

Asian American Women and Clothing Perceptions: A Study of Intersectionality

by
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While seemingly harmless, stereotypes can play a significant role in prejudice and discrimination. In two studies, we examined stereotypes of Asian American women and how they may vary with different clothing types. We used a mixed factorial design with a sample of college students from a U.S. university. In the first study, participants were assigned to one of two clothing conditions: casual or business. In the second study we added a third condition, “party”. In Study 1 participants saw four pictures of female models, three Asian American and one White, in outfits corresponding to each condition. In Study 2, participants saw six pictures of female models, three White and three Asian American, in one of the three conditions. The participants rated each model on a series of descriptors based off stereotypes of Asian American women, compiled into four stereotype categories: sexualized, submissive, invisible, and general Asian stereotypes. We used the Scale of Anti-Asian American Stereotypes to measure internal prejudice toward Asian Americans as a covariate. In Study 1, participants rated models in business attire as less stereotypically Asian, less sexualized, and less invisible. In Study 2, we found no main effect of race, but did find significant race by clothing interactions on the submissive, invisible, and general Asian stereotypes. It is important to keep in mind that future research should explore ways to change the views of those who are prejudiced, to avoid relying on victims of discrimination to change their own actions in order to avoid such experiences.

Key Words: Asian-American, Women, Stereotypes, Prejudice

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

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Asian American Women & Clothing Perceptions: A Study of Intersectionality

While often overlooked by society, stereotypes of Asian American women that originated decades ago continue to remain prevalent even today. Because of deep roots stemming from the European colonization of Asia to Hollywood portrayals of Asian women in the mid-twentieth century, stereotypes of Asian women as exotic, sexualized, servile, quiet, cute, and tiny (Mukkamala & Suyemoto, 2018; Nguyen, 2016) can still impact the day to day lives of modern Asian American women. In this study, we sought to gauge the prevalence of such stereotypes in the population today. We used clothing type as an independent variable, which has been proven to impact how one is perceived (Gurung et al., 2017; McDermott & Pettijohn II, 2011). Specifically, we investigated if the type of outfit worn would influence stereotypes of White and Asian American women.

The commonplace nature of racial stereotypes makes it easy for those who use them to see a one-dimensional perspective of the target, which leaves these prejudiced views unchallenged. For Asian American women, stereotypes may impact their self-perceptions, behaviors, and psychological health, as well as external factors like career opportunities (Chakraborty & McKenzie, 2002; Chan, 1988; Kim, 2002; Nguyen, 2016). Therefore, the importance of exploring these stereotypes cannot be understated. Due to such stereotypes of Asian women as invisible, powerless, submissive, and sexualized (Hommadova & Davydova, 2018; Mukkamala & Suyemoto, 2018; Prasso, 2005), we were interested in seeing if people still held such perceptions of Asian American women in stereotype incongruent business attire (Study 1 and 2), which has been shown to increase perceptions of one as competent and authoritative (Kwon & Johnson-Hillery, 1998). Additionally, by putting both White and Asian American models in more fashionable or even provocative party clothing (Study 2), we sought to determine

if the stereotypes of Asian American women as sexualized and fetishized would remain more prominent in the Asian American models as opposed to the White models.

The Experience of Asians and Asian American Women

While stereotypes of the general Asian American population have received relatively less attention than other populations, research has successfully isolated some central themes. When considering stereotypes of Asian Americans, which encompass people from a broad diversity of countries and ethnicities, one of the most well-known is that of the “model minority,” in which Asian Americans are seen as an example of what other minorities should strive to be. They are considered to be intelligent, hard-working, successful, and high-earning, which often puts a great deal of pressure on such individuals to live up to these idealistic standards (Sue & Kitano, 1973; Suzuki, 1977). These outwardly positive perceptions can have other negative effects as well; Asian Americans may internalize these stereotypes, which can result in somatic symptoms and psychological distress (Gupta et al., 2011). This internalization may also cause them to anticipate discrimination from those who hold stereotypes, resulting in a reaction that may lead to disorders such as anxiety and depression (Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008).

Although research has successfully established some components of the Asian American experience, more work must be done to fully explore stereotypes of Asian American women, whose gender and race intersect. It is important to understand that these multiple identities of race and gender are not additive; rather, the intersectionality between these two components creates a new set of unique experiences for the individual. Therefore, the experiences of Asian American women are far more complex than simply putting the experiences of Asian Americans and women together. Therefore, it follows that such intersectionality would significantly impact how these individuals are perceived (Lei et al., 2020; Rattan et al., 2019). Unfortunately, there

has been a lack of research surrounding the specific stereotypes that Asian American women experience, both in terms of gauging their prevalence in the public as well as ways they might be changed or influenced. This disparity is lamentable, especially given the large number of individuals who may experience these stereotypes. In a sample of 20 women from East Asia at an American university, 13 reported some form of discrimination or sexual harassment based on their gender or being Asian (Hommadova & Davydova, 2018). These stereotypes are indeed real, and there is a myriad of ways in which stereotypes may negatively influence Asian American women's lives.

