

# Positioning Asian Americans in social cognition

Jin X. Goh<sup>1</sup>  | Ryan F. Lei<sup>2</sup> | Linda X. Zou<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Colby College, Waterville, Maine, USA

<sup>2</sup>Haverford College, Haverford, Pennsylvania, USA

<sup>3</sup>University of Maryland–College Park, College Park, Maryland, USA

## Correspondence

Jin X. Goh.

Email: [jin.x.goh@gmail.com](mailto:jin.x.goh@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

Asian Americans are increasingly positioned at the center of current events, yet extant theories and approaches in social psychology (and social cognition specifically) may not adequately capture how Asian Americans are perceived and treated in the current American racial landscape. We propose three directions to propel social cognition research on Asian Americans. First, research emphasizes Asian Americans' perceived high status (e.g., the model minority stereotype) while often overlooking their perceived foreignness. The two-dimensional *Racial Position Model* elucidates the consequences of being stereotyped as perpetual foreigners for Asian Americans and their relations with other racial and ethnic groups. Second, research and laypeople alike consider East Asian Americans to be the prototypical Asian Americans, thereby excluding subgroups such as South and Southeast Asian Americans. Considering the *ethnic diversity* of Asian Americans challenges and extends existing social psychological theories. Lastly, much of psychological research approaches race in isolation without considering its intersection with other identities such as gender. An *intersectional framework* offers insights into how Asian Americans' gender and race overlap in our social cognition. More nuanced research on Asian Americans is needed to fully understand race relations in the 21st century and we hope these three interconnected directions can guide researchers who are interested in the topic.

## KEYWORDS

Asian Americans, race, ethnicity, intersectionality, perpetual foreigner, stereotypes, social cognition

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Asian Americans faced unprecedented danger not only from a deadly virus but also from their fellow Americans who accused them of being foreign carriers of disease and a threat to “true Americans” (Li & Nicholson, 2021). These resentments and resulting instances of harassment and violence remained on the periphery of national discourse until a White man murdered eight people in Atlanta, six of whom were East Asian women (Diaz & Romo, 2021). Such attacks against Asian Americans revealed a persistent but less recognized side of the Asian American experience: that as much as they are viewed as successful model minorities, they are also seen as perpetual outsiders.

The duality of the Asian American experience has also permeated the U.S. political sphere. In 2022, the Supreme Court heard two cases challenging the use of race-conscious college admissions policies (e.g., affirmative action). The organization Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA) brought forth these challenges by claiming to represent the interests of Asian Americans, alleging that affirmative action discriminates against Asian Americans in favor of less-qualified Black and Latine students (Gersen, 2022). Such narratives portray Asian Americans as a high-achieving monolith when, in reality, college attendance rates and access to educational resources vary drastically across Asian American ethnic subgroups (Gebeloff et al., 2021). As such, many Asian Americans themselves benefit from and support affirmative action (Venkatraman, 2022).

Social psychology's current understanding of Asian Americans fails to adequately explain this somewhat paradoxical portrait. Asian Americans are viewed seemingly positively, yet face widespread racial discrimination (Czopp et al., 2015); they are stereotyped as competitive and threatening yet also submissive and obedient (e.g., Berdahl & Min, 2012; Bu & Borgida, 2021; Fiske et al., 2002). Resolving these apparent contradictions requires going beyond traditional approaches in social cognition, such as introducing greater differentiation *within* the Asian American category. Furthermore, extant research on Asian Americans does not provide a full view of their position in modern race relations (Tseng & Lee, 2021). Asian Americans are perceived and treated in ways that often challenge the “bifurcated poles” of either Black or White (O'Brien, 2008). Indeed, stereotypes of Asian American have deviated from stereotypes of other racial and ethnic groups consistently throughout U.S. history (Ancheta, 2006). These stereotyping processes justify racial hierarchy and maintain the stratification of not only Asian Americans themselves but all communities of color.

We propose three interconnected directions to advance social cognition's study of Asian Americans. We then conclude with a discussion of how our field can continue to progress by taking into greater consideration Asian Americans' actual experiences. First, we argue that social psychology's focus on the portrayal of Asian Americans as a model minority (i.e., a racial and ethnic minority group that has achieved great financial and educational success; Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2020) only provides a partial understanding of how Asian Americans are perceived. We use the *Racial Position Model* (Zou & Cheryan, 2017) to consider how Asian Americans are stereotyped simultaneously as high in status but perpetually foreign. The inclusion of a dimension of perceived cultural foreignness into our field's consideration of Asian American stereotype content reveals aspects of contemporary race relations that may otherwise be obscured or rendered invisible.

Second, the “Asian American” catch-all label masks the complex heterogeneity contained within the most ethnically and economically diverse U.S. racial group. To address the homogenization of Asian Americans as a monolith, we consider the importance of *ethnic disaggregation* and acknowledging Asian Americans' ethnic diversity. Disaggregating Asian Americans to account for their full spectrum of ethnic heterogeneity will improve the generalizability of our existing theories and methods and uncover novel research avenues to explore.

Third, to address the apparent contradictions of how Asian Americans are represented in social cognition, we consider an *intersectional framework*, which can offer us insights into how perceptions of Asian Americans' race intersect with gender. Investigating how stereotypes of Asian Americans are often intersectional may help to shed light on potential mechanisms by which the racial status quo is maintained and variation with the Asian American category is minimized.

## 2 | RACIAL POSITION MODEL

In the mid-20th century, the reversal of long-standing bans against immigration from Asia was accompanied by a shift in Asian Americans' stereotype content. The 1965 Immigration Act introduced a preference system that favored the admission of Asian immigrants from well-educated and professional backgrounds, altering the socioeconomic composition of Asian communities in the U.S. (Wu, 2013). Accordingly, in both popular perception and psychological research, Asian Americans have come to be seen as a well-educated and upwardly mobile model minority (Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2020; Kim et al., 2021; Sue et al., 2021).

The model minority stereotype comprises traits such as being hardworking, intelligent, mathematical, self-disciplined, and obedient (Ho & Jackson, 2001). The seminal Stereotype Content Model (SCM; Fiske et al., 2002) shows that Asian Americans are stereotyped as high in competence (e.g., skilled, capable) due to their high perceived status, but low in warmth (e.g., unsociable, passive) due to their perceived competitiveness with the societal referent group (i.e., White Americans). These mixed stereotypes have mixed consequences. For instance, Asian Americans face discrimination because of their perceived unsociability, which is incongruent with the traits that people in the U.S. value and expect in leaders (e.g., assertiveness, social skills) and can thus lead Asian Americans to be disproportionately excluded from leadership positions (Berdahl & Min, 2012; Lu et al., 2020; Sy et al., 2010). At the same time, being seen as a model minority can buffer Asian Americans against discriminatory experiences faced by other communities of color (e.g., facing bias from teachers, or being racially profiled by police or shopkeepers; Huynh, 2012; Hwang & Goto, 2008; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). However, a narrow research focus on the model minority stereotype fails to consider another important stereotype that targets Asian Americans: that of the perpetual foreigner.

The perpetual foreigner stereotype portrays Asian Americans as outsiders who are culturally unassimilable, regardless of birthplace or citizenship. Historical and political analyses show that from their earliest arrival to the U.S., Asian Americans have consistently been positioned outside of the American identity (Lee, 2015). For example, immigration and naturalization laws throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries made Asian Americans ineligible for U.S. citizenship and citizenship's rights and privileges (Hong, 2019). The perception of Asian Americans as foreigners can have dangerous consequences, as evidenced by the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II for their assumed loyalty to Japan, the erroneous prosecutions of Chinese American scientists for alleged espionage on behalf of foreign governments, or most recently, the targeting of Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic (He & Xie, 2022; Lee, 2022; Li & Nicholson, 2021; Mandalaywala et al., 2021). Anti-Asian violence is often backed by the perceived association between Asian Americans and foreign military adversaries or economic competitors, such as in the murder of Vincent Chin, a Chinese American man who was blamed by his assailants for Japan's impact on the U.S. automobile industry (Lee, 2022). The model minority stereotype alone is limited in its ability to explain such experiences. However, the perpetual foreigner stereotype remains understudied within psychological research. For instance, a search of PsycINFO for *Asian American* and *model minority* together returned nearly 800 peer-reviewed articles. In comparison, a search for *Asian American* and *perpetual foreigner* returned under 40 peer-reviewed articles, and *Asian American* and *foreignness* returned under 10.

The two-dimensional Racial Position Model (Zou & Cheryan, 2017; see also Kim, 1999) reveals that racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. are stereotyped along two distinct dimensions. Along a dimension of perceived status, consistent with past research (Fiske et al., 2002), Asian Americans are seen as higher in educational, economic, and

occupational prestige than other communities of color, though not as high status as White Americans. Along a second dimension of perceived cultural foreignness, Asian Americans are seen as foreigners deviating from the American superordinate category prototype. Indeed, within a shared superordinate category (e.g., "American"), subgroups differ in the extent to which they are perceived as representative of that category (Wenzel et al., 2008). Representations of superordinate categories tend to privilege the characteristics of the dominant subgroup (Hegarty & Pratto, 2001). As such, there exists "shades of Americanness" (Dovidio et al., 2010), in which White Americans are robustly perceived as the most "American" while Black and Native Americans as perceived as relatively less American (see Devos & Mohamed, 2014 for a review). Certain communities of color, including not only Asian Americans but also Latine Americans and Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) Americans, are perceived as especially distant from the American identity to such a degree that they are considered culturally foreign (Zou & Cheryan, 2017). Taken together, Asian Americans are positioned within U.S. society as a high-status model minority, and simultaneously as perpetual foreigners outside the bounds of American identity.

Deeper consideration of how Asian Americans are stereotyped not only as high status, but also as foreign, and how these two dimensions of stereotyping may interact with each other, can improve our understanding of contemporary race relations. A two-dimensional Racial Position Model may help identify the specific contexts in which Asian Americans are likely to be marginalized. For instance, the model minority stereotype would suggest that Asian Americans face less discrimination compared to other communities of color. Indeed, past work has documented that Asian Americans are less likely than Black and Latine Americans to encounter discrimination for certain high-status jobs (e.g., doctor, scientist; Dupree et al., 2021; King et al., 2006). However, Asian Americans may simultaneously be vulnerable to discrimination in job contexts where American identity is considered relevant (e.g., jobs involving national security; Yogeewaran et al., 2012). For instance, Asian Americans may be less likely to be selected for a job requiring American cultural knowledge compared to a job requiring advanced education (Pope et al., 2023). They may also be precluded from positions due to concerns about their accents and English language proficiency (Oreopoulos, 2011; Timming, 2017).

The Racial Position Model may also reveal additional mechanisms that underlie White Americans' prejudiced responses towards Asian Americans. For instance, research on White Americans' perceptions of intergroup threat has found that White Americans perceive Asian Americans as a threat to their own group's economic and academic success (Butz & Yogeewaran, 2011; Maddux et al., 2008). More recent work reveals that White Americans also perceive Asian Americans as a threat to their American culture and identity, and this perceived foreign cultural threat explains their desires to move away in response to local Asian American population growth (Zou & Cheryan, 2022).

Finally, the Racial Position Model may illuminate conditions under which different communities of color may band together. Perceiving shared experiences of discrimination facilitates greater intra-minority solidarity (Craig & Richeson, 2016). Asian Americans' experiences of being stereotyped as a high-status model minority may be inconsistent with other communities of color's experiences with discrimination. However, Asian Americans' experiences of being stereotyped as perpetual foreigners could be highlighted to increase solidarity with other communities of color who are also commonly positioned as foreign (e.g., Latine Americans, MENA Americans; Eidgahy & Pérez, 2022; Zou & Cheryan, 2017). Incorporating both the model minority stereotype and the perpetual foreigner stereotype (and the potential interplay between the two) into our understanding of Asian American stereotype content allows social psychological theory and research to better capture how Asian Americans are perceived, as well as reveal aspects of contemporary race relations that may otherwise go overlooked.

### 3 | ETHNIC DISAGGREGATION

The "Asian American" label arose out of the 1960s civil rights movements that sought to coalesce different Asian ethnic groups in solidarity with other communities of color (Okamoto, 2014). There are over 20 Asian American ethnic groups, with the six largest ethnic groups being Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese

Americans (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). Each ethnic group carries its own cultural heritage, language, practices, religion, immigration history, and more.

However, the Asian American label has shifted in its meaning over time to center East Asian Americans (e.g., those with heritage from China, Japan, and Korea). People in the U.S. tend to position those with East Asian heritage as the prototypical Asian Americans (Goh & McCue, 2021; Kuo et al., 2020; Lee & Ramakrishnan, 2020). Although South Asian Americans (e.g., those with heritage from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh) and Southeast Asian Americans (e.g., those with heritage from Vietnam, the Philippines, and Cambodia) do in fact identify with the broader Asian American category, they are less likely to be categorized as such compared to East Asian Americans (Goh & McCue, 2021; Lee & Ramakrishnan, 2020). South and Southeast Asian Americans themselves acknowledge that they are not perceived or categorized as Asian Americans, in part due to their darker skin tones relative to East Asian Americans (Lee, 2019; Ryabov, 2016; Yamashita, 2022). Such exclusion from the Asian American label marginalizes non-East Asian Americans' experiences, which contributes to their disidentification from the Asian American label (Flores & Huo, 2012; Lee, 2019).

Centering East Asian Americans permeates the research process as well. For instance, popular databases for facial stimuli, such as the Chicago Face Database (Ma et al., 2015) and the Karolinska Directed Emotional Faces (Lundqvist et al., 1998), are composed almost entirely of East Asian faces. Similarly, common research paradigms that involve presenting facial stimuli, such as the Asian - European American Implicit Association Test, exclusively feature East Asian targets (Xu et al., 2014). The perceived prototypicality of East Asian Americans also has consequences for how measures referencing the broad pan-ethnic Asian American community are construed. For instance, the SCM (Fiske et al., 2002) shows that Asian Americans are stereotyped and rated as high in competence. However, participants may be interpreting the broad "Asian American" label as referring to East Asian Americans. Southeast Asian Americans (e.g., Vietnamese and Filipino Americans) instead report being stereotyped as low-achieving and inferior in status and intellect (Nadal et al., 2012; Ngo, 2006). When researchers and participants conflate Asian Americans broadly with East Asian Americans specifically, this can severely limit the generalizability of methods and conclusions.

Conversely, actively incorporating disaggregation into research practices can uncover stark differences in experiences across ethnic communities. While East Asian Americans tend to have higher median household incomes than the national average (which contributes to narratives of Asian Americans as economically successful; Gebeloff et al., 2021), Burmese Americans and Bhutanese Americans have lower household incomes than the national average. The narrative that Asian Americans' presumed economic success is because of their stereotypically strong academic achievements also obscures disparities. While 83% of Taiwanese Americans and 60% of Chinese Americans are college graduates, the graduation rates among Cambodian Americans and Laotian Americans are far below the national average. Although SFFA positioned itself as an advocate for all Asian Americans, the majority of surveyed Asian American voters favor affirmative action; disaggregation further reveals that 82% of Korean Americans and 80% of Indian Americans overwhelmingly support affirmative action, in contrast to 59% of Chinese Americans (Lee et al., 2022). The monolithic label of Asian American conceals the massive heterogeneity of their experiences and researchers ought to take such heterogeneity and diversity more seriously.

Disaggregation can also extend social cognition theories on perceptions of Asian Americans. For instance, disaggregation can illuminate variation in category prototypes by cultural context. Building on the Racial Position Model (Zou & Cheryan, 2017), Goh and McCue (2021) demonstrated that "shades of Americanness" differ even among Asian American ethnic groups, such that South Asian Americans are stereotyped as more foreign and less prototypically American relative to East and Southeast Asian Americans. Crucially, this finding was limited to the U.S. context. In the U.K., "Asians" colloquially refers to South Asian British, due to a longstanding pattern of South Asian migration and the history of British imperial colonization and control of India and other South Asian countries. British participants perceived South Asians as more prototypically Asian and less culturally foreign than American participants. Practicing ethnic disaggregation reveals important and predictable cross-cultural variations in how Asian Americans are stereotyped and racialized.

In practice, disaggregation of Asian Americans does not necessarily mean that all studies should include every single Asian American ethnic group. Rather, simply being specific in describing research stimuli can promote accurate

interpretation of research findings in order to avoid improper generalization. For instance, if researchers are using facial photographs of Asian Americans as stimuli, it is important to specify whether the stimuli are all East Asian Americans or include other Asian American subgroups. When measuring stereotypes of Asian Americans, it may be useful to consider how participants evaluate the broader category as well as the specific ethnic groups to uncover potential similarities and differences. Additionally, we urge researchers to create more diverse databases. As noted above, popular face databases exclusively focus on East Asian targets. Incorporating more diverse Asian targets would surely fuel research programs in social cognition. Finally, when conducting cultural comparisons, researchers should be mindful that the nebulous “Asian” category label may hold different meanings for participants in different countries.

Disaggregation is still a nascent territory within social cognition and more research is needed. Herein, we largely summarize disaggregation research that uses broad ethnic subgroups (e.g., East and South Asian Americans) rather than specific ethnic groups (e.g., Chinese and Indian Americans). However, considerable differences exist within these subgroups. Yet perceivers may not always be able to (or want to) differentiate between subgroups (Kawakami et al., 2017), such as Vincent Chin's attackers who thought he was Japanese (Lee, 2022), or Americans' avoidance of both Chinese and non-Chinese Asian restaurants during the COVID-19 pandemic (Huang et al., 2023). During World War II, Chinese Americans wore “I am Chinese” buttons to escape anti-Japanese sentiment because other Americans could not readily distinguish between the two East Asian ethnic groups (Lee, 2015). Even within each specific ethnic group, there are still substantial variations in socioeconomic status, skin tone, and political engagements. For instance, one in four Chinese Americans in New York City lives in poverty (Wong, 2021), but such statistics are concealed by the narrow focus on the model minority stereotype, which could lead to an underestimation of the Asian-White wealth gap (Kuo et al., 2020). In addition to ethnicity, researchers can consider other ways to disaggregate Asian Americans, such as immigration and generational statuses, political affiliation, religion, and social class and caste.

Accurate representation of Asian American heterogeneity can expose the inequities that different Asian American subgroups face. Nonetheless, disaggregation research must not be entrapped by the mindset of who has it worse than others, which pits Asian ethnic groups against one another and against other communities of color (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Tseng & Lee, 2021; Young & Sullivan, 2016). Rather, the focus should be on how acknowledging the heterogeneity and diversity of Asian American communities can paint a fuller and more colorful portrait of social cognition instead of viewing them as a homogenous monolith that all look the same.

## 4 | INCORPORATING AN INTERSECTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The need to consider the perpetual foreigner stereotype and heterogeneity within the Asian American category is also fundamentally a need to recognize and incorporate issues of power and hierarchy into our characterization of Asian Americans—something that an intersectional framework is well-positioned to do (Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989). By intersectional framework, we refer to a set of guiding questions posed by Cole (2009) inviting researchers to ask where there are similarities across the entire group, where there are unique outcomes and experiences among subgroups, and what role structural factors play in shaping these outcomes.

Although there are a variety of subgroups to consider within Asian Americans, we focus on how perceptions of Asian Americans intersect with gender because gender is a fundamental component of how people understand the social world (Martin & Slepian, 2021; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Moreover, the intersection of gender and race is the starting point and focus for Black feminist scholars who championed the importance of intersectionality (e.g., Crenshaw, 1989). Nonetheless, there are important intersections with other social categories to consider, including how older (Kalish & Moriwaki, 1973) or gay (Semrow et al., 2020) Asian Americans are perceived and treated by others. Overall, we would urge interested readers to consider why they are interested in a particular social location implied by an intersection of social categories.

Applying the guiding questions from an intersectional framework can be helpful for addressing both theoretical puzzles and real-world outcomes of anti-Asian discrimination. For example, one puzzle is why Asian Americans

are sometimes stereotyped as high in competence but low in warmth—both stereotypically masculine traits (Fiske et al., 2002)—and at other times stereotyped with more feminine traits (e.g., Galinsky et al., 2013; Ghavami & Peplau, 2013). We suggest that focusing attention on how structural forces shape society throughout history helps to resolve this apparent puzzle by directing researchers to consider *when* and *why* Asian Americans might be gendered in a particular way. For example, understanding that the Page Act was enacted in 1875 to specifically exclude Chinese women, who were viewed as “immoral,” helps to clarify why Asian Americans are often feminized. That is, the “threat” of Asian people has long focused on Asian women, who were seen as a threat to White Christian marriages (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021). This feminization of Asians was extended to Asian men who were forced into stereotypically women's work (e.g., laundry) after the completion of the transcontinental railroad (Lei et al., 2023; Park, 2013).

Vestiges of these historical events and processes reverberate in U.S. society today. Asian American women continue to be exoticized (Mukkamala & Suyemoto, 2018; Sue et al., 2007), often in service of White men's sexual desires (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021; Sue et al., 2007). These ideologies are even socialized to Asian American girls and young women (Ahn et al., 2022). Meanwhile, Asian American men continue to be emasculated and relegated to the margins of U.S. culture and society (e.g., Schug et al., 2015, 2017).

Additionally, applying an intersectional framework encompasses and extends both the need for disaggregation and the need to consider how perceived status and cultural foreignness shape perceptions of Asian Americans. With respect to disaggregation, incorporating an intersectional lens can help identify how different subgroups of Asian Americans face divergent outcomes like career advancement opportunities (Lu et al., 2020). For example, East Asian Americans are perceived as less assertive than South Asian Americans in law and business schools, which helps explain the underperformance of East Asian Americans in these contexts (Lu et al., 2020). Given that people also perceive social roles (e.g., organizational leaders) to be gendered (Hall et al., 2015; Schein et al., 1996), these differences in perceptions of masculine- and feminine-typed traits for Asian Americans subgroups matter.

Considering how ethnic disaggregation might shed light on inequalities is even more important when incorporating a person's gender into the analysis. For example, East Asian American women are considered hyper-feminine (Hall et al., 2015), which may disadvantage them in contexts that emphasize masculinity-contests (i.e., hyper-competitiveness; Vial et al., 2022). To the extent that South Asian American women are viewed as less feminine than their East Asian counterparts, they may be less subjected to the perception that their gender is unfit for masculinized contexts. However, it may be possible that there are unique dynamics at these intersections of race and gender, rather than simply a question of the degree of bias experienced (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Related research examining differences in backlash for Black and White women expressing agency shows that Black women are not punished to the same degree as White women for agentic behavior (Livingston et al., 2012) but are also held to higher standards for organizational underperformance (Rosette & Livingston, 2012).

With respect to how intersectionality can also inform how perceived status and cultural foreignness shape perceptions of Asian Americans, we can consider how both these dimensions are hierarchy-maintaining ideologies (as indicated by the Racial Position Model) and are gendered in a way to maintain White supremacy. Specifically, when considered through the lens of intersectionality, stereotypes of Asian Americans are emphasized to contrast with stereotypes of Black people in the U.S. (for a review, see Lei et al., 2023). Importantly, different gendered stereotypes may be strategically deployed to maintain the racial status hierarchy. More masculine stereotypes of competence are invoked to highlight Asian Americans' “model minority” status relative to Black Americans and minimize Black Americans' experiences with racism (Kim, 1999), but more feminine stereotypes are invoked when explaining why Asian Americans are not a fit for leadership positions relative to White Americans (e.g., Sy et al., 2010). Additionally, we would argue the perpetual foreigner stereotype is implicitly gendered in that stereotypes of Asian Americans as sly, cunning, and in the U.S. to “steal” jobs are more aligned with stereotypes of women (Maddux et al., 2008). By carefully considering the use of gendered stereotypes of Asian Americans, researchers can gain insight into the mechanisms by which racial hierarchy is maintained.

Finally, positioning Asian Americans as an integral part of social cognition research and incorporating an intersectional framework can be important for bridging sub-areas of psychology and pushing forward theories about how we learn about the social world. For example, developmental researchers have posited that humans come equipped

with the capacity to differentiate between ingroup and outgroup members (Spelke & Kinzler, 2007), of which gender is a fundamental differentiator (Kinzler et al., 2010; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). From this perspective, infants and children's acquisition of social categories may be orthogonal, acquiring representations of gender and race independent of one another. Although this approach has yielded important insights in how children reason about a social category, research designs operating under this premise preclude the possibility that children account for multiple social categories in an intersectional way and leave open theoretical questions of whether children are reasoning about ingroup-outgroup dynamics or about the social categories themselves.

To tackle some of these questions, recent work has begun to examine whether children develop representations of social categories that are more intersectional by incorporating Asian Americans as stimuli alongside Black and White Americans. For example, while children marginalize Black women from their representations of a female gender group, they do not do the same to White or Asian women (Lei et al., 2020; Leshin et al., 2022). Moreover, (predominantly White) children are more likely to pick Asian women as the most typical representation of women and Black women as the least representative (Lei et al., 2022). These findings suggest an alternative possibility for how children learn about the social world. Rather than learn about one category at a time (e.g., gender, then race) and then activate a specific category in a given context, children may be learning about people in this more intersectional way. This work highlights how the inclusion of Asian Americans can improve our understanding of psychological phenomena, such as moving beyond simple ingroup-outgroup dynamics.

## 5 | UPDATING PERCEIVERS' PERSPECTIVES BY INCORPORATING TARGETS' PERSPECTIVES

Thus far, we have focused on how Asian Americans are *perceived* by others. However, social cognition theory and research can be greatly informed by taking into consideration the experiences of Asian Americans themselves. For instance, Asian Americans' reported experiences with prejudice and discrimination show a clear emergence of the perpetual foreigner stereotype. Asian Americans describe frequent encounters of being treated like "aliens in their own land," faced with assumptions that they are not "real" Americans (e.g., "Where are you really from?"; Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Sue et al., 2007; Zou & Cheryan, 2017). These experiences are also qualitatively different across subgroups of Asian Americans. For example, South Asian Americans are uniquely stereotyped as terrorists, which is a highly gendered stereotype that particularly affects South Asian men (Iwamoto & Kaya, 2016; Thangaraj, 2015).

These experiences of being stereotyped in various ways have consequences for Asian Americans' psychological well-being. For example, being targeted by the perpetual foreigner stereotypes (e.g., having their American citizenship or residency questioned, or having their English language ability commented on) predicts greater depressive symptoms and a lower sense of belonging in the U.S (Armenta et al., 2013; Huynh et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2011). As another example, East Asian American women who face socialization pressures to be hyperfeminine express issues with body image, self-esteem, and general mental health (Ahn et al., 2022).

Incorporating insights from Asian Americans' own experiences helps researchers and the general public alike to better understand current events as they unfold. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the enduring nature of the perpetual foreigner stereotype as Asian Americans faced directives to "go home" and accusations of being a diseased threat invading America (Cheah et al., 2020; Lee & Waters, 2021; Wu et al., 2021). By understanding the experiences of targets of discrimination, we can develop stronger theories on how these groups are perceived.

## 6 | CONCLUSION

Over 11,500 anti-Asian violence cases were recorded between 2020 and 2022, the majority of which targeted Asian women (Stop AAPI Hate, 2022). This unprecedented increase, which defied the model minority image, left many shocked and perplexed. Concurrently, Asian Americans have been used as a pawn in the fight to dismantle affirmative action, an uncomfortable position that many Asian Americans themselves do not support. Extant theories and methods in social



cognition cannot adequately explain such events, in part because Asian Americans remain understudied within psychology (Roberts et al., 2020; Torrez et al., 2022; Yip et al., 2021). The problem is structural—research on Asian Americans as well as Asian American researchers themselves are consistently underfunded (Chen et al., 2022, Doàn et al., 2019). When social psychologists actively ignore Asian Americans, we miss critical insights on modern race relations. Instead, social cognition research can paint a fuller picture of Asian Americans in the 21<sup>st</sup> century when we also consider their racial position as perpetual foreigners, their ethnic diversity, and the intersection between race and other dimensions of identity, especially gender. We hope that this article can serve as a roadmap to inspire more research on Asian Americans.

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## ORCID

Jin X. Goh  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2181-2879>

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## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

**Jin X. Goh** is an assistant professor of psychology at Colby College. His research focuses on how social identities shape social perceptions and evaluations.

**Ryan F. Lei** is an assistant professor of psychology at Haverford College. His research takes an intersectional perspective on how people learn and use social categories.

**Linda X. Zou** is an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Maryland. Her recent research examines how racial and ethnic groups think about and relate to one another.

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