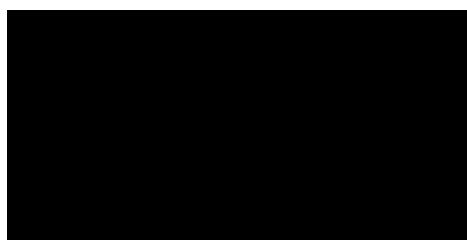


**Anti-Asian Hate in America: Exploring a Psychological Aspect of Human Thought,
Behavior, and a Solution**

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Abstract

Anti-Asian hate began as soon as the first wave of Asian immigrants stepped foot on the continental United States in the late 1800s. Recently, the COVID-19 global pandemic sparked a resurgence of anti-Asian sentiments that led to a notable downshift in physical and mental well-being within the Asian community. Through the lens of in-group-out-group-bias, Asians are a minority “outgroup” to the White majority “ingroup” which can help to explain perpetrators’ discriminatory behaviors, ranging from microaggressions to violent hate crimes. Anti-Asian stereotypes, such as the “perpetual foreigner” and “model minority” stereotypes, insidiously ‘justify’ and perpetuate outgroup bias and anti-Asian hate, causing Asians to experience a decreased sense of belonging to White American culture as well as a disillusionment with their Asian identity. In order to reduce the prominence of anti-Asian hate in American society, Asians may benefit from rallying under a shared “Asian American” social identity. Through strengthening intragroup relationships, Asians can more effectively exert minority influence. When anti-Asian hate is universally seen and addressed as widespread, systemic and traumatizing, social and policy changes are more likely to be executed. Ultimately, it will take the united efforts of Asians and non-Asians to reduce anti-Asian hate and improve racial equity in the United States.

Anti-Asian Hate and How it Impacts Asians

On March 16, 2021, a shooting spree in metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia resulted in the deaths of eight people, six of whom were Asian¹ women (Fausset & Vigdor, 2021). This was just one of the latest painful incidents in an unabating timeline of anti-Asian hate.

Anti-Asian hate began with the arrival of the first wave of Asian immigrants onto US territory in the mid-19th century. These immigrants were perceived as a social, economic and health threat by anti-immigration nativists, especially White American union workers who viewed Asians' hard working ethics as an impediment to the crusade against harsh working conditions. Thus, the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) was passed. It was the first and only major federal law to restrict immigration purely based on race.

Anti-Asian discrimination endured throughout the twentieth century in the forms of segregation, displacement, and violent hate crimes. This was exemplified in the treatment of Japanese citizens in World War II (Japanese-American Incarceration During World War II, January 24, 2022). During WWII, the entire Japanese community was dispossessed of their homes and properties, and subsequently relocated to internment camps where they were held in relative isolation until the conclusion of the war. Many victims sustained psychological injuries from the experience that transformed into multigenerational legacies. Today, the children of the trauma victims face a myriad of consequences that may include a reduced sense of self-regard and a heightened pressure to conform to societal norms and expectations (Nagata, 1993).

In 2021, amidst the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic, Asian hate crimes quadrupled in the US (Buchholz, 2021). "Chink", a largely discarded xenophobic slur used against the Chinese people, reemerged along with other derogatory, stereotypical terms which were hurtled

¹For the purposes of this essay, the terms Asian/Asians will be used to represent both Asian-identifying and Asian American-identifying individuals.

largely at persons of seeming Asian descent. Moreover, Asians, and especially persons of Chinese heritage, were accused of being carriers of COVID-19, which was dubbed the “Chinese Virus” (Lee & Waters, 2021). The rise in hate crimes have led to a growing concern for physical safety and a visible downshift in self-esteem and mental health for Asians, the racial demographic least likely to reveal their needs for emotional support (Lee & Waters, 2021). The heightening of cultural biases against Asians further accentuated practices of inequitable hiring and promotion to leadership positions in the workplace (Huang, 2020), and Asian businesses experienced disproportionate financial loss and lower rates of governmental assistance (Mishra, July 20, 2021). This suggests that anti-Asian discrimination is widespread, systemic and traumatizing.

Human Behavior Related to Anti-Asian Hate

A sense of belonging is positively correlated with perceived meaningfulness of life (Lambert et al., 2013). Belonging is crucial to well-being, and that belonging can be derived from a cultural group, national heritage, or any other social group to which a person ascribes (Woo et al., 2020). However, for Asian immigrants, this sense of belonging in America is often denied. Due to distinctive phenotypes, such as skin tone or facial features, and differing cultural practices, seen in language or etiquette, non-Asian Americans have considered Asians as “aliens” (Huynh et al., 2011). According to in-group-out-group-bias, otherwise known as ingroup favoritism, Asians were perceived as an “outgroup” that did not belong by White Americans, the “ingroup”, and henceforth alienated (Brewer, 2007). Additionally, ingroup members debase outgroups to maintain or elevate their own social status which can range from “invisible”

microaggressions such as backhanded compliments to outright hate crimes such as the Atlanta mass shooting.