Although there have been few empirical studies aiming to change stereotypes of Asian American women, the research that has been done has uncovered similar themes. The idea of racial microaggressions, which are “brief, commonplace, and daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental slights and indignities,” is a central one in discussing such stereotypes (Sue et al., 2008, p. 329). Sue et al. (2007) found that these microaggressions lead to Asian American women feeling exoticized, fetishized, and sexualized. One Asian American woman stated that such treatment “equates our identities to that of passive companions to White men” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 95). People commonly see Asian American women as intelligent, quiet, shy, and petite (Ghavami & Peplau, 2012). Even when Asian American women are in the authoritative role of faculty at a university, they are expected to be non-confrontational and submissive to those with more power, and are seen as passive, exotic, and less credible than other professors, especially if they are a non-native English speaker (Nguyen, 2016).

Keeping in line with the idea that the intersectionality between multiple identities may create a unique experience for Asian American women, there may in fact be different forms of discrimination aimed at these multiple identities. One study found three themes of discrimination

against Asian American women: racism against Asian Americans shared by Asian American women, Asian American women-specific experiences, and experiences from within the Asian American group or family. There were also a variety of common descriptors generally attributed to Asian American women, such as “exoticized and fetishized,” “not a leader/way too young,” “submissive and passive,” “cute and small,” “invisible and silent,” and “service workers” (Mukkamala & Suyemoto, 2018). The fact that there are different forms of discrimination aimed at different aspects of their identity reveal the complexities of prejudice towards Asian American women. At the same time, Asian American women may be quickly labeled as simple, one-dimensional caricatures. Therefore, it is essential to better understand these stereotypes, and work to fill the gap in empirical research of stereotypes directed toward Asian American women.

The Nature of Stereotypes

While most may not think about how stereotypes operate within daily life, they essentially exist to make certain cognitive processes faster. Formally defined, stereotypes are “schemas that allow for easy, fast, processing of information about people, events, or objects, based on their membership in particular groups” (Grison & Gazzaniga, 2019, p. 299). They play a significant role in how people make snap judgements of others; thus, it is essential to understand how stereotypes work in order to determine how we may possibly alter them in any circumstance.

While seemingly simple on the surface, stereotypes may reveal deeper cognitive processes, including both conscious and unconscious attitudes toward another individual or group (Banaji et al., 1993). When making predictions about a certain group, people see the more distinctive or stereotypically representative aspects of that group as more important in

contributing to their judgement (Bordalo et al., 2016). Even basic physical characteristics like facial features or skin color can immediately provoke stereotypical judgements of that person (Mason et al., 2006). After such stereotypes are activated in someone, that person's judgement can quickly become biased, impacting cognitive processes such as physical behavior and attention allocation (Bargh et al., 1996; Donders et al., 2008). Activating stereotypes in the victim may also impact their behavior. For example, older adults who are made aware of the stereotype that older adults are poor at memory tasks will perform worse on a memory test than a group of older adults in which the stereotypes has not been activated (Fourquet et al., 2020). Clearly, the activation and processing of stereotypes can have a serious impact on everyone involved.

Stereotypes are commonly thought of in regards to social perception, as an easy way to place people into groups. However, those who stereotype may have certain biases, and the generalized stereotypes placed on a group are often negative traits that not actually true in the first place (Adorno et al. 1950). These stereotypes are often focused on the most distinctive or noticeable differences between groups, which then makes the process of placing people into groups quicker and more efficient (Bordalo et al., 2016). Such differences often consist of specific inherent character traits, such as the stereotype that Americans are typically aggressive (Westra, 2017). However, labeling all people who belong to a certain group in the same way reduces the individuality of those in the group, and can quickly give rise to more serious issues.

Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination

Understanding stereotypes is simply the first step in getting to the root of a more serious phenomena. Stereotyping Asian American women may not just be inconsiderate or inaccurate, but it may reveal a person's prejudice, which is "an unfair negative attitude toward a social group

or a person perceived to be a member of that group” (Dovidio, 2005). If stereotypes are driven by such prejudice, it follows that stereotypes can have serious effects, even though they may seem harmless on the surface (Chan, 1988; Steele, 1997). Holding prejudicial attitudes can easily manifest in discrimination through people’s actions, judgements, and behaviors, and may significantly alter how targets of stereotypes are perceived by others in general (Fiske, 1998; Van Knippenberg et al., 1999). For example, participants who previously held the stereotype that Asians are good at math rated Asian American individuals as having better math abilities (Ryan et al., 1996).

Prolonged experiences with discrimination may also have a more severe impact on an individual than just distorting outward perceptions of them. Racial discrimination is related to both psychological and physical health and may lead to stress, depression, and anger in victims of discrimination (Chakraborty & McKenzie, 2002; Kim, 2002). A 4-year study found that the cumulative effect of exposure to racial discrimination can be highly detrimental to an individual’s mental health (Wallace et al., 2016). Racial discrimination may even impact such physical processes as cardiac functioning (Hoggard et al., 2015).

In Asian American women, such racial discrimination may become internalized, as it comes to affect their own perceptions of themselves. As evidenced from interviews and first-hand accounts, these women may unconsciously place blame for feelings of vulnerability or worthlessness on themselves, rather than the external source of discrimination (Chan, 1988). This is a serious matter, as racial discrimination will only be propagated if the victims see the discrimination as their fault. This internalization may also help explain Asian American women’s lower threshold for discrimination affecting their mental and physical health as

compared to Asian American men (Hahm et al., 2010). Clearly, Asian American women face a unique set of challenges when it comes to stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination.

The Influence of Clothing on Perception

Although it may seem like an overly simple intervention to reduce the considerable impact of stereotypes, previous research has shown that clothing can significantly impact perceptions of others (Abbey et al., 1987; Kahn & Davies, 2017; Livingston & Gurung, 2019; McDermott & Pettijohn II, 2011). In relation to racial stereotypes specifically, clothing can either reinforce or lessen their impact. Oftentimes people have strong associations of a certain type of clothing with a certain race, which would be described as stereotype congruent clothing. (Gurung et al., 2020; Kahn & Davies, 2017). For example, putting African Americans in stereotype incongruent formal clothing (suit coat, tie, dress shirt, dress pants) resulted in participants rating them significantly more positively than viewing African Americans in stereotype congruent outfits, such as baggy shirts and pants (Livingston & Gurung, 2019). Similarly, students are more likely to trust an African American professor in a formal outfit than a t-shirt (Aruguete et al., 2017). Even minor aspects of one's outfit can influence other's perceptions of them to a significant extent (Howlett et al., 2013).

More specifically, business outfits may have a unique impact on perceptions. Given the connotations and contexts that it may be associated with, such clothing can increase perceptions of being intelligent, interesting, successful, and attractive (Bell, 1991; Harris et al., 1983). Additionally, models in formal business outfits are viewed as more friendly, authoritative, competent, responsible, efficient, and credible (Kwon & Johnson-Hillery, 1998). Considering the fact that the professional appearance of women is often considered more important than that of men (Kwon & Johnson-Hillery, 1998), such clothing may be especially effective in changing

perceptions of women. For example, women of high-status wearing even a slightly more provocative business outfits are perceived to be less competent than women in a more conservative business outfit (Howlett et al., 2015). Similarly, in one study people gave higher ratings of intelligence and competence to a woman in a managerial position when she was wearing slacks and business jacket, versus when she was wearing heels, makeup, a low-cut blouse, and a tight skirt (Glick et al., 2005).

Given that there is sufficient evidence that clothing can impact perceptions (including those driven by racial stereotypes), we sought to use this variable to alter stereotypes of Asian American women. Unfortunately, there is a great lack of research in regards to evaluating such stereotypes, much less ways in which they may be influenced. We hope to assess what stereotypes of Asian American women might be currently prevalent, and how different outfits may affect their manifestation.

The Current Studies

The current studies integrated the impact of clothing on perceptions and racial stereotypes of Asian American women. As context plays a key part in judgements of others (Bordalo et al., 2016), we investigated if stereotypical judgements of Asian American women changed with their style of clothing (Study 1) and how they may differ from White women in similar outfits (Study 2). Given the previous research on how greatly clothing can affect an impression of someone and stereotypes about them (Kahn & Davies, 2017; McDermott & Pettijohn II, 2011), along with the specific ways both business wear and provocative clothing can influence an impression (Kwon & Johnson-Hillery, 1998; Gurung et al., 2007), we sought to mitigate stereotypes of Asian women by putting models in formal business wear. We also compared Asian models against White models to see if perceptions of Asian stereotypes were more prevalent with the Asian models,

and how they might differ between specific outfits. Additionally, while we realize that the term “Asian” can encompass a wide variety of nationalities and ethnic backgrounds, we are using this term in a broad sense, as determining the differences between these ethnicities is beyond the scope of our study.

We controlled for prejudice against Asian Americans as a confounding variable by including the Scale of Anti-Asian American Stereotypes (SAAS, Lin et al., 2005), as well as a question in the survey designed to measure the participant’s personal experience with and exposure to Asians. In creating a scale to measure prejudice against Asian Americans, Lin et al., (2005) used the rationale of the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2002). This rationale assumes that outgroups are often seen as either warm but incompetent, or cold and competent. Asians typically fall into this second category, as they are commonly perceived as cold and unsociable. However, they are often respected and perceived to be intelligent, which demonstrates the multidimensional nature of prejudice towards Asian Americans (Lin et al., 2005). Therefore, it uses two subscales, a competence score and a sociability score, to accurately assess to what degree participants hold these prejudiced attitudes.

The SAAS has been used in various research areas pertaining to Asian Americans, often in relation to discrimination, prejudice, communication, and social situations (Alt et al., 2019; Kohatsu et al., 2011; Sy et al., 2017; Zhang, 2016). It has been validated alongside other measures, such as the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI, Glick & Fiske, 1996) and the Subtle Prejudice Scale (SPS, Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). Various studies have used this scale to measure negative stereotypes of Asian Americans and anti-Asian American prejudice and has been successful in detecting the presence of strong negative stereotypes in participants (Zhang, 2016; Kohatsu et al., 2011). Kohatsu et al. (2011) found that certain racial attitudes towards

Asian Americans were significant in predicting both competence and sociability sub-scores. The SAAS has been used to prove the negative effects of both positive and negative stereotypes on Asian Americans (Lin et al., 2005). Overall, it has been found to be accurate in predicting prejudice as seen through a variety of behaviors towards Asian Americans (Lin et al., 2005).

As formal business clothing can increase perceptions of being authoritative, competent, and trustworthy (Arguete et al., 2017; Kwon & Johnson-Hillery, 1998), we were interested in seeing its effects on stereotypes of Asian American women as passive, submissive, not fit for leadership roles, sexualized, and quiet (Mukkamala & Suyemoto, 2018; Ngyuen, 2016; Prasso, 2005; Sue et al., 2007; Tinkler et al, 2019). Considering these sexualized stereotypes of Asian women, combined with the fact that provocative clothing can increase sexualization of women in general (Koukounas & Letch, 2001; Moor, 2010), we wanted to see how ratings may vary across race. Our study is aimed at continuing research in determining the prevalence of these stereotypes (Chakraborty & McKenzie, 2002; Fiske, 1998; Kim, 2002; Steele, 1997; Van Knippenberg et al., 1999), as well as seeking to dispel them.

