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"Hard to Crack": Experiences of Community Integration Among First- and Second-Generation Asian MSM in Canada

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Asians are the largest racial minority in Canada making up 11% of the population and represented over 60% of new immigrants between 2001 and 2006. We examined the experiences of community integration for first-generation ($n = 27$) and second-generation ($n = 22$) Asian Canadian men who have sex with men (MSM) in their ethnic and gay communities. Through focus group interviews, we explored their level of connectedness and the level of discrimination they experienced in the two communities. Findings indicate that Asian MSM in general perceived their ethnic community as homophobic, stemming from a combination of seeing sex as taboo, stereotypes about being gay, and the affiliation with religion. Although the literature indicates that immigrants rely on the support of their ethnic communities, our finding suggest that this is not the case for Asian immigrant MSM, who in our sample reported feeling less connected compared to their second-generation counterparts. For the gay community, our sample reported mixed experiences as some regarded it as welcoming, whereas others described it as racist. However, these experiences did not differ by generational status. Many were aware of explicit messages stating "No Asians" in dating contexts, while at the same time being aware that some older White men were interested in dating Asians exclusively. Barriers to integration in both communities may contribute to feelings of isolation. Theoretical implications are discussed.

Keywords: Asian, men who have sex with men, immigrants, community

Asians are the largest racial minority in Canada making up 11% of the population and represented over 60% of new immigrants between 2001 and 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2006; Statistics Canada, 2008). South Asians and Chinese are the largest immigrant groups representing 51% of new immigrants during that time period (Statistics Canada, 2006). Immigrants often turn to their ethnic communities for support as they transition and acculturate to their new country (Noh & Avison, 1996; Tran, 1987; Zhou, 1992). Previous research on Asian immigrants has demonstrated that ethnic social support networks have a direct positive effect on immigrants' subjective wellbeing (Yoon, Lee, & Goh, 2008). Those who were not well-connected with their ethnic communities often experience negative psychological outcomes (Noh & Kaspar, 2003).

Although ethnic communities can facilitate integration, they can also be sites of discrimination and rejection for some members. In a national survey of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) Asians in the United States, close to 90% agreed that homophobia or transphobia were problems in their ethnic community (Dang & Vianney, 2007). Cultural norms within Asian communities often prevent open discussion regarding same-sex relationships. For one, sexuality is regarded as a private matter, not to be discussed publicly (Chan, 1995). In some Asian languages, there are no words for homosexuality, which further silences such discussion (Boulden, 2009; Nakamura, Flojo, & Dittrich, 2009). Second, the emphasis on family and collectivism places high importance on conformity to traditional gender roles. These expectations often oppose Western cultural ideas emphasizing individuality and self-discovery. In a study on the coming out process of Asian Americans, Dittrich and Jernewall (2007) found that the main reason for delaying "coming out" was to avoid putting their parents in a socially awkward position and to prevent stigmatizing the family within their ethnic community. This is consistent with the idea of placing the family above the self. In this light, the differences between Asian and Western cultural expectations regarding sexual expression and familial obligations often create

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challenges for Asians to live an openly gay life. The stigma of homosexuality and fear of bringing shame to ones' family often increases social isolation as many Asian men who have sex with men (MSM) purposely avoid interacting with other Asian MSM so that community members will not suspect their sexual orientation (Chng, Wong, Park, Edberg, & Lai, 2003).

Sexual minorities who face discrimination from their families or community often turn to the LGBT community for support. Involvement in the LGBT community can offer many benefits. Past studies have found that gay community involvement is related to safer sex practices (Seibt et al., 1995) as well as improving self-understanding (LeBeau & Jellison, 2009). Asian MSM therefore, at least theoretically, have another community they can turn to for support. However, the LGBT community can also be unwelcoming to ethnic minorities. In a study of LGBT Asians in the United States, 78% agreed that there is racism in the gay community (Dang & Vianney, 2007). Discrimination is important to consider as it has negative consequences for physical and mental health (Krieger, 1999; Mays & Cochran, 2001; Paradies, 2006; Peterson & Jones, 2009; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003). Experiences of discrimination among MSM have been linked to depression (Yoshikawa, Wilson, Chae, & Cheng, 2004) as well as higher risk of HIV (Choi, Yep, & Kumekawa, 1998; Myers et al., 2001). When Asian MSM experience discrimination in the gay community this may discourage their social involvement, a factor that may exacerbate the social isolation they already feel within their ethnic community.

Although previous research has highlighted the challenges of multiple minority identities among Asian MSM (Han, Operario, & Choi, 2011; Mao, Mccormick, & Van de Ven, 2002) or examined their experiences in one community (Boulden, 2009; Phua, 2007; Poon & Ho, 2008), most research has not directly compared the experiences of Asian MSM in both ethnic and gay communies. In addition, the context of their experiences relating to discrimination in both communities, as well as how it relates to their sense of belonging, has largely been ignored. The theory of intersectionality is particularly relevant with its recognition of the interdependence of social categories and research on multiple minority identities have begun to emerge. For example, Bowleg's (2012) qualitative study on Black gay and bisexual men's experiences of intersectionality found that a majority felt that their lives were challenging because of the interconnectedness between the discrimination that they experienced from different communities. With this in mind, the present study will attempt to bring further understanding to the experiences of Asian MSM by exploring their experiences in both gay and ethnic communities.

Another criticism in the literature is that immigration status is often ignored or omitted (American Psychological Association [APA], Presidential Task Force on Immigration, 2012). Much of what we know about the experiences of Asian immigrants is extrapolated from research on Asians who may or may not be immigrants, and most research on Asian MSM does not differentiate participants by generational status (Mao et al., 2002; Poon & Ho, 2008). Generational differences are important as past research shows that racial discrimination impacts native-born Asian Americans differently compared to Asian immigrants when it comes to their sense of coherence and well-being (Ying, Lee, & Tsai, 2000; Yip, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2008).

The recent APA Presidential Task Force on Immigration report called on the field of psychology to "examine the ