiences with increased gendered racial microaggressions were associated with greater levels of shifting, which in turn, were associated with greater perceived subtle and blatant racism.

Discussion: These data extend our understanding of the shifting coping mechanism used by some Asian American

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women. Implications for clinical practice and future research are also discussed.

KEYWORDS

Asian American women, gendered microaggressions, perceived racism, shifting

1 | INTRODUCTION

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, racism against Asian Americans is increasing (Braun, 2021; Yam, 2021), and Asian American women, in particular are frequent targets of these attacks, relative to Asian American men (Horse et al., 2022). Moreover, overt racist attacks are often precipitated by subtler, brief, and commonplace variants known as racial microaggressions—that is, intentional or unintentional racial slights (K. Nadal et al., 2015; Sue et al., 2007). Racial microaggressions also appear to negatively impact Asian American mental health outcomes, self-esteem, and well-being (S. Lee & Waters, 2021; K. L. Nadal et al., 2012, 2014). Furthermore, there is considerable evidence suggesting reliable gender differences regarding exposure to microaggressions among Asian Americans, as men often experience more negative outcomes compared to women (Liang et al., 2009; Lui & Quezada, 2019; Ong et al., 2013; Wong-Padoongpatt et al., 2020). Although illuminating, this gender differential has contributed to a genuine paucity of published work that specifically focuses on how Asian American women cope with daily microaggressive assaults (Gamst et al., 2021; Keum et al., 2018).

In this current study, we examine the capacity of microaggressions to initiate subtle and blatant perceived racism in the context of a particular coping strategy, shifting, among Asian American women. The emerging literature indicates that women of color engage in shifting, a coping mechanism, in their social or interpersonal interactions with White Americans and involves the alteration or modification of one's self-presentation in response to perceived cultural cues or demands (Gamst et al., 2019, 2021; J. C. Johnson et al., 2016). In practice, these self-alterations may encompass changing one's hairstyle, or food selection, to altering one's tone of voice or emotionality (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

Shifting among Asian American women has been operationalized to include three forms (Gamst et al., 2021): white beauty conformity (WBC), which emphasizes internalized racist concerns about beauty techniques, values, and Westernized body ideals; bicultural shift (BS), which focuses on challenges involved in presenting one's "Asian" versus one's "American" identity (LaFromboise et al., 1993); Asian language/culture avoidance (AL/CA), which also may reflect internalized racist attitudes and involves avoiding speaking an Asian language or eating Asian foods in public, or "Americanizing" one's first name as a means of avoiding potential racial microaggressions that tend to stereotype them (Iwasaki et al., 2016).

Two conceptual frameworks were utilized to guide the present research: The Multicultural Assessment-Intervention Process (MAIP) model (Dana, 1993, 2000; Gamst et al., 2011) and intersectionality theory (Cole, 2009; K. Crenshaw, 1991; Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016; Mena & Quina, 2019). The MAIP framework began as a broad mental health service delivery model (Dana, 1993, 2000) and subsequently was expanded (Gamst et al., 2009, 2011) to encompass new predictive relationships among multicultural constructs and mental health outcomes. Of particular relevance are the links the MAIP outlines between acculturation, ethnic/racial identity, and perceptions of racism/discrimination (Gamst et al., 2011). Previous MAIP research has shown the utility of examining simultaneously respondent ethnic identity and acculturation status (Gamst et al., 2002, 2022) and racial identity and gendered racism (Young et al., 2019) among samples of Latinx, Asian American, and African American women, respectively. Subsequent expansion of the MAIP model and its multicultural status assessment component in particular (Gamst et al., 2011) has also enabled investigators to hypothesize additional predictive relationships

among cultural constructs and discrimination among Asian American women (Gamst et al., 2022) and Chinese international students (Chauv et al., 2022). Thus, through the MAIP's multicultural status assessment component, we identified Asian American women's gendered racial microaggressions (see Keum et al., 2018) as a possible associate of their perceived subtle and blatant racism (see Yoo et al., 2010) with shifting (Gamst et al., 2021) as a possible mediator. We believe it is reasonable to expect that daily perceived microaggressive assaults upon Asian American women may result in increased levels of self-appraisals such as shifting which in turn increasingly sensitizes these women to expectations of overt and subtle forms of racism in their immediate environment. As noted by previous scholars (Constantine & Sue, 2007), people of color are not a monolith in their experiences of microaggressions and perceived racism and their perceptions of microaggressions vary across members of this group. For example, someone with less racial consciousness might not perceive a microaggression in a negative light, and how a potentially microaggressive experience is interpreted makes all the difference. Thus, how individuals respond to said microaggression (e.g., by shifting or not) may be an important cue that signals (to themselves) whether racism was at play. Said differently, if a potentially microaggressive event occurs and a conscious behavioral change (i.e., shifting) occurs as a result, this will likely lead to perceptions that a racist interaction did indeed occur because it forced them to alter their self-presentation. While the MAIP model and intersectionality theory do not make explicit associative predictions among key variables, these frameworks have been successful in suggesting important possible associative relations between salient cultural variables. As Asian American women experience daily gendered racial microaggressions, they may feel compelled to shift or alter their external self-presentation to lessen the hurtful impact of these microaggressive assaults, which in turn, sensitizes them even more to their perceptions of racism and discrimination in their immediate environment.

We also employed intersectionality theory (Cole, 2009; K. Crenshaw, 1991; Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016; Mena & Quina, 2019) to help us identify and emphasize how multiple oppressions of Asian American women (e.g., sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism) are often simultaneously experienced (Lewis & Grzanka, 2016). Such an approach emphasizes contextual factors and lived experiences that may lead Asian American women to engage in shifting as a coping mechanism. Moreover, intersectionality theory is historically used to explain how women of color occupy society's margins and are subjected to multiple sources of subordination at the structural, political, and most relevantly to the present study, representational level (K. Crenshaw, 1991). The roots of intersectionality can be traced to Critical Race Theory (e.g., for a review, see Gillborn, 2015), with its precursors to US Black feminism and women of color activism, culminating in its current focus on critical interdisciplinarity, structural/systemic analysis, and social justice/political activism (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). Other work has specifically centered the unique oppression of Asian American women given their gender, race, and class due to assaults on an ideological, political, and economic level (Le Espiritu, 2008). Despite the unique histories that have defined different Asian subgroups Le Espiritu (2008) contends that Asian American women are often defined or racialized as one group and thus share many commonalities in their dealings with racism, patriarchy, and class.

Hence, intersectionality theory coupled with constructs identified by the MAIP framework (e.g., racial microaggressions, shifting, perceived racism) provide an opportunity to empirically explore complex cultural variable associations. Based on these conceptual frameworks, we briefly explore empirical relations between experiencing racial microaggressions and perceiving racism as well as between shifting and perceived racism, to identify possible correlates of perceived racism within this population.

2 | RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS AND RACISM

Microaggressions refer to a form of subtle but pervasive "everyday racism" that are frequently verbal or unconscious attacks based on social group membership (Alvarez et al., 2016; Endo, 2015; Pierce, 1974; Solórzano & Huber, 2020; Sue, 2010; Sue et al., 2007; Syed, 2021; Zucker et al., 2016). They include microassaults (explicitly derogatory attacks), microinsults (more subtle insults that demean a person's social group membership), and

microinvalidation (comments that undermine the life experiences of people of color; Sue et al., 2007). In contrast to blatant racism, microaggressions usually lack intentionality or awareness on the part of the perpetrator and may be arguably more common in modern-day interracial interactions (Dovidio et al., 2018). Given that the opportunity for these experiences to occur will only become more likely as society itself becomes more diverse, microaggressions can be more harmful than blatant racism (Robinson-Wood et al., 2015).

Borrowing from Critical Race Theory, Solórzano and Huber (2020) argued that microaggressions reflect the lived experience of people of color within the larger social context of race/racism and white supremacy (see also Sue, 2010). In their view, racial microaggressions are an extension of a larger system of institutional racism and “macroaggression,” or the ideologies that further systems of social dominance by one group over another. Consistent with one of the core tenets of Critical Race Theory, which says that racism is less of an individual/personal problem and more of a collective malaise perpetuated at all levels of a society's structures (K. W. Crenshaw, 2010), Pérez Huber and Solorzano (2015) posit that microaggressions are a prime example of a tool used by dominant groups to keep people of color in a position of disadvantage and exclusion.

The impact of microaggressions on people of color is clear. They predict negative physical and mental health symptoms (Lui & Quezada, 2019), particularly among African Americans (Bowleg et al., 2016; Hollingsworth et al., 2017; Lewis & Neville, 2015; Mercer et al., 2011; Torres et al., 2010), and Latinx individuals (K. L. Nadal et al., 2014; Rivera et al., 2010; Torres & Taknint, 2015; Yosso et al., 2009). Among Asian Americans, exposure to microaggressions have been examined within the context of general mental health issues (Kim et al., 2017; K. Nadal et al., 2015), well-being (Ong et al., 2013), rejection sensitivity (Wong-Padoongpatt et al., 2020), microaggressive themes (Sue et al., 2009), self-esteem (Thai et al., 2017), and depression (Choi et al., 2017).

A relatively limited number of studies have focused specifically on the effects of microaggressions on Asian American women. Those that do have referred to the phenomenon as gendered racial microaggressions and highlighted the ways in which their experiences of racism and sexism may mutually compound one another (Keum et al., 2018)—a point that proponents of intersectionality theory have long endorsed (K. Crenshaw, 1991). As a group, Asian women appear to be unique in their microaggressive experiences both in terms of its content (e.g., their eroticization—Sue et al., 2007) and consequence (e.g., to disordered eating and body image—Le et al., 2020). Given that (1) Asian Americans in general frequently are seen as the so-called “model minority” and (2) Asian American women in particular are seen as submissive, it is likely that this group may be more frequent targets of microaggressions than blatant racist attacks. Per the “model minority” myth, Asian Americans are seen as high achieving and hard working in academic contexts, but this stereotype not only limits their gains in other contexts and undermines the types of discrimination this group experiences (e.g., Suzuki, 1977; for a more recent discussion, see Tran & Birman, 2010).

Several studies have qualitatively examined the impact of perceived discrimination and/or microaggressions on Asian American women's well-being and mental health. For example, Asian American women are portrayed in highly sexualized and stereotypical contexts in the social and news media (Yamamoto, 2000). In addition to racist stereotypes (e.g., being criminals and bad drivers), they experience gendered racism (e.g., exoticization or rendered invisible) and family-related discrimination (differential treatment than male family members) (Mukkamala & Suyemoto, 2018). Young Asian American women with a history of self-harm/suicidality (Hahm et al., 2014), experience multiple types of “disempowering” parental styles (e.g., abusive, burdening, gender-prescriptive). Among Asian American women suicide survivors, the model minority myth creates unbearable stress and contributes to their experiences of being overlooked for mental health treatment and resources (Noh, 2018). Further qualitative evidence among Asian American adults indicated that many engage in and reproduce internalized racism which may be dismantled through exposure to ethnic education and coethnic experiences (Trieu & Lee, 2018). Lastly, Azhar et al. (2021) qualitatively examined Asian American and Pacific Islanders' (APIs) social media (Twitter) tweets for intersectional themes that converged on race, gender, and sexuality. Six themes emerged and included: (1) API women's exoticization, (2) API women's passivity, (3) API men as weak and asexual, (4) API women and men as

objects of racialized violence and sexual harassment, (5) queer APIs as objects of sexual harassment and violence, and (6) APIs as subjects of neocolonialist attitudes.

Recent quantitative evidence also supports much of these qualitative findings among Asian American women. For example, among a sample of Asian American women, Buchanan et al. (2018) found a positive association between gender harassment and depression and a positive relationship among unwanted sexual attention, sexual coercion, and racial harassment and posttraumatic stress. Keum, Wong, & Salim-Eissa (2022) demonstrated with a sample of emerging Asian American women that gendered racial microaggressions significantly predicted suicidal ideation. Internalized racism (i.e., self-negativity) also interacted with gendered racial microaggressions in predicting suicidal ideation. Keum and Wong (2022) using polynomial regression examined the congruence and discrepancy between frequency and stress appraisal of gendered racial microaggressions among a sample of Asian American women and examined how these attitudes were related to depression and internalized racism. Their results suggested that greater congruence between frequency and stress was positively associated with depressive symptoms and internalized racism. Similarly, G. M. Garcia et al. (2019) examined a cross-sectional sample of Asian and Pacific Islanders and reported a positive predictive relationship among racial/ethnic discrimination, internalized inferiority, and mental distress.

Recent theoretical conceptualizations and re-evaluations have elucidated the impact of microaggressions among people of color and the internalization of these racist stereotypes (David et al., 2019). Versey et al. (2019) advocated for the use of “appropriated racial oppression” as opposed to “internalized racism” to attempt to move the focus away from beliefs about individual's shortcomings and instead widen the scope to describe systems of oppression (i.e., White mainstream values) that foster racism. Toward this end, Campón and Carter (2015) developed a new measure called the appropriated racial oppression scale (AROS). The four dimensions of AROS discovered by Campón and Carter (2015) are assumed to be a function of direct and indirect negative stereotypical messages received by people of color that influences their self-image.

What remains unclear is whether the cumulative effects of these everyday experiences with microaggressions necessarily translates into perceptions of racism among Asian American women. After all, the ostensibly minor nature of some microaggressions remains one of their defining features. To our knowledge, no studies have examined the direct relation between experiences of microaggressions and perceived racism among this ethnic group. Although qualitative research on Black women have suggested that among members of that group, microaggressions are perceived as not only (blatantly) racist, but even more damaging than blatant racism (Robinson-Wood et al., 2015), no studies have examined whether Asian American women hold a similar level of race consciousness when processing their own experiences in this domain. This is especially important given that gender differences in perceived racism have been observed among Asian Americans (Liang et al., 2009).

3 | SHIFTING AND PERCEIVED RACISM

Shifting was selected as a possible mediator between gendered racial microaggressions and perceived racism among Asian American women due to their unique changes in behavioral responses (i.e., WBC, BS, and AL/CA) that was recently discovered (Gamst et al., 2021). Given the mounting evidence of the adaptiveness of shifting as a coping mechanism across other groups, the shifting responses of Asian American women most likely enable them to modify their reactions to perceived microaggressive threats from White Americans. For example, recent evidence indicated that acculturated African American women who were immersed in African American culture tended to shift more, which in turn was associated with greater perceived race-related stress (G. Gamst et al., 2020). Conversely, S. Garcia et al. (2022) found that Latinx women who were less acculturated to mainstream American culture were more likely to engage in shifting as a coping strategy, and in turn, were more likely to endorse marianismo beliefs. Recently, Gamst et al. (2022) reported that among their sample of Asian American women, both ethnic identity and shifting positively predicted racism-related stress. Pyke and Johnson (2003) provided additional

qualitative evidence of shifting among a sample of second-generation daughters of Korean and Vietnamese immigrants. From these studies, it appears that shifting is both a behavioral response to how these women are racially perceived in the presence of mainstream group members (e.g., microaggressive experiences), as well as prompting greater perceptions of being the target of racism. In other words, shifting may be a viable potential mediator when examining the association of gendered racial microaggressions and perceived racism among Asian American women.

One question that arises from the shifting literature is the degree to which it is adaptive. In other words, does shifting actually help women of color cope? Although the research on this is limited (particularly when it comes to Asian American women), other work has suggested that shifting has psychological costs. Among Black women, a host of physical and psychological consequences of shifting occurs in response to perceived racism (Hall et al., 2012; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003), and studies of similar behaviors (e.g., racial identity impression management) among Asian Americans in the workplace also shows that it does not achieve its intended effects (Xin, 2004). Additionally, shifting is linked to stress (specifically, racism-related stress—Gamst et al., 2020, 2022). Related work on conceptually similar phenomenon such as code-switching have demonstrated largely the same patterns: among people of color, altering's one's language or speech patterns has been seen as a response to linguistic racism, and this practice, in turn, can lead to greater feelings of inauthenticity, effort and stress (D. G. Johnson et al., 2022).

Of course, shifting among Asian American women while at times affords a survival coping mechanism, also occurs within a racist US social economic milieu, capitalism, that constantly perpetuates racist ideology and class antagonisms (Gamst et al., 2018; Syed, 2021). Thus, the shifting construct can also be construed as a behavioral mechanism indicative of the amount of internalized racism/appropriated racial oppression that Asian American women have systemically experienced under an oppressive economic system.

4 | THE CURRENT STUDY

The present study provides a useful contribution to the growing literature on the use of a women's shifting coping mechanism in response to racist threats among an often-neglected population—Asian American women (Gamst et al., 2021; Keum et al., 2018). Figure 1 presents the proposed structural model of the direct and indirect associations between gendered racial microaggressions, shifting, and perceived racism, which was configured based on the limited empirical shifting literature (Gamst et al., 2019, 2020, 2021; J. C. Johnson et al., 2016).

We hypothesize that Asian American women's perceived gendered racial microaggressions will directly and positively be associated with their perceived racism experiences. Although these two constructs may be similar at first glance, a deeper examination of both the theoretical and empirical evidence suggests that they are, in fact,

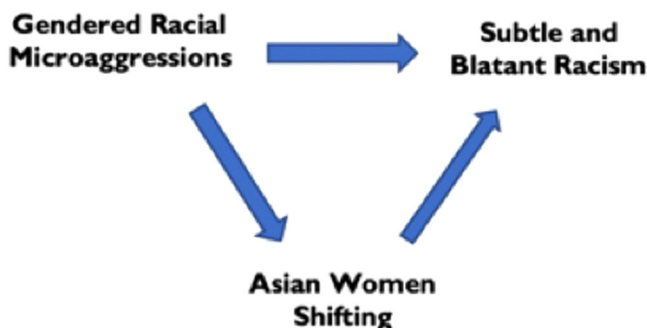


FIGURE 1 Conceptual model with gendered racial microaggressions predicting subtle and blatant racism mediated by Asian women shifting.

distinct (see Keum et al., 2018): while the former focuses exclusively on the intersectional oppressive nature of sexism meeting racism experienced by Asian American women, the latter focuses more broadly on perceptions of being the target of racism in general. We further hypothesize that shifting will positively mediate this relation: being the target of microaggressive attacks would be linked to greater shifting among Asian American women as a coping mechanism but ironically, this behavioral response (needing to change themselves in the presence of White Americans) would actually be associated with greater levels of perceived racism.

5 | METHOD

5.1 | Participants

Participants ($N = 253$) were represented by a convenience sample of US Asian American adult women obtained from an online workforce. Participant age ranged from 18 to 72 years ($M = 31.07$, $SD = 8.76$), specific age range categories included 18–19 ($n = 7$, 2.8%), 20–29 ($n = 117$, 46.2%), 30–39 ($n = 98$, 38.7%), 40–49 ($n = 20$, 7.9%), 50–59 ($n = 7$, 2.8%), 60 or higher ($n = 4$, 1.6%). Participants' education included college graduate or professional degree (73.1%), some college (21.0%), and high school or less (5.9%). Participant self-reported forced choice ethnicities included Asian Indian (22.9%), Chinese (not Taiwanese, 22.5%), Filipino (12.6%), Japanese (11.5%), Korean (10.7%), Thai (3.2%), Vietnamese (2.8%), multiethnic (2.8%), Indonesian (1.6%), Hmong (0.8%), Taiwanese (0.8%), Laotian (0.8%), other-Asian ethnicity (7.1%). Relationship status included married (54.4%), single (34.9%), cohabiting (7.9%), divorced (1.6%), and separated (1.2%). Participant sexual orientation included heterosexual (79.1%), bisexual (15.4%), asexual (2.8%), lesbian (0.8%), pansexual (0.8%), queer (0.4%), gay (0.4%), and questioning (0.4%). Lastly, participant generation included first generation (24.5%), second generation (46.2%), third generation (15.8%), fourth generation (5.5%), fifth generation (5.9%), and don't know (2.0%).

5.2 | Measures

5.2.1 | Demographic information

This included the aforementioned six demographic items.

5.2.2 | Gendered racial microaggressions scale for Asian American women (GRMSAAW)

The GRMSAAW (Keum et al., 2018) is a 22-item multidimensional self-report measure of perceived microaggressions among Asian American women. Past research has demonstrated that this measure of gendered racial microaggressions experienced by Asian American women is distinct from other measures of racism, including more generalized (i.e., nonintersectional) perceptions of racial microaggressions and internalized racism (Keum et al., 2018). It includes the following four subscales: ascribed submissiveness (AS, 9 items; e.g., "Others expect me to be submissive"), Asian fetishism (AF, 4 items; e.g., "Others express sexual interest in me because of my Asian appearance"), media invalidation (MI, 5 items; e.g., "I see non-Asian women being casted to play female Asian characters"), and assumption of universal appearance (AUA, 4 items; e.g., "Others have talked about Asian American women as if they all have the same facial features [e.g., eye shape, skin tone]"). The items were measured on a 6-point scale from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). Higher mean scores on each subscale indicate greater experience with the particular type of microaggression during their lifetime. Internal consistency values included the following: AS ($\alpha = 0.92$), AF ($\alpha = 0.90$), MI ($\alpha = 0.83$), and AUA ($\alpha = 0.84$).

5.2.3 | Asian American women's shifting scale (AsAWSS)

The AsAWSS (Gamst et al., 2021) is a 12-item multidimensional self-report measure of Asian American women's shifting or self-presentation alteration of their public persona in response to environmental cultural cues. The AsAWSS includes three subscales: WBC (4 items) assesses alignment with white beauty ideals (e.g., "I use makeup and or beauty techniques to make my appearance more Westernized"). BS (4 items) assesses alternation between Asian ethnic culture and mainstream culture (e.g., "At home, I present the "Asian" side of myself as opposed to the "American" side of myself"). AL/CA (4 items) assesses reluctance to present a public Asian self-image around White Americans (e.g., "I avoid speaking Asian languages around White Americans"). All items are rated on a 4-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Higher mean scores indicate a greater tendency to shift. Internal consistency values included 0.83, 0.78, and 0.77 for the scores of the WBC, BS, and AL/CV subscales, respectively.

5.2.4 | Subtle and blatant racism scale for Asian American college students (SABR-A²)

The SABR-A² (Yoo et al., 2010) is an 8-item multidimensional self-report measure of perceived discrimination and racial bias. The SABR-A² includes two subscales: subtle racism subscale (SR, 4 items) assesses implicit racial bias or stereotype (e.g., "In America, I am viewed with suspicion because I am Asian"); Blatant Racism subscale (BR, 4 items) assesses explicit racial bias or stereotype (e.g., "In America, I am called names such as, "chink," "gook," etc. because I am Asian"). All items are rated on a 5-point scale from 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*almost always*). Higher mean scores indicate greater perceived racism. Internal consistency values included 0.87 and 0.73 for the scores of the SR and BR subscales, respectively.

5.3 | Procedure

The current study was approved by the university's institutional review board. Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk; $N = 253$) was used to recruit participants online and they were compensated \$1.00 each, an amount that is generally higher than typical MTurk compensation (Buhrmester et al., 2011). Individuals were initially screened with qualifying questions to participate in the study that identified them as Asian American women who were 18 years or older and who permanently resided in the United States. Individuals who did not meet this screening criteria were not allowed to proceed with the study. After screening, potential participants were asked to agree to the consent form and completed the study's questionnaire, which took an average of 15 min to complete. All scales were randomly presented to each participant. Several manipulation checks that required respondents to make a specific response were utilized to help ensure participants paid attention to the questions and provided adequate answers.

6 | RESULTS

6.1 | Preliminary analyses

Obtained data included 283 participants and were reviewed for completeness and distributional issues. Thirty cases were removed due to failure to complete the entire questionnaire or follow study protocol, resulting in a viable sample of 253 participants. No univariate or multivariate outliers were detected. The skewness and kurtosis for all of the subscale scores were relatively close to normal, ranging from -0.529 to 0.083 (skewness) and -0.781 to 0.018 (kurtosis). Thus, variable distributions were deemed appropriate for subsequent analyses. The means,

standard deviations, min and max values, internal consistency reliabilities for the subscale scores used in the present study and their intercorrelations are presented in Table 1. Subscale values were generally in the range of those reported in the multicultural psychology literature (see Gamst et al., 2011). All subscale scores achieved a minimally acceptable level of internal consistency. The four GRMSAAW subscale scores were moderately positively correlated ($r_s = 0.55\text{--}0.76$, $p < 0.01$), as were the three AsAWSS subscale scores ($r_s = 0.66\text{--}0.69$, $p < 0.01$). The scores of the two SABR-A² subscales showed fairly high correlation ($r = 0.83$, $p < 0.01$), but this is consistent with previous findings (Yoo et al., 2010).

6.2 | The structural model

A structural equation model was configured based on the conceptual relations between constructs shown in Figure 1 and the rationale for their temporal sequence based on the existing literature. Figure 2 presents the structural model. The latent variable of subtle and blatant racism was designated as the outcome variable using the two subscales of subtle and blatant racism (SABR-A²) as indicators, while the latent exogenous predictor variable of gendered racial microaggressions (GRMSAAW) was indicated by the four subscales of AS, AF, MI, and AUA. This relation was proposed to be mediated by Asian women shifting (AsAWSS) as indicated by the subscales of AL/CA, BA, and WBC. This temporal sequence of microaggressions preceding their cognitive/affective consequences (i.e., shifting, perceived racism) was based on both the aforementioned theoretical framework (e.g., the MAIP) and previous empirical evidence demonstrating the psychosocial impact of microaggressive attacks on women of color's behavior.

The standardized coefficients and squared multiple correlations associated with the model are also shown in Figure 2. While the chi square value was statistically significant (24 , $N = 253$) = 69.463 , $p < 0.001$, the GFI, NFI, IFI, TLI, and CFI were 0.945, 0.953, 0.969, 0.953, and 0.969, respectively, and the RMSEA was 0.087 (90% CI: 0.063–0.111); overall, the model appears to have yielded an adequate to good fit to the data. All paths were statistically significant, and the model accounted for 61% of the variance of subtle and blatant racism. An Aroian (1947) test, the most conservative variation of the Sobel (1982, 1986) test family, was used to evaluate the statistical significance of the indirect effect of gendered racial microaggressions through Asian women shifting to subtle and blatant racism, and it showed that the indirect effect was statistically significant, $z = 4.61$, $p < 0.001$.

The statistical significance of the indirect effect opened the possibility of a mediation effect having been observed. To assess this, the unmediated model of gendered racial microaggressions in isolation predicting subtle and blatant racism was evaluated. The results of the unmediated analysis showed that the strength of the direct path was quite robust, the standardized path coefficient being 0.71 (unstandardized value = 0.709, $SE = 0.064$) compared to the more than moderate but somewhat weaker direct path strength in the mediated model with a standardized path coefficient of 0.50 (unstandardized value = 0.495, $SE = 0.065$). A Freedman–Schatzkin test (Freedman & Schatzkin, 1992) revealed that the direct path in the mediated model was significantly weaker than the corresponding path in the unmediated model ($t(251) = 5.893$, $p < 0.001$). It thus appears that there was a partial mediation effect with approximately 30% of the predictive strength of gendered racial microaggressions on subtle and blatant racism being mediated by the dynamics represented by Asian women shifting.

6.3 | Exploratory analysis

We also conducted an exploratory between subjects MANOVA analysis to examine whether subgroup differences between East (Chinese, Taiwanese, Japanese, Korean) versus Southeast (i.e., Thai, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino, Laotian) versus South Asian (i.e., Asian Indian) subgroups on the model's predictors. Significant differences emerged on the three shifting subscales: $F(2, 225) = 4.86$, $p < 0.009$ for white beauty; $F(2, 225) = 9.46$, $p < 0.001$ for BS;

TABLE 1 Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and intercorrelations of key variables (N = 253).

	Descriptive statistics						Correlations									
	M	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
1. AS	3.67	1.05	1	6	-0.243	-0.138	0.92	-	0.58*	0.70*	0.69*	0.50*	0.42*	0.36*	0.62*	0.60*
2. AF	3.59	1.23	1	6	-0.261	-0.493	0.90	-	0.55*	0.55*	0.36*	0.31*	0.29*	0.44*	0.45*	0.45*
3. MI	3.79	1.00	1	6	-0.179	-0.294	0.83	-	0.76*	0.41*	0.44*	0.37*	0.37*	0.54*	0.52*	0.52*
4. AUA	3.97	1.01	1	6	-0.232	-0.018	0.84	-	0.30*	0.33*	0.23*	0.23*	0.23*	0.50*	0.52*	0.52*
5. WBC	2.43	0.77	1	4	-0.217	-0.730	0.83	-	0.67*	0.66*	0.47*	0.49*	0.49*	0.49*	0.49*	0.49*
6. BS	2.58	0.67	1	4	-0.529	-0.050	0.78	-	0.69*	0.44*	0.48*	0.48*	0.48*	0.48*	0.48*	0.48*
7. AL/CA	2.28	0.79	1	4	0.024	-0.781	0.77	-	0.53*	0.53*	0.53*	0.53*	0.53*	0.53*	0.53*	0.53*
8. SR	2.88	0.96	1	5	-0.088	-0.621	0.87	-	0.83*	0.83*	0.83*	0.83*	0.83*	0.83*	0.83*	0.83*
9. BR	2.80	0.85	1	5	0.083	-0.520	0.73	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Abbreviations: AF, GRMSAAW Asian fetishism subscale; AL/CA, AsAWSS Asian language/culture avoidance subscale; AS, GRMSAAW ascribed submissiveness subscale; AsAWSS, Asian American women's shifting scale; AUA, GRMSAAW assumption of universal appearance subscale; BR, SABRA-A² blatant racism subscale; BS, AsAWSS bicultural shift subscale; GRMSAAW, gendered racial microaggressions scale for Asian American women; MI, GRMSAAW media invalidation subscale; SABR-A², subtle and blatant racism scale for Asian American college students; SR, SABR-A² subtle racism subscale; WBC, AsAWSS white beauty conformity subscale.

* $p < 0.01$.

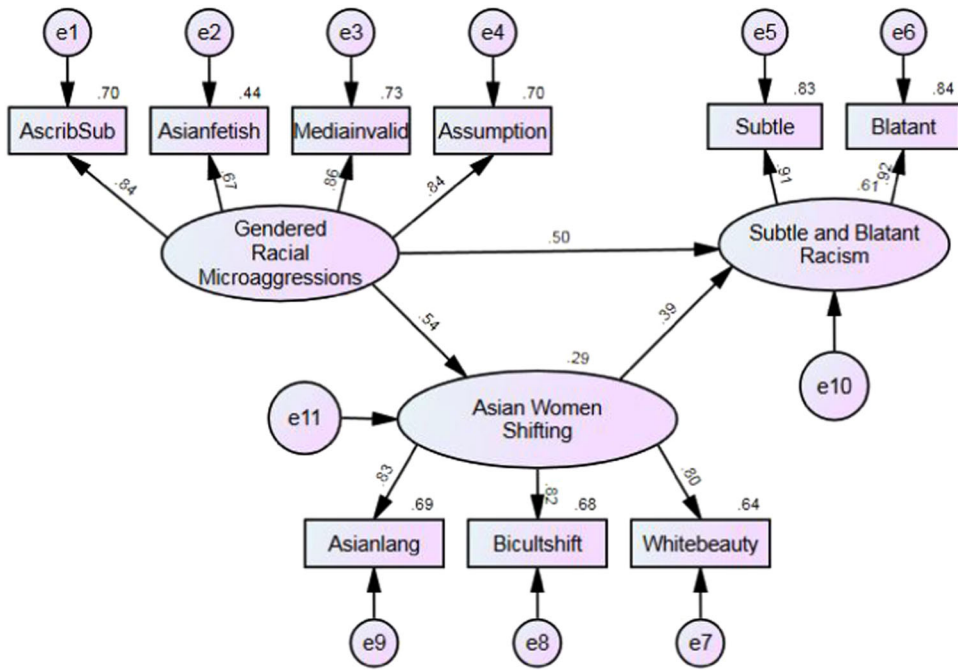


FIGURE 2 Structural model of subtle and blatant racism (N = 253). Latent constructs are shown in ellipses, observed variables are shown in rectangles and error coefficients are shown in circles. R² values for the latent shifting and subtle and blatant racism variables are shown in the upper area of each factor.

and $F(2, 225) = 15.33, p < 0.001$ for AL/CA. Pairwise comparisons revealed that across these, South Asians scored higher than the other two Asian subgroups (M_{diffs} ranged from 0.36 to 0.58, all p 's ≤ 0.011) but East and Southeast Asians did not differ from each other (all p 's > 0.10). Similar differences also emerged for both Subtle ($F(2, 225) = 9.49, p < 0.001$) and Blatant ($F(2, 225) = 6.75, p = 0.001$) racism. Once again, South Asians scored higher than both East and Southeast Asians (M_{diffs} ranged from 0.39 to 0.74, all p 's ≤ 0.003) but East and Southeast Asians did not significantly differ from each other (all p 's ≥ 0.075).

No subgroup differences emerged on the gendered microaggressions subscales with the exception of AS, $F(2, 225) = 5.36, p = 0.005$; South Asians scored significantly higher than East Asians ($M_{diff} = 0.56, p = 0.001$) and marginally higher than Southeast Asians ($M_{diff} = 0.35, p = 0.078$). Although we did not make predictions a priori about differences between these subgroups, these are nevertheless in line with previous work (Gamst et al., 2021; S. Y. Lee et al., 2015).

7 | DISCUSSION

Both gendered racial microaggressions and perceived racism, with shifting acting as a mediator, were examined in the present study. While the direct path between gendered racial microaggressions and perceived racism indicated a positive association between the two variables, we also discovered a partial mediation effect; higher levels of perceived gendered racial microaggressions were associated with greater levels of shifting among Asian American women, and were in turn, associated with greater levels of subtle and blatant perceived racism.

Our findings suggest that Asian American women experience microaggressive affronts and these negative experiences were associated with increased shifting behaviors that included “Westernizing” their appearance,

alternating their “Asian” and “American” identities, and tactical avoidance of their heritage culture, which were consequently associated with greater levels of implicit and explicit perceived racial bias and stereotyping. These findings demonstrate the behavioral and psychological costs of microaggressions. Being the target of these everyday racist comments is linked to Asian American women shifting their behaviors in the presence of White Americans and within a systemically oppressive social-economic milieu, but doing so only appears to be associated with greater perceptions of racism. This not only demonstrates that experiencing microaggressions leads to behavioral change, but also that such change may only confirm the perception that one is the target of racism.

This is consistent with the growing literature on how various microaggressions (i.e., micro-insults, invalidations, assaults) perpetrated on Asian Americans are associated with poorer self-assessed health status and outcomes (Nicholson & Mei, 2020). In particular, these findings provide empirical support for the idea that Asian American women often bear the brunt of these challenges due to their intersectional identities of being both Asian American and women and the subsequent implicit and explicit racist messages they encounter in their daily lives (Ahn et al., 2021).

The present work also contributes to the understanding, based on the MAIP model and intersectionality theory, of the experiences of gendered racism among Asian American women (Keum et al., 2018). These two frameworks provided an opportunity to examine associations among complex cultural variables. As Asian American women increasingly encounter gendered racial microaggressive assaults, they appear to increase their use of shifting as both a coping mechanism and as a conscious/unconscious reaction to a systemically often hostile, racist, and oppressive environment. Although the reliance on shifting as a coping strategy among women of color has been well-documented (Gamst et al., 2019, 2021, 2022; J. C. Johnson et al., 2016; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003), as is the link between shifting and racism-related stress (e.g., among African American and Asian women; Gamst et al., 2020, 2021), this study was the first of its kind to demonstrate how shifting may allow Asian American women to navigate experiences of gendered microaggressions and perceived racism (Lewis & Neville, 2015) albeit with significant personal consequences.