We had two major research questions. First, we wanted to gauge to what extent and which of these stereotypes of Asian American women are currently held, as well as investigate which of these stereotypes, if any, would be changed by displaying models in formal business wear. Secondly, we sought to find out if stereotypes of Asian American women consistently differed from perceptions of White women in any of the three conditions, and if so, which. For our first study, we hypothesized that the Asian American models in the formal business wear would be rated lower on submissive (e.g., passive, obedient), invisible (e.g., shy, likely to be a team player), and sexualized (e.g., promiscuous, attractive) stereotypes of Asian American women. Given that Asians Americans in general are stereotyped as intelligent, successful, and

high-achieving (Sue & Kitano, 1973; Suzuki, 1977), we hypothesized that business attire may actually increase this specific group of stereotypes because business wear can increase perceptions of being intelligent. For our second study, we hypothesized that while both races would be rated higher on sexualized stereotypes in the party clothing condition, Asian American models would be rated higher overall on these stereotypes due to previous stereotypes of Asian women as sexualized (Mukkamala & Suyemoto, 2018). When in the formal business wear, we expected Asian American models to be rated lower on submissive, invisible, and sexualized stereotypes as compared to the White models.

Study 1

Method

Participants

Participants ($N = 252$) included undergraduate students at a midsized, western university in the United States enrolled in introductory psychology courses. Participants' ages ranged from 18–50 ($M = 22.18$, $SD = 6.38$). The sample was 74.31% women, 24.90% men, and 0.78% transgender or other. Participants were 38.34% first-year students, 21.74% second-year students, 22.13% third-year students, 14.23% fourth-year students, and 3.56% students of another year. The sample was 60.87% European American, 16.21% Asian or Asian American, 9.49% Hispanic or Latino, 9.09% two or more races, 2.76% of another race, 1.19% African American, and 0.39% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. We recruited participants through the psychology department's research sign-up website (SONA software). Participants received course credit for their participation and instructions told them that “this study is interested in testing personality traits in regards to presentation” and they were to “look at different people and rate their personalities based on how they present themselves.”

Materials

Visual Stimuli. Our study was one of two separate studies being administered through a single online survey. We recruited four undergraduate students who were known to the researcher, three Asian American women (two Korean, one Chinese/Filipina) and one European American woman (as an effort to distract participants from the nature of the study). The order in which the pictures appeared was randomized by Qualtrics survey software. College-aged students agreed to serve as models for the study and were of relatively the same height with an average body structure. The lead author took full body pictures of all four models in front of a blank white background. All models stood facing forward with a neutral expression, looking into the camera with their hands relaxed at their sides. In Condition 1, all models were shown dressed in business attire. For example, the first Asian American model wore a striped shirt, a black blazer, grey slacks, and black heeled boots. Condition 2 included the same models wearing casual clothing (e.g., jeans, leggings, sneakers, and T-shirts). All stimuli material and survey questions are available on <https://osf.io/kr2uc>.

Dependent Variables. We measured stereotypes of Asian American women drawn from previous research as an indicator of prejudice. Participants answered a series of questions regarding each model. Below each model's picture were the instructions "Please indicate the extent to which you believe this person is the following:" followed by a series of descriptive words. The descriptors included words based off various stereotypes of Asian American women (Chang, 2015; Mukkamala & Suyemoto, 2018; Nguyen, 2016; Prasso, 2005) such as "submissive," "feminine," "promiscuous," "obedient," and "likely to be a team player," as well as antonyms of the stereotypes: "authoritative," "powerful," and "likely to be a leader." The descriptors also included stereotypes associated with the Asian American population in general

such as “intelligent,” “studious,” and “hard working.” We included unassociated descriptors such as “fun,” “friendly,” and “funny” as distractors. Participants rated each word on a Likert rating scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

We averaged scores for each descriptor across all three Asian American models, in an effort to generalize across the Asian American women. We then grouped these descriptors into four main categories of stereotypes: general Asian stereotypes (intelligent, studious, and hardworking), sexualized Asian women stereotypes (feminine, promiscuous, seductive, and attractive), submissive Asian women stereotypes (obedient, agreeable, compliant, submissive, and passive) and invisible, non-leader-like Asian women stereotypes (likely to be a team player, powerful, authoritative, polite, shy, leader). We created composite scores for each category, and the resulting scores showed acceptable reliability with Cronbach’s alpha = .91 for general Asian stereotypes, .56 for sexualized stereotypes, .63 for submissive stereotypes, and .77 for invisible stereotypes. We reverse scored antonyms of stereotypes (e.g., “authoritative,” “powerful”). After these descriptors, we asked participants to rate the outfits on six qualities: “professional,” “tight-fitting,” “exposed,” “modest,” “fashionable,” and “casual” as a manipulation check.

Covariates. We used the SAAS (Lin et al., 2005) to measure participants’ attitudes toward Asian Americans. The scale used a Likert rating scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). It included 25 statements such as “in order to get ahead of others, Asian Americans can be overly competitive,” or “oftentimes, Asian Americans think they are smarter than everyone else is.” Statements such as these added up to produce a Competence subscore. Statements such as “Asian Americans do not interact with others smoothly in social situations” added up to produce a Sociability subscore. Reliability measured by Cronbach’s alpha was .82 for the total score.

Participants also completed the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1996) to measure sexism. The ASI consists of two subscales, the Hostile Sexism scale and the Benevolent Sexism scale. The Hostile Sexism scale is related to negative images of women and consists of 11 statements such as “Women are too easily offended” rated on a 4-point Likert scale of 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). The Benevolent Sexism scale is related to positive images of women and consists of eleven statements such as “Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores” rated on a 5-point scale 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). We averaged responses to create subscale scores. Subscales showed moderate to high internal consistency, Cronbach’s alpha = .65 for Benevolent Sexism, .86 for Hostile Sexism, and .86 for the total ASI score. Although low, the reliability of Benevolent Sexism is within the acceptable range and may be due to contemporary perceptions of the individual questions in that subscale, which may vary from the time it was developed.

To measure participants’ personal exposure and experiences with Asians, we also included a question asking how many of the participants’ close friends were African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, White, Asian or Pacific Islander, and Hispanic or Latino.

Procedure

After being approved by the institutional review board, students picked the survey, titled “Attitudes and Perceptions of Clothing” from a list of studies available through the psychology department’s research recruitment Sona website. We used a between-subjects design and randomly assigned participants to either condition. All surveys were administered using Qualtrics software online. Participants first read a consent form, and if agreeing, read brief instructions to answer honestly about their perceptions of the following pictures. We randomly

assigned participants to either the control condition (models in casual wear) or the experimental condition (models in business wear).

After rating the models, participants completed some basic demographic information (age, year in school, ethnicity, gender), the SAAS, a short separate study, and the question concerning the ethnicities of their friends. Participants read a debrief on the nature of the study and the variables and had the option to have their data deleted, due to the deceptive element. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete. All responses were anonymous, and students received class credit for participating.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

We first conducted preliminary tests for gender differences on our covariate measures, followed by examining relevant correlations. We did not perform any analysis with transgender participants or those of another gender, due to the small number of those participants. Consistent with past research, we found significant differences between men and women's responses on the ASI. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) of the sexism subscales was significant, Hotelling's Trace $F(1, 235) = 7.28, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .06$. Men's sexism scores on both subscales were significantly higher than women's scores, $F(1, 236) = 14.01, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .06$ (Hostile Sexism), $F(1, 236) = 6.06, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .03$ (Benevolent Sexism). Men and women did not vary on any subscales of the SAAS.

Given the relative novelty of measuring both sexism and Asian American stereotypes, we examined the correlations between these measures and also explored if stereotypes would vary with the number of friends of color a participant had. Table 1 illustrates the main correlations. Both forms of prejudicial perceptions, sexism and stereotyping, showed significant correlations.

Individuals higher in sexism also tended to have higher stereotyping scores. Of note, having more Asian American friends was associated with significantly higher levels of two forms of stereotyping, both overall and competence related stereotyping.

Although we did not run pilot tests of the images confirming perceptions of the outfits as “casual” or “business,” our manipulation check showed that, overall, participants viewed the business outfits as more professional, $F(1, 251) = 791.42, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .76$, more modest, $F(1, 251) = 11.20, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .04$, less exposed, $F(1, 251) = 7.93, p = .005, \eta_p^2 = .03$, and more fashionable, $F(1, 251) = 39.11, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .14$.

Hypothesis-Driven Analyses

We tested our hypothesis that Asian American women would be seen as less submissive, invisible, and sexualized in stereotype incongruent business wear using a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA). We used clothing type as the fixed factor and mean ratings from each stereotype category (general Asian, sexualized Asian women, submissive Asian women, invisible/nonleader Asian women) as dependent variables. We controlled for gender, sexism, and Asian American stereotypes using the total scores for each scale.

We found a statistically significant multivariate effect, Hotelling’s Trace $F(4, 233) = 18.48, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .24$. Both gender, $F(4, 233) = 3.42, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .06$, and Asian stereotypes, $F(4, 233) = 6.09, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$ were significant covariates. Sexism was not a significant variable.

Tests of between subjects effects showed that three out of four types of stereotypes significantly varied across conditions. Models in casual attire were rated higher on general Asian stereotypes, $F(1, 239) = 46.56, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .17$. We also found a significant effect on sexualized stereotypes, $F(1, 239) = 12.91, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .05$, with higher mean ratings of

models in casual attire. Finally, there was a significant main effect for the invisible stereotype category, $F(1, 239) = 42.01, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$, with lower mean ratings in the business attire condition. There was not a significance difference between conditions in the submissive category of stereotypes. Means and standard deviations for both conditions are shown in Table 2.

Exploratory Analyses

Although we used the White model images as a distractor, having a comparison race in the design afforded us the opportunity to conduct a post hoc test of race. We conducted four 2 (Race: Asian American, European American) x 2 (Clothing: business, casual) repeated measures analyses of variance controlling for gender, sexism, and Asian American stereotypes using the total scores for each scale.

We found a statistically significant interaction for race and clothing for sexualized stereotypes, Hotelling's Trace $F(1, 235) = 5.70, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .02$, for generalized stereotypes, Hotelling's Trace $F(1, 235) = 8.04, p = .005, \eta_p^2 = .03$, and for invisible stereotypes, Hotelling's Trace $F(1, 235) = 19.05, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$. Examination of means show that participants stereotyped the Asian American women less when casually dressed. This indicates that race and clothing operate together in predicting perceptions of sexualized, general, and invisible stereotypes. None of the covariates were significant in any equation, and there no were significant effects on submissive stereotypes.

We also ran the major analysis using only the Asian and Asian American sample of participants, although only 16.21% of the sample was Asian or Asian American (32 participants). There was a significant main effect of condition, Hotelling's Trace $F(1, 36) = 4.24, p = .008, \eta_p^2$

= .38, with only general stereotypes showing a significant difference across categories parallel to the main analyses, $F(1, 36) = 7.29, p = .011, \eta_p^2 = .19$.

Discussion

Racial discrimination propagated by stereotypes is indeed an issue for Asian American women, and it is important to explore these issues as well as possible solutions for them. Our results are in line with past research that suggests clothing can have a significant impact on how one is perceived (Gurung et al., 2020; Kahn & Davies, 2017). However, in adding the dimensions of race and gender, our study demonstrated how clothing can have a considerable effect on the way Asian American women specifically are perceived and can in fact be used as a means to influence these stereotypes.

In general, participants viewed models in the business attire as less stereotypically Asian American than those in the casual wear. Perhaps the business clothing influenced subjects to view the models as more autonomous, powerful individuals whose race was not as important. In casual clothing, the models' race might have been more evident because there was less attention on the outfit. Results from the invisible and sexualized stereotype category were in line with our original hypothesis that Asian American women in business wear would be seen as less invisible and more leader-like, as well as less sexualized. It is possible that participants associated business clothing with authority and power, which negated the invisible stereotypes of Asian American women (Gurung et al., 2017). Additionally, our manipulation check confirmed that the business attire was perceived as more modest and less exposed, which likely influenced the lower sexualized ratings. This was indeed a novel finding, as these are prominent stereotypes of Asian American women that can negatively impact their everyday lives (Mukkamala & Suyemoto, 2018; Sue et al., 2007). It is also important to note that, even though mean ratings

varied between conditions for each stereotype, in the general Asian, submissive, and invisible stereotypes, mean ratings for both conditions remained below 3, indicating overall disagreement with the stereotype. Only in the sexualized category of stereotypes did the mean ratings differ between business attire (lower than 3, indicating disagreement) and casual attire (higher than 3, indicating agreement).

Contrary to our hypothesis, we did not find a significant effect for submissive stereotypes. It is possible these submissive stereotypes were not as prevalent as initially thought, or simply were not prevalent within our sample. It is also possible that our manipulation did not manage to shift this particular aspect of stereotyping as conversely because they were too strong to be shifted. It is of theoretical interest that we managed to shift some stereotypes and not others, and future research can aim to pull apart the processes and mechanisms for this finding.

It is indeed interesting to note that having more Asian American friends was associated with both overall and competence-related types of stereotyping. It was possible that some type of confirmation bias was involved, in which people paid more attention to stereotypically Asian traits in their Asian American friends, ignoring traits that might be incongruent with such stereotypes. If people had more Asian American friends, they might automatically be more used to searching for more stereotypically Asian traits in each of those friends. Additionally, the strong influence of such stereotypes might have caused these labels to become internalized, a common occurrence in Asian Americans (Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Pyke & Dang, 2003). Therefore, Asian Americans may behave closer in accordance with such stereotypes, even unconsciously, as a result of this internalization (Chan, 1988; Pyke & Dang, 2003; Shen, 2015). People observing these behaviors such as those with more Asian American friends are then more likely to have stronger stereotypical views of Asian Americans.

Additionally, the interaction effects found in the study indicate that race and clothing worked together in shaping perceptions of individuals. What may create a certain perception for one race may create a different perception for another. The fact that these interactions were significant in predicting sexualized stereotypes, general Asian stereotypes, and invisible stereotypes may indicate something about the nature of these such labels and how different races are measured by similar traits. Given we only had one White model, these exploratory analyses should be interpreted with caution.

Our design represents a first step into using a relatively simple variable, clothing, to predict perceptions. The sizable research literature on the linkage of clothing to sexism, and newer research showing how formal clothing may attenuate racist perceptions (Gurung et al., 2020) was matched here where professional clothing short circuits commonly held beliefs about Asian American women. This was a first step in examining the power of clothing in this respect, and the current design sets up some key next steps.

The major limitations of our study included the demographics of our models and the overall makeup of our sample. Our sample was comprised of college students at one specific West Coast college, with the greatest number of participants being young, European American women, limiting generalizability. Although the West Coast has a higher number of Asian American individuals making the face validity of the study higher, the use of primarily Asian American models limited our generalizability. Additionally, we only used female models in the study, so our results cannot be generalized to Asian American males or people of other non-Asian races. Although we included one European American model to alleviate suspicion, it is possible participants might have been alerted to the focus on Asian Americans in the study due to the higher number of Asian American models. Finally, the simple “look” of each model might

have lent itself toward a certain perception (e.g., a younger looking model vs. an older looking model), and additional work with models varying in age would be prudent.

Study 2

Method

Participants

Participants ($N = 152$) included undergraduate students at a mid-sized, western university in the United States enrolled in introductory psychology courses. Participants' ages ranged from 18-47 ($M = 22.66$, $SD = 7.24$). The sample was 81.21% female, 16.12% male, 2.01% other, and .67% transgender. Participants were 43.42% first year students, 23.03% second year students, 17.11% third year students, 11.84% fourth year students, and 4.61% students of another year. The sample was 57.24% White, 16.45% Asian or Asian American, 12.50% two or more races, 10.53% Hispanic or Latino, 1.32% not listed, .66% African American, .66% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. We recruited participants through the university's research sign-up website. Participants received course credit for their participation and instructions told them "provide us with your impressions of a range of people" and that the study was interested in "testing how human beings' perceptions of others vary as a function of the type of clothing the others are wearing and the ethnicity of those others."

Materials

Visual stimuli. We used two of the same models from Study 1 and added two more White models as well as two other Asian American models. In total, six undergraduate students, three Asian American females (two Chinese, one Chinese/Filipina) and three European American females agreed to serve as models for the study. We took full body pictures of all six

models behind a blank white background. All models stood facing forward with a neutral expression, looking into the camera with their hands relaxed at their sides. In condition 1, all model of both races dressed in casual attire (e.g., jeans, leggings, sneakers, and t-shirts). In condition 2, all models were dressed in business attire such as blouses, blazers, and pencil skirts. In condition 3, all models were dressed in party clothes. This included a variety of plain and flower printed dresses (both looser and tighter cuts), skirts, heels, and necklaces. We controlled the order that the pictures were presented, so there was less chance that participants would randomly see models of one race all after each other, possibly indicating the nature of the study. All stimuli material and survey questions are available on https://osf.io/35crf/?view_only=28f660b7dc434d5c8e6c20225172da34.

Dependent variables. We used the same measures as in Study 1. We averaged scores for each descriptor across all 3 Asian American models, and all 3 White models. We then grouped these descriptors into four main categories of stereotypes: general Asian stereotypes, sexualized Asian women stereotypes, submissive Asian women stereotypes, and invisible, non-leader-like Asian women stereotypes, for a composite score for each category. Antonyms of stereotypes (e.g. ‘authoritative, ‘powerful’) were reverse scored. After these descriptors, we asked participants to rate the outfits on six qualities: ‘professional,’ ‘tight-fitting,’ ‘exposed,’ ‘modest,’ ‘fashionable,’ and ‘casual’ as a manipulation check. Reliability measured by Cronbach’s alpha for each composite was .57.

Covariates. Similar to Study 1, we used the SAAS (Lin et al., 2005) to measure participant’s attitudes toward Asian Americans. Reliability measured by Cronbach’s alpha was .91 for the total score. To measure participant’s personal exposure and experiences with Asians, we also included a question asking how many of the participant’s close friends were African

American, American Indian or Alaska Native, White, Asian or Pacific Islander, and Hispanic or Latino.

Procedure

After being approved by the institutional review board, students picked the survey, titled ‘Studying Stereotypes’ from a list of studies available through the psychology department’s research recruitment SONA website. We used a mixed factorial design where participants were and randomly assigned participants to one clothing condition, in which they saw models of both races. All surveys were administered using Qualtrics software online. Participants first read a consent form, and if agreeing, read brief instructions to answer honestly about their perceptions of the following pictures. We randomly assigned participants to the casual condition, business condition, or party condition.

After rating the models, participants completed some basic demographic information (age, year in school, ethnicity, gender), the SAAS, and the question concerning the ethnicities of their friends. Participants were then debriefed on the nature of the study and the variables and given the option to have their data deleted, due to the deceptive element. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Results were taken anonymously and students were given class credit for participating.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Although we did not run pilot tests of the images confirming perceptions of each of the outfits using the labels “casual,” “business,” or “party,” our manipulation check showed that overall, business outfits were viewed as the most professional $F(2, 152) = 133.75, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .64$, and modest, $F(2, 152) = 26.97, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .27$. Party outfits were perceived to be the

tightest, $F(2, 152) = 31.93, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .30$, most exposed, $F(2, 152) = 26.49, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .26$, and most fashionable, $F(2, 152) = 5.27, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = .066$. Casual outfits were viewed as the most casual, $F(152) = 118.45, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .61$.

Major Analyses

We tested our hypothesis that Asian American women be rated higher than White models in each stereotype category using a repeated measures ANCOVA, with the SAAS total score as a covariate. We used race as the within-subjects independent variable, clothing type as the between-subjects independent variable, with mean ratings from each stereotype category (general Asian, sexualized Asian women, submissive Asian women, invisible/non-leader Asian women) as dependent variables. We controlled Asian American stereotypes using the total SAAS score.

We did not find significant effects for race for any of the four stereotype categories, although mean ratings for sexualized stereotypes were in the direction of our hypothesis, with higher mean ratings for Asian American models, $F(1, 148) = 3.32, p = .07, \eta_p^2 = .02$. The types of outfits were rated significantly different between conditions in three of the stereotype categories: sexualized, $F(2, 148) = 18.14, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .20$, invisible, $F(2, 148) = 5.97, p = .003, \eta_p^2 = .08$, and general Asian stereotypes, $F(2, 148) = 4.31, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .06$. There was a significant interaction between race and clothing type in three stereotype categories: invisible, $F(2, 148) = 8.03, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$, submissive, $F(1, 148) = 8.36, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$, and general Asian stereotypes, $F(2, 148) = 4.69, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .06$. Means and standard deviations for all conditions and races are shown in Table 3.

General Discussion

Stereotypes are so commonplace in today's society that their ill effects are seldom given appropriate attention. Asians are especially overlooked in discussion of the negative effects of racial discrimination due their status as a "model minority" (Sue & Kitano, 1973; Suzuki, 1977). Given the fact that intersecting identities such as race and gender create a separate, non-additive experience for the individual (Lei et al., 2020; Rattan et al., 2019), Asian American women may face unique encounters of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. Therefore, it is important to determine ways that perceptions of others might be changed. Our results are in line with previous studies that confirm clothing can significantly influence perceptions of others (Gurung et al., 2020; Kahn & Davies, 2017).

The interaction effects found in Study 2 indicate a close relationship between race and the way one is perceived, even when introducing the variable of clothing. It is clear that models of different races, even when wearing similar clothing, may be perceived quite differently. The fact that interaction effects were found in submissive, general Asian, and invisible stereotypes may reveal some qualities about these specific traits and how they are perceived to be related to different races. Contrary to our hypothesis, we did not find significant effects between races for any of the stereotype categories. It is possible that stereotypes of Asian American women are not as prevalent as they might have been in previous years and that society is indeed making progress toward doing away with such prejudice. While this would represent a significant step in the right direction, it is also possible that the study simply might have been unable to properly detect stereotypes due to our measures or design.

Study 2 presented similar limitations to Study 1. The sample size was also comprised of students at a college on the west coast, with most participants being young, White females. We only used female models in the study, so our results cannot be generalized to Asian American

males or people of other non-Asian races. The simple “look” of each model might have elicited certain perceptions as well. Slight differences in body posture or facial expression might have caused discrepancies in ratings, especially with descriptors like “promiscuous” or “shy.” Finally, the variation between outfits could have influenced ratings, as aspects of the Asian American models’ casual outfits might have been inherently different from the White models’ casual outfits, for example.

Conclusions from these studies could be a significant source of future research. First, steps could be taken to gather a more diverse sample size to expand the generalizability of the results. The demographics of the models could be changed, such as those of different ages or races. It may be worth considering using male models to explore stereotypes of Asian American men or Asian Americans in general. For these other demographics, it would be an interesting endeavor to analyze if there are similar or different effects in terms of the prevalence of stereotypes and how those might compare to White models. Although Study 2 focused on Asian American and White models, future research could compare results against other races of color to explore whether certain clothing does have a different impact on Asian Americans versus other races. Additionally, given that this study used a between-subjects design, future studies may utilize a within-subjects design to verify that the effects continue to exist within the same participants.

Perhaps the most important conclusion to note is that further research should look into ways to change the mindset of those who hold stereotypes that may negatively influence the lives of the subjects in any way, whether they be obviously unfavorable or seemingly positive, such as that of the “model minority.” Although our study employs clothing as a method of changing perceptions, the responsibility of changing prejudicial attitudes and discrimination of any kind

should rest on those who hold such views. It would be irresponsible to rely on those experiencing prejudice and discrimination to change their actions to avoid such treatment, as Livingston and Gurung (2019) also rightly concluded in a similar study. Our results suggest that one's race can play a significant role in shaping perceptions, even when a variable like clothing is involved, and that changing perceptions is indeed possible. It is essential to reconsider how people think about the ways they deal with stereotypes and prejudice. Therefore, it is up to each member of society to be more diligent and creative when considering ways to combat stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination at the source.

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Table 1.

Correlations Between Scale for Asian American Stereotypes and Number of Friends (Study 1).

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. SAAS Sociability	—							
2. SAAS Competence	.71**	—						
3. SAAS Total	.92**	.93**	—					
4. African Am. Friends	.09	-.05	.02	—				
5. Am. Indian/Alaskan Native Friends	-.02	-.12	-.08	.43**	—			
6. Hispanic/Latino Friends	-.01	-.05	-.03	.52**	.40**	—		
7. Asian/PI Friends	.07	.14	.11	.16	-.06	.06	—	
8. White Friends	.06	-.07	-.01	.38**	.32**	.24**	-.04	—

AM. = American, SAAS = Scale for Asian American Stereotypes, PI = Pacific Islander

** $p < .01$.

Table 2

Mean Ratings of Models in Each Condition by Stereotype Group (Study 1)

Stereotype Category	Business Attire	Casual Attire
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
General Asian ***	1.78 (0.51)	2.25 (0.61)
Sexualized ***	2.96 (0.50)	3.13 (0.42)
Submissive	2.70 (0.53)	2.64 (0.42)
Invisible ***	2.34 (0.46)	2.73 (0.49)

Note. Higher scores indicate a more stereotypical rating for each category (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*).

*** $p < .001$

Table 3

Mean Ratings of Models of Both Races in Each Condition by Stereotype Group (Study 2).

Stereotype Category	White			Asian		
	Casual Attire	Business Attire	Party Attire	Casual Attire	Business Attire	Party Attire
	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>M</i> (SD)
General Asian	3.82(.56)	4.02(.47)	3.70(.53)	3.74(.60)	4.06(.53)	3.85(.61)
Sexualized	2.75(.58)	2.87(.34)	3.30(.51)	2.97(.53)	3.15(.41)	3.46(.47)
Submissive	3.28(.53)	3.26(.46)	2.99(.47)	3.19(.58)	3.20(.37)	3.26(.48)
Invisible	3.28(.41)	3.02(.40)	2.93(.39)	3.08(.29)	3.00(.32)	3.14(.32)

Note. Higher scores indicate a more stereotypical rating for each category. (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)

