

# The Model Minority as a Shared Reality and Its Implication for Interracial Perceptions

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Despite the disparities of the life experiences among Asian Americans, the model minority stereotype continues to propagate in the United States. Taking a shared reality theory perspective, we demonstrate that the model minority image of being diligent, high achieving, and submissive is a characteristic representation of Asian Americans that is widely shared among Americans (Study 1). In addition, Americans assume that most people in the United States expect Asian Americans to conform to the model minority image (Study 2). Taken together, these results suggest that the model minority representation is a shared reality in the United States. Furthermore, results from an experimental study (Study 3) confirms that media exposure to Asian-American successes can strengthen European Americans' belief in the model minority as a shared reality, broadening the difference between the perceived acceptance of Asian Americans and African Americans in the community. Such exposure also strengthens European Americans' inclination to align their personal attitudes toward Asian Americans with their perceived shared attitude in the community.

*Keywords:* model minority, media exposure, social reality, racial attitudes, interracial relations

A *Wall Street Journal* article entitled “The New White Flight” has evoked fierce criticisms, especially from the Asian-American communities (Leung, 2005). The term “White flight,” once referred to the abandonment of inner cities by Whites to avoid racial tension with Blacks, takes on a new meaning. The article presents the changing demographics in two top public high schools in Northern California and describes how White parents moved their children out of these schools and even avoided the school district altogether, not because the schools were failing academically, but because the schools were, in the author's words, “too Asian,” overly “academically intense,” and had many “excessively com-

petitive and single-minded” Asian parents (Hwang, 2005). Another recent *Wall Street Journal* article entitled “Why Chinese mothers are superior” written by Amy Chua (2011a), a Yale Law School professor and the author of *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (Chua, 2011b)—a book that, presumably, offers *insights* on “how Chinese parents raise such stereotypically successful kids”—has been no less controversial. These news stories have raised the concern in public discourse regarding the role the media have played to perpetuate and reinforce the model minority stereotype of Asian Americans (Kolbert, 2011; Rahala, 2011), which could spark intergroup tensions (Dolak, 2011; Leung, 2005).

The glorification of Asian-American successes has been a common theme in the mass media in the United States. “Success Story of One Minority Group in the U.S.” (*U.S. News & World Report*, 1966), “Success Story: Outwhiting the Whites” (*Newsweek*, 1971), “Asian Americans: A ‘Model Minority’” (*Newsweek*, 1982), “Asian Americans: the Drive to Excel” (*Newsweek on Campus*, 1984), “The Triumph of Asian Americans: America's Greatest Success Story” (Bell, *The New Republic*, 1985), and “America's Super Minority” (Ramirez, *Fortune*, 1986) are just a few of the many news headlines that celebrate Asian-American achievements in the last decades. These portrayals of Asian-American successes have invited fierce criticisms from the learned community (e.g., Chou & Feagin, 2008; Takaki, 1998). Some scholars have pointed out that the characterization of Asian Americans as a model minority is mythical (Hurr & Kim, 1989; Wong, Lai, Nagaswa, & Lin, 1998) and that there are wide achievement disparities within

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the Asian groups (Hu, 1989). Nonetheless, the media continue to reinforce the image of Asians as “America’s Super Minority” (Ramirez, 1986) and leave those Asians who live below the poverty line and those who are confronted with mental health and substance abuse issues invisible (e.g., Crystal, 1989; Tang, 1997).

Although much research has been conducted to examine the model minority images, as reviewed below, most of these studies focused on defying the stereotype and investigating its implications to Asian-American communities. Few empirical studies have been conducted to examine the extent to which the image of Asian Americans as “diligent, hardworking, quiet high achievers” is shared among Americans. Even less is known about whether the model minority portrayals in the media create a shared reality that influences interracial perceptions in the United States. In the current research, we adopt the shared reality theory to address these important, yet underexplored, issues.

### The Model Minority Myth as a Shared Reality

The first objective of the present investigation is to determine whether the model minority image of Asian Americans is a shared reality among Americans. *Shared reality* is the totality of the knowledge that is assumed to be known and shared by others (Wan, Torelli, & Chiu, 2010). In shared reality theory (Hardin & Higgins, 1996) or its theoretical variants (Chiu, Gelfand, Yamagishi, Shteynberg, & Wan, 2010), an idea becomes a shared reality when people, independent of whether there is objective evidence for the validity of the idea, assume the idea to be widely known and shared in the community. In the context of the current research, the theory suggests that regardless of whether the model minority belief is supported by facts, the perception that Asian Americans embody the model minority characteristics is seen as widely shared among Americans.

The term *model minority* first emerged in the United States in the mid-1960s, around the time of the Civil Rights Movement. It romanticizes Asian Americans as hardworking, successful ethnic minorities, who fulfill the “American Dream” by overcoming harsh circumstances and discrimination while remaining quiet and submissive (Alvarez, Juang, & Liang, 2006; Wong et al., 1998). This romanticized image of Asian Americans has spread rapidly since then (Kawai, 2005; Takaki, 1998).

Such biased representation of Asian Americans has invited fierce criticisms since its early emergence (Hurh & Kim, 1989; Wong et al., 1998). A common concern is that depicting Asian Americans as a model minority fails to recognize the diverse ethnocultural backgrounds within Asian-American groups, homogenizing more than 30 ethnic groups that use more than 300 languages into a single category (Teranishi, Ceja, Antonio, Allen, & McDonough, 2004). More importantly, the glamorized Asian-American image disregards the well-documented achievement disparities and social issues within Asian-American communities (Chou & Feagin, 2008; Uba, 2003). Despite the efforts to counter the model minority image of Asian Americans, it has remained pervasive in the American culture (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Wong et al., 1998).

To demythologize the model minority myth, some researchers have examined the historical and sociocultural factors that contribute to the formation and maintenance of the model minority stereotype (Sue & Okazaki, 1990). There are also studies that

examine Asian Americans’ academic experiences (Lew, 2003; Sue & Zane, 1985; Tran & Birman, 2010) and evaluate how the apparently positive stereotype may threaten Asian-American students’ academic performance (Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2000; but see Thompson & Kiang, 2010). Furthermore, attempts have been made to increase the public’s awareness of Asian Americans’ mental health (Gee, 2004; Sue, Sue, Sue, & Takeuchi, 1995), substance abuse (Berganio, Tacata, & Jamero, 1997; Varma & Siris, 1996), and physical health (Sy, Chng, Choi, & Wong, 1998) problems. Despite these accumulating evidences, the model minority stereotype prevails (Wong et al., 1998).

To examine the extent to which the model minority image of Asian American exists as a shared reality among Americans, Study 1 seeks to establish that the image of being diligent, high achieving, and submissive is a characteristic representation of Asian Americans that is consensually shared among Americans. In Study 2, we attempt to further demonstrate that Americans perceive that most people in the United States expect Asian Americans to conform to the model minority image; that is, they recognize that the model minority image of Asian American is a widely shared social reality.

### News Media, Model Minority, and Racial Perception

Having examined the model minority representation as a shared reality, we then examine the role news media play in reinforcing such shared reality and its implications to intergroup perceptions. Research has shown that news media do not only play an important role in shaping social beliefs and attitudes (Brescoll & LaFrance, 2004); their portrayals of social groups can also shape the perception of those groups (Lee, 2005) and influence shared cultural consensus at large (Defleur & Dennis, 1998). Scholars are particularly concerned that the news media have participated in reinforcing the diligent, hardworking model minority image through its biased representation of Asian-American successes (e.g., Chung, 2005; Takaki, 1998). Although the average Asian in the United States is by no means *the* model of American success (Hu, 1989), the news media glorification of *some* Asian-American successes, particularly those of prominent Asian Americans, may have led the general public to believe that most, if not all, Asian Americans are successful, reinforcing the model minority ideal as the American standard of success.

The shared reality theory (Chiu et al., 2010; Hardin & Higgins, 1996; Wan et al., 2010) offers an explanation of how news media reinforce the model minority representation as a shared reality. First, Chiu et al. (2010) propose that repeated exposure to the same idea would increase the perceived sharedness of the idea in the community. Consistent with this idea, recent research has shown that when individuals are repeatedly exposed to the same persuasive argument many times, even when the perceivers receive many repetitions of the argument from the same source, they tend to believe that the argument is widely shared among others (Weaver, Gracia, Schwarz, & Miller, 2007). Thus, exposures to the success stories of a few prominent Asian Americans (e.g., as depicted in “Why Chinese mothers are superior”; Chua, 2011a) or a few groups of Asian Americans (e.g., as depicted in “The New White Flight”; Hwang, 2005) may lead people to believe the Asian-American model minority ideal is widely accepted.

In addition, the circulation of a narrative that resonates with a supposedly widely shared belief is particularly likely to become a popular topic in public discourse, which in turn further reinforces the perceived sharedness of the idea. For instance, research has shown that information that is congruent with commonly shared information in a group is discussed more and is given more weight in the group's decision than unshared information (Stasser & Stewart, 1992). Also, in a communication chain, information that is consistent with the shared reality often perpetuates through information transmission whereas information that is inconsistent with it tends to drop out in the process (Kashima, 2000). The heated debate ignited by *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (Chua, 2011b) provides a good illustration of this process. Although the author intended to write about her personal "journey" of parenting, and has highlighted "that the person at beginning of the book is different from the person at the end—that [she got her] comeuppance and retreat from this very strict Chinese parenting model" (Dolak, 2011), the public attention has been drawn almost exclusively to the consensually shared idea about "how Chinese parents raise such stereotypically successful kids" (Chua, 2011a).

Finally, when a narrative finds itself into the mass media, people may infer that the message embodied in the narrative is already part of the common ground in mass communication, and hence a widely accepted message as well (Lau, Chiu, & Lee, 2001). Thus, exposure to success stories about Asian Americans in the media might lead their consumers to infer that Asian American as model minority is a generally accepted and widely shared social reality. Accordingly, we predict that exposure to narratives of successful Asian Americans would strengthen the acceptance of the model minority myth as a shared reality. We investigate this issue in Study 3.

### Intergroup Implications of the Model Minority Myth

The model minority myth as a shared reality has important implications to interracial relations. Some scholars have suggested that the representations of Asian-American successes in American society would promote the "American dream" and legitimize American "bedrock values" of hard work, responsibility, and endurance (Chou & Feagin, 2008; Takaki, 1998). These scholars contend that the celebration of the apparent Asian-American successes in the news media was started as a ruling class endeavor to disunite African Americans and Asian Americans during the Civil Rights Movement and has continued to serve as a convenient tool to manipulate racial perceptions (Chou & Feagin, 2008), justifying existing racial hierarchy and holding individuals against the model minority standard (Kawai, 2005; Omatsu, 1994). Although some qualitative analyses have been performed on how Asian Americans have been portrayed in mass media (Kawai, 2005; Wong, 1994), it is still unclear whether media exposure to the model minority image plays a causal role in affecting racial perceptions (e.g., Chung, 2005; Mannur, 2005).

Study 3 addresses this issue by examining the casual effect of media exposure to an Asian-American success story (vs. an European American success story or control story) on European Americans' perceived acceptance of Asian versus African Americans in their local community. We hypothesize that exposure to an Asian-American success story would increase European Americans' per-

ceived acceptance of Asian versus African Americans in the local community.

Furthermore, shared reality research has consistently revealed that when a shared social consensus is established within a collective, the shared reality could predicate individuals' own judgments (Echterhoff, Higgins, & Groll, 2005; Higgins & Rholes, 1978; Sinclair, Huntsinger, Skorinko, & Hardin, 2005; Zou et al., 2009). Such common beliefs serve important coordination and communication functions in the group; these beliefs offer group members a set of shared assumptions for regulating their interactions with other group members. Accordingly, when a certain attitude is perceived to be widely shared in the group, individuals are particularly likely to align their personal attitude with the group attitude. Hence, when individuals are reminded of the model minority myth, aside from perceiving the model minority myth to be widespread in their community, they would also align their personal attitudes with the shared beliefs in the community. We explore this possibility in Study 3.

In summary, although extensive research has been conducted to defy the model minority stereotype and to examine its psychological implications to Asian Americans, little is known about whether the idealized images of Asian Americans in media coverage creates a shared reality that influences interethnic relations in the United States. In the current research, we adopted the shared reality perspective to examine the extent to which the model minority representation of Asian Americans is shared among Americans (Studies 1 and 2) and the role media plays in reinforcing the model minority myth as a shared reality and its implications to racial perceptions (Study 3).

## Study 1

Study 1 was carried out to demonstrate that the model minority image of being diligent, achieving, and quiet is a characteristic image of Asian Americans that is widely shared among Americans.

### Method

**Participants.** The participants were 290 undergraduate students (56% female; average age = 20.15) from introductory psychology classes. There were 39% European Americans, 34% Asian Americans, 3% African Americans, and 24% students of other ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Latino, biracial, multiracial). They participated in this paper-and-pencil survey study for course requirement credit.

**Procedure.** To examine whether a model minority representation aligns with the image of Asian American, in this study, participants were presented with a description of individuals who are "diligent and hardworking. They do well in school, particularly in the area of math and sciences. Both of them are on the honor roll. Despite the superior academic performance, they are quiet in class most of the time. With their achievements, they are expected to excel in their career in the future—with a well-paid and prestigious occupation." The participants then indicated how similar this description was to the images of African Americans, Asian Americans, and European Americans on an 11-point scale (−5 = *Not at all* to 5 = *Extremely*). Because the model minority representation is defined by a configuration of traits, we asked the

participants to rate the similarity of the three ethnic groups to this holistic description instead of their similarity to the individual characteristics (such as, diligent, achieving, and quiet).

In addition to the model minority description, we included two filler descriptions (individuals who were outspoken, straightforward, and direct; and individuals who were fun-loving and rebellious) to obscure the purpose of the study. The participants indicated how similar each of these descriptions was to the images of African Americans, Asian Americans, and European Americans on the same 11-point scale.

## Results and Discussion

We performed a 3 (Target Ethnicity: African American, Asian American, or European American; within-subjects)  $\times$  4 (Participant Ethnicity: European American, Asian American, African American, or Other; between-subjects) mixed design analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the model minority description. Results revealed a main effect of Target Ethnicity,  $F(2, 564) = 459.66$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .62$ . The Target Ethnicity  $\times$  Participant Ethnicity interaction was not significant,  $F(2, 304) = 1.81$ , *ns*. As shown in Table 1, the respondents perceived the model minority description as more similar to the image of Asian Americans than to that of African Americans,  $F(1, 282) = 840.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .75$ , and European Americans,  $F(1, 282) = 136.79$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .33$ . In short, Americans perceive the diligent, high achieving, and quiet image as a representation that is uniquely characteristic of Asian Americans (Alvarez et al., 2006; Wong et al., 1998).

### Study 2

Study 1 shows that the stereotypic image of Asian Americans as being diligent, high achieving, and quiet is consensually shared among Americans. The goal of Study 2 is to demonstrate that Americans assume that most people in the United States expect Asian Americans to conform to the model minority image. That is, it illustrates that the model minority ideal is perceived to be a widely shared reality in the United States.

## Method

**Participants.** One hundred eighty-eight undergraduate students (71% female; average age = 19.93) from introductory psychology classes were recruited. The participants included 61% European Americans, 20% Asian Americans, 2% African Americans, and 17% students of other ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Latino,

biracial, multiracial). They participated in this paper-and-pencil study for course requirement credit.

**Procedure.** Participants were presented with the model minority description and the two filler descriptions used in Study 1. The participants read the descriptions and estimated the percent (from 0 to 100) of the U.S. adult population that would consider each description to be descriptive of African Americans, Asian Americans, and European Americans. The order of the ratings for the ethnic groups was counterbalanced. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four orders of ratings.

## Results and Discussion

A 3 (Target Ethnicity: African American, Asian American, or European American; within-subjects)  $\times$  4 (Participant Ethnicity: European American, Asian American, African American, or Other; between-subjects)  $\times$  4 (Order; between-subjects) mixed design ANOVA was performed on the model minority description estimates. The only significant effect in this analysis was the main effect of target ethnicity,  $F(2, 362) = 105.66$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .37$ . Regardless of participants' ethnic background and the question order, the participants estimated that most Americans, 65%, believed that the model minority description applied to Asian Americans. The participants also estimated that less than 40% of Americans believed that the model minority description applied to European Americans, and that only 17% of Americans believed that the model minority description applied to African Americans (See Table 2). The percent estimate for Asian American targets was significantly higher than that for European American targets,  $F(1, 181) = 65.36$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .27$ , and African American targets,  $F(1, 171) = 169.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .48$ . In short, the respondents believe that most people in the United States perceive Asian Americans to fit the model minority description. That is, Americans consider the model minority stereotype to be a shared reality in the United States.

### Study 3

The present study was designed to test the causal effect of exposure to the model minority representation on intergroup perceptions. Participants were randomly assigned to read a news story of a successful Asian American or European American, or a success-unrelated news story. Next, they responded to a measure of perceived acceptance toward Asian and African Americans. Specifically, they estimated how willing other students on campus would be to interact with Asian and African Americans. We expect that exposure to the Asian American success story (vs. reading other stories) would strengthen the perceived sharedness of the model minority myth in the community, leading participants to estimate more favorable group attitudes toward Asian Americans relative to African Americans. In addition, we also measured the participants' own attitudes toward Asian and African Americans to explore whether the shared reality created by exposure to the model minority image would influence individuals' personal attitudes toward the minority groups.

## Method

**Participants.** The participants were 155 undergraduates (40% female), including 80 Asian Americans (59% US-born) and 75

Table 1  
*Means and Standard Deviations of Perceived Similarity (−5 = Not at All Similar to 5 = Extremely Similar) of the Model Minority Description to the Images of African Americans, Asian Americans, and European Americans*

	African Americans	Asian Americans	European Americans
Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	−3.03 (1.99)	4.37 (1.20)	1.63 (2.11)

Table 2

*Means and Standard Deviations of the Estimated Percent (From 0 to 100) of the U.S. Adult Population That Consider the Model Minority Description to Be Descriptive of African Americans, Asian Americans, and European Americans*

	African Americans	Asian Americans	European Americans
Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	17.28 (14.52)	65.22 (23.01)	39.04 (22.88)

European Americans (100% U.S.-born). They participated in the study for course requirement credit.

**Procedure.** Upon arrival, the participant was greeted by an experimenter and settled in a cubicle. The participant was told that the experiment consisted of several smaller studies. Next, the experimenter introduced the media exposure manipulation, which was disguised as a writing evaluation task. The participants then completed several short questionnaires that contain the dependent measures and the demographic questions.

**News media exposure.** Participants were randomly assigned to read one of three newspaper articles that either depicted (1) a successful Asian American, (2) a successful European American, or (3) an article not related to success (control). The article used in the Asian-American Success Condition presented the success story of an Asian American whose achievements had recently received statewide recognition. The article in the European-American Success Condition was identical to the Asian-American success article with the exception that the name of the protagonist was changed from an Asian surname to an Anglo-Saxon surname. The article in the Control Condition described the work of a dream analyst and was unrelated to success. The three articles were matched in length and writing style. The effect of reading an Asian-American success article was the focal interest in the current study. We included a success-unrelated article to rule out the possibility that reading a news article alone could influence the perceivers' racial attitudes. The European-American success article was included to rule out the possibility that reading a success story alone could influence racial perceptions.

The newspaper article was presented as a writing evaluation task. The participants were told that "we are interested in how readers evaluate the quality of journalistic writings" and that they would be given a news article randomly selected from widely circulated local newspapers. They were told to read the article carefully and answer the questions that followed. After reading the article, they were asked to summarize the article in a few sentences and rate the article in terms of its clarity and the positivity (vs. negativity) of its tone. No group differences were found on these ratings, indicating that the three articles were rated as similarly clear and positive, all  $F_s \leq 1.08$ ,  $ns$ .

**Dependent measures.** After reading the article, the participants completed a filler survey before taking the dependent measures. The dependent measures were presented to the participants as parts of a student preference survey. The students were told that, "In this study, we are interested in students' preferences toward various aspects of different ethnic cultures."

To assess whether media exposure influences the shared reality, the dependent measures consisted of 24 items that assessed par-

ticipants' perceived social acceptance toward Asian Americans (12 items) and African Americans (12 items) in the community. Examples of the items are "Enjoy having Asian (African) American friends," and "Prefer getting married with an Asian (Black) person." The 24 target items were mixed with 12 filler items that measured liking of Asian or African American arts or hobbies (e.g., "Enjoy listening to Asian music"). The participants indicated on a seven-point scale (1 = *very unlike the students at this university* to 7 = *just like the students at this university*) how descriptive each statement was of the students at their own university. Higher (vs. lower) scores on these items indicated perception of stronger acceptance (vs. rejection) of the target group on campus. We collapsed the ratings across the pertinent items to form two measures: (1) perceived acceptance of Asian Americans, and (2) perceived acceptance of African Americans. The reliabilities of both measures were high (Cronbach's  $\alpha_s > .91$ ).

In addition to measuring the participants' perceived acceptance of Asian and African Americans on campus, we measured the participants' own willingness to associate with the two ethnic groups. We asked participants to indicate on a seven-point scale (1 = *very unlike me* to 7 = *just like me*) how true each of the same 24 items was of their self. We collapsed the ratings across the pertinent items to form two measures: (1) participants' personal attitude toward Asian Americans, and (2) their personal attitude toward African Americans. The reliabilities of both measures were high (Cronbach's  $\alpha_s > .91$ ).

## Results and Discussion

**Model minority as a shared reality.** We performed a 3 (Media Exposure: Asian American success, European American success, or control; between-subjects)  $\times$  2 (Participant Ethnicity: Asian American or European American; between-subjects)  $\times$  2 (Target Ethnicity: Asian Americans or African Americans; within-subjects) mixed design ANOVA on the perceived acceptance of Asian and African Americans in the community. The main effects of participant ethnicity and target ethnicity were significant. Compared with Asian American respondents ( $M = 3.69$ ), European Americans ( $M = 4.09$ ) perceived greater acceptance of both minority groups in the community,  $F(1, 149) = 13.30$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .08$ . In addition, participants perceived greater social acceptance toward Asian Americans ( $M = 4.11$ ) than African Americans ( $M = 3.71$ ),  $F(1, 149) = 13.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .08$ .

More importantly, we found a significant interaction between media exposure, participant ethnicity, and target ethnicity,  $F(2, 149) = 4.87$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .06$ . To understand this three-way interaction, we performed a Media Exposure  $\times$  Target Ethnicity ANOVA for Asian-American respondents and for their European-American counterparts separately. Among Asian Americans, only the main effect of target ethnicity was significant,  $F(1, 77) = 15.22$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .17$ . As shown in Figure 1, independent of which article they read, Asian Americans perceived greater acceptance of Asian Americans than African Americans in the community.

For European Americans, there was a significant Media Exposure  $\times$  Target Ethnicity interaction,  $F(2, 73) = 4.96$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .12$ . As shown in Figure 1, after reading an Asian American success news story, European American participants perceived significantly greater acceptance of Asian Americans than African

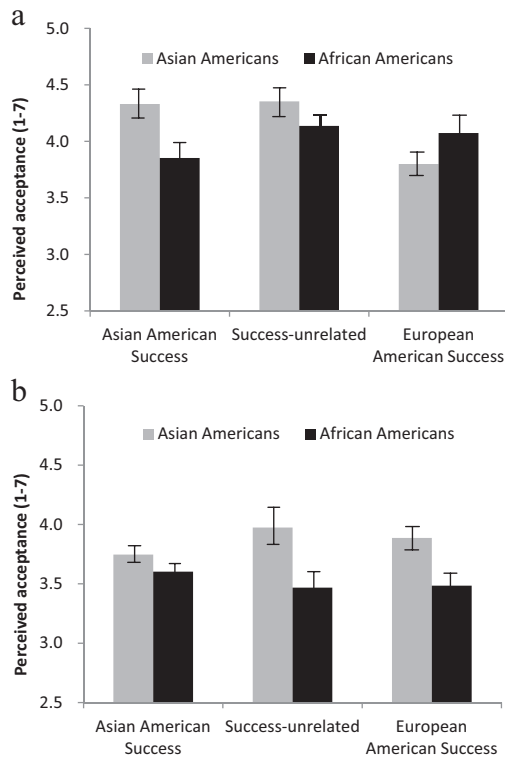


Figure 1. Perceived acceptance toward Asian and African Americans after reading an Asian-American success news story, a European-American success news story, or a success-unrelated news story by participant ethnicity: (a) European-American participants and (b) Asian-American participants.

Americans among their peers,  $F(1, 24) = 4.45, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .16$ . There was a smaller difference in the same direction in the Control Condition,  $F(1, 25) = 3.58, p = .07, \eta_p^2 = .13$ . Interestingly, reading an European-American success news story reversed the trend, resulting in more favorable perception of African Americans relative to Asian Americans,  $F(1, 24) = 3.18, p = .09, \eta_p^2 = .12$ . In short, exposure to the model minority image in news media can influence racial perceptions in the shared reality, exaggerating the perceived acceptance toward Asian Americans relative to African Americans in the community.

**Personal attitudes.** Next, we explore whether participants' personal attitudes would be influenced by the perceived acceptance of ethnic minority groups in their community after being exposed to an Asian American success story. Because the media exposure manipulation affected European Americans' perception of the acceptance of Asian Americans and African Americans, our analysis focused on European Americans' personal attitudes toward Asian Americans and African Americans. First, we performed a Media Exposure  $\times$  Perceived Acceptance of Asian Americans (centered at its mean) General Linear Model on European Americans' personal attitudes toward Asian Americans. There was a significant main effect of perceived acceptance of Asian Americans,  $F(1, 69) = 6.11, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .08$ . It indicates that participants who perceived greater acceptance of Asian Americans in the community had more favorable personal attitudes

toward Asian Americans ( $r = .30, p < .01$ ). More importantly, as indicated in the significant Media Exposure  $\times$  Perceived Acceptance of Asian Americans interaction,  $F(2, 69) = 3.13, p = .05, \eta_p^2 = .08$ , the association between personal attitude and perceived acceptance toward Asian Americans was stronger after the participants had read an Asian American success story ( $r = .58, p < .005$ ) than after they had read a European-American success story ( $r = .40, p = .05$ ) or a success-unrelated story ( $r = -.11, ns$ ). We also performed a Media Exposure  $\times$  Perceived Acceptance of African Americans (centered at its mean) General Linear Model on European Americans' personal attitudes toward African Americans. Only the main effect of perceived acceptance of African Americans was significant,  $F(1, 69) = 6.25, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .08$ , indicating that those who perceived greater acceptance of African Americans in the community had more favorable personal attitudes toward African Americans ( $r = .29, p < .05$ ) in general.

In summary, after reading a news story about a successful Asian American (vs. a story or a successful European American or a success-unrelated story), European Americans perceived greater acceptance of Asian Americans than African Americans in the community. This result suggests that media exposure to Asian American successes increases European Americans' acceptance of the model minority myth as a shared reality. Furthermore, media exposure to Asian Americans successes also increased European Americans' tendency to align their personal attitudes toward Asian Americans with the perceived shared attitudes toward Asian Americans. Our media exposure did not affect Asian American participants' perceived social attitudes toward Asian and African Americans. In general, Asian Americans perceived greater social acceptance of Asian Americans than African Americans. This pattern of result may reflect a perceptual bias in favor of the ingroup and is consistent with the finding that undergraduates often expect ingroup favoritism in their fellow students' intergroup perceptions (Dimdins & Montgomery, 2004).

## General Discussion

The present investigation takes a shared reality perspective to examine the model minority representation in the United States. Study 1 shows that Americans share the knowledge that the stereotypic image of Asian Americans comprises the model minority traits (being diligent, high achieving, and quiet). Study 2 further establishes that Americans assume that most people in the United States expect Asian Americans to conform to the model minority image. Taken together, these results suggest that the model minority image of Asian American is a widely shared reality in the United States.

Study 3 provides the evidence that media exposure to Asian-American successes can strengthen the model minority belief as a shared reality among European Americans, broadening the difference in the perceived acceptance of Asian Americans relative to African Americans in the community. Such exposure also strengthens European Americans' inclination to align their personal attitudes toward Asian Americans with the perceived shared attitude toward Asian Americans.

## Implications for Asian Americans

These findings have important implications for how Asian Americans are perceived and received in the American society.

The glamour of the model minority image may overshadow the needs of some disadvantaged groups within Asian American communities, such as the poor families living in a single-room-occupancy unit in Chinatown, and struggling Hmong, Cambodian, and Laotian students (Vo, 2004; Yu, 2006). For example, a report, *A Portrait of Chinese Americans* (Organization of Chinese Americans & Asian American Studies Program at the University of Maryland, 2008), revealed that although twice as many Chinese Americans over age 25 are college degree holders relative to the general population, there are also significantly more Chinese Americans who have earned less than a high school diploma compared with the general population. Figures from the U.S. Census (2000) also point to the wide achievement disparities within Asian groups. Whereas 44% Asian Americans over 25 years of age have a college degree, merely 7% of Hmong, 8% of Laotian, and 9% of Cambodian hold a college degree. Failure to conform to the model minority expectation of the struggling Asian American students often led to unjust treatment by teachers (Chang & Sue, 2003), leaving these students' education needs unnoticed (Lee, 2001; Nance, 2007; Yu, 2006). Mental health and substance abuse issues have also been hidden behind the model minority glamour (Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Uba, 2003). The apparently glorious image sets up a racial frame that pressurizes Asian Americans to conform to avoid becoming the targets of discrimination (Chou & Feagin, 2008). In fact, Asian Americans tend to underuse mental health and substance abuse treatment services, and those who use these services tend to exhibit more severe symptoms (e.g., Calvan, 2008; Chen, Sullivan, Lu, & Shibusawa, 2003; Sakai, Ho, Risk, & Price, 2005).

In short, there are huge disparities within Asian American communities; however, overgeneralization of some Asian-American successes often places the need of some Asian-American communities on the back burner. For instance, because of a budget deficit, in March 2008, 19 programs under the San Francisco Mayor's Office of Community Development had undergone budget cuts. Among all the programs, the three most affected ones are those that provide services to low-income Asian communities (Chin, 2008). Asian Americans are also excluded as a protected minority under federal affirmative action policies (Suzuki, 2002) although, as discussed earlier, a sizable portion of the Asian-American student population was struggling academically. In fact, a recent study has demonstrated how reading vivid newspaper articles that glorify the successes of Asian Americans would, ironically, leave individuals who are motivated to address social inequality with the impression that Asian Americans need less support than other disadvantaged groups. As a consequence of this process, individuals who would have fought for underprivileged Asian Americans may feel indifferent to the needs of Asian Americans and withdraw their support for social programs that address these Asian Americans' needs (Chao, Chiu, & Lee, 2010). More importantly, as our results suggest, European Americans may continue to believe in the model minority image despite the disparity between this image and the actual experiences of many Asian Americans, as long as the model minority image is supported by frequent media coverage of Asian American successes. Furthermore, such coverage may also increase European Americans' tendency to tune their personal attitude toward Asian Americans toward the glamorous image of the model minority.

## Implications for Interracial Relations

Some scholars contend that the propagation of the model minority image in news media is motivated by the American ruling class to legitimize American "bedrock values," to justify social inequality, and to disunite Asian Americans and African Americans by pitting them against one another (e.g., Chou & Feagin, 2008; Takaki, 1998). Although the present research cannot directly address this ruling class hypothesis, our data show that media exposure to model minority images can enlarge the gap in the perceived acceptance of Asian and African Americans in the community, favoring Asian Americans at the expense of African Americans and reinforcing the model minority myth as a shared reality. Thus, although the model minority standard might motivate individuals in the society to pursue the American ideal of hard work and endurance, reinforcing American "bedrock values," when this model minority ideal is used as a yardstick to evaluate other ethnic groups, it might lead to intergroup bias and interethnic tensions (Kawai, 2005; Omatsu, 1994). Future studies should identify conditions under which the model minority ideal would inspire achievement motivation and circumstances under which the same ideal would lead to negative emotions, sparking interracial conflicts.

## Limitations and Conclusion

One limitation of the present investigation is that we did not examine the effects of the success images of other positively evaluated minority groups (e.g., Jewish Americans, recent African immigrants). As recent African immigrants have been portrayed as the "new 'model minority'" (Page, 2007) and research has shown that they are often more positively evaluated than American-born African Americans (Rimer & Arenson, 2004; Tormala & Deaux, 2006), it is important to investigate how the success image of this minority group may impact racial perceptions in the United States in future research.

Although the news media nurtured model minority image has received broad attention in public discourses (Hurh & Kim, 1989; Tang, 1997), little experimental research has been carried out to examine the interracial ramifications of the model minority image. Whether the prevalence of the model minority image is intended by the ruling class to promote the American "bedrock values" (Takaki, 1998) or to justify social inequality (Omatsu, 1994) is not a question that psychology can answer; however, psychology can offer a behavioral science perspective on how such partial representations of Asian American successes can influence individuals' racial perceptions. We hope this article will inspire future studies that would deepen our understanding of the creation and propagation of the model minority stereotype and its social consequences.

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