Even as a teenager I have experienced this phenomenon and can recall a recent encounter with a person who appeared to be a White middle-aged female. The woman confronted me on a street intersection while I was masked for protection against the spread of COVID-19. Although she was unmasked, she demanded to know why my whole face was not covered with a mask and insinuated that I was more responsible for the spread of the virus than non-Asians. Through the lens of ingroup favoritism, this woman exhibits the tendency to direct negative emotions toward the “outgroup” instead of gazing inward or objectively examining circumstances, especially given that Asians have the lowest infection rate compared to the other ethnicities in the US (Cases, Data, and Surveillance, 2020).

The association of the Asian identity with COVID-19 has permanently altered Asians’ perspective on how they view their roots (Choi et al., 2021; Woo et al., 2020). Frequent incidents like the one provided above encourage and intensify Asians’ desire to fit into White American culture and feel a sense of belonging. Through their subsequent efforts to assimilate into the White American “ingroup”, the unity and power of the “outgroup” Asian community have diminished. In the long term, Asians can not hope to resolve the fundamental issue of anti-Asian racism by adapting to Whiteness (Young et al., 2021).

Human Thought Related to Anti-Asian Hate

The term *stereotype* was coined by Walter Lippman (1922) to refer to “the tendency of people to form mental images based on preconceptions that members of a particular group are alike in certain ways” (Lelacheur, 2022, pp. 159-164). In the 1800s, nativists initially resented

Asians for “stealing” their jobs in the workforce. They subsequently stereotyped the Asian “outgroup” by associating the Asian identity with traits such as laziness, stubbornness and immorality (Bozich, 2016). However, even after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 drastically diminished the number of Asian immigrants entering the US, discrimination against Asians persisted. Nativists did not update their beliefs but rather ignored or rejected the information that would conflict with their existing stereotypes in order to maintain cognitive consistency, leading to the perpetuation of anti-Asian stereotypes into the 21st century.

One of the prevailing stereotypes against Asians today is the “perpetual foreigner” stereotype. It tags Asians as inherently foreign people who will never be “true Americans” (Lee et al., 2009). The notion that Asians are “outsiders” and not “one of us” likely helps perpetrators’ consciences reconcile with committing violent and xenophobically-motivated acts. Additionally, it leads Asians in the US to question their identity and experience a lower sense of belonging to White American culture (Huynh et al., 2011). The COVID-19 pandemic facilitated the process of alienating the Asian population, casting them as easy targets to project fear and anger on.

Another prominent stereotype that contributes to anti-Asian hate is the “model minority” myth. It paints *all* Asians as smart (e.g. good at math), hard-working and wealthy—the embodiment of achievement (Lee et al., 2009). This benevolent form of racism puts Asians on a pedestal, palliating their traumatic racist experiences. The insinuation that all Asians are benefiting from the American Dream serves as a denial to their historic and current marginalization and excludes them from anti-racism conversations, resources, and policy support (Keum et al., 2018). Taken together, these two stereotypes suggest all Asians are the same, which in turn means that they are different from all other Americans, therefore insidiously perpetuating outgroup bias and anti-Asian hate.

A Solution to Anti-Asian Hate

According to President Biden, “silence is complicity” (White House, 2021). However, after the first few days of national news coverage and bolded newspaper headlines regarding the mass shooting in Atlanta, Georgia that killed six Asian women, no concrete actions on the state or federal level were taken. Thus, I believe stopping anti-Asian hate is not simply an issue concerning increasing public awareness, but rather one of increasing public action.

The Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) postulates that people naturally categorize themselves on the basis of social group memberships to fulfill their innate need to identify and belong (Choi et al., 2020). Thus, a first step to ending anti-Asian hate is for Asians of all subcultures to come together under the umbrella of the “Asian American” social identity, to set aside interregional differences and quarrels in their united bargain for better racial rights. The goal isn’t to affirm the stereotype that “all Asians are the same”; it is for Asians—Filipinos, Chinese, Persians, Indians, and many others—to find common ground and seek solace from each other rather than from their perpetrators. Aiming to adapt to Whiteness is no solution to discrimination.

With a stronger shared social identity of Asians, we are more likely to exert minority influence. Minority influence occurs when long term exposure to a consistent minority group position alters the beliefs and behaviors of the majority (American Psychological Association, n.d.). One way this may manifest is in the form of Stop Asian Hate rallies and protests. This collective action will hopefully facilitate a process by which the public evaluates and reforms their ideologies. If Asians, the minority “outgroup”, stay consistent and unfaltering in their position, the majority will likely gradually adopt the views of the minority. According to

Moscovici (1985), private acceptance will come first, and social and policy changes will follow.

Through the efforts of united Asians and open-minded non-Asians, I hope the United States will achieve a greater level of cultural pluralism and become a society that glories in racial equity.

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