Researchers should continue to examine microaggressions and perceived racism among Asian American women and their effects, given the cumulative effect on their well-being (Keum et al., 2018; Ong et al., 2013). Given intersectionality theory's emphasis on individuals' lived experiences, future studies should more closely examine the contextual factors that predict Asian American women's shifting behaviors. One possibility is that shifting is more likely in certain contexts than others (e.g., as a function of local demographics, population density, and other indices of diversity). The fact that the present study relied on a national sample of adult Asian American women suggests that the patterns revealed here are likely applicable across situations and groups; however, whether the presence or absence of diversity could moderate these effects remains an important empirical question to be tested. Additionally, we expect future research to explore in greater depth how Asian American women successfully cope with these daily assaults to thrive and lead happy productive lives, as well as explore their personal agency and other sources of strength (Reyes & Constantino, 2016).

8 | IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Our research is one additional step in answering the call to provide Asian American women's voices with a public presence (Kim et al., 2017). Regular microaggressive experiences are strongly associated with Asian American women's perceptions of implicit and explicit racism directed at themselves. These very destructive personal experiences with racism may encourage the use of shifting. Practitioners who treat Asian American women should be aware of the impact of these factors and therefore consider exploring how their clients utilize this coping mechanism, in particular, its frequency and sociocultural context. Historically, Asian American women often experienced exclusion in personal and professional lives (Ahn et al., 2021; Chow, 1987). By exploring Asian American women's lived experiences with perceived discrimination and microaggressions, and their clients' coping

strategies, practitioners can help to validate their painful experiences within a safe therapeutic space. However, because, microaggressions can also occur within therapeutic contexts and adversely affect the therapeutic alliance and treatment outcomes, it is imperative for practitioners to examine their own biases toward Asian American women. In particular, practitioners should recognize when they also commit microaggressions and develop a multicultural orientation in therapy (Kuo et al., 2021).

9 | LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Several limitations can be noted in the present research. First, this study relied on a cross-sectional examination of Asian American women's experiences with microaggressions, shifting, and racism. There remains ongoing debate about the potential issues of using mediational analysis within the context of such data where there is not a time component (for review, see Fairchild & McDaniel, 2017; Hayes & Rockwood, 2020). However, Hayes and Rockwood (2020) highlighted that the statistical procedure is meant to inform the research question but is not the inference itself; others have concurred that the question of temporal ordering should be one addressed by the research model and its rationale (Fairchild & McDaniel, 2017). Although we contend that our theoretical paradigm outlines the rationale for why experiences with microaggressions precede coping strategies such as shifting and downstream consequences such as perceived racism, future studies can more directly demonstrate this temporal sequence by relying on longitudinal methods. In particular, where microaggressive attacks are measured in vivo and subsequent responses are captured later in time.

Along a related vein, this study only tested the association between gendered racial microaggressions and perceived racism, with shifting serving as a statistically significant mediator. While illuminating, the present patterns do not suggest that these are the only downstream associations linked with microaggressive attacks. For example, other research indicates that perceived microaggressions with this population may also be associated with racism-related stress (Gamst et al., 2020) as well as other negative health outcomes (e.g., Choi et al., 2017). Thus, subsequent research could benefit from more complex and nuanced models that examine these related constructs simultaneously. Moreover, we suggested that the mechanism presented here—experiences of microaggressions leading Asian American women to shift their behaviors and thereby contribute to their sense of perceived racism—may reflect one way in which racial consciousness develops. However, although this is the interpretive framework, we did not explicitly test internalized racism or color-blind attitudes in our sample. Future studies could include those as potential moderators in their study of microaggressions and perceived racism to account for the possibility that the patterns observed here are most applicable to Asian American women with lesser degrees of racial awareness or consciousness.

Second, the present study's reliance on quantitative modeling may have inadvertently limited our participants' voices to the particular constructs examined in this study, and could have been enhanced with more qualitative assessments. Third, the important discussion (Syed, 2021) of which racism framework, systemic (with its emphasis on blatant acts of intentional racism and microaggressions), and interpersonal (with its focus on subtle acts of passive racism) are both encapsulated in our present outcome measures but would benefit from further theoretical elaboration. For example, the destructive role of our current economic system, capitalism, is often omitted and neglected in microaggression assessments of various populations and warrant consideration within future theoretical and empirical work. Last, the sample was skewed with college-educated women (with the majority being first or second generation) and may not be representative of Asian American women as a whole. For example, it is possible that Asian American women who, due to generational status or individual histories (e.g., adoption), may solely identify as "American" and thus lack a clear Asian identity to shift toward, or alternatively, see being Asian and American as mutually constitutive rather than separate. To address this possibility, future studies should closely examine variables such as generational status or bicultural identity integration as additional moderators of the observed phenomenon.

Nevertheless, this study adds to the growing body of literature that explicates the effects and consequences of experiencing microaggressions among Asian American women. Our hope is that this study will encourage future researchers to explore how shifting is utilized by both Asian American women, as well as women of color in general, as they navigate the challenges of a frequently oppressive environment.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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PEER REVIEW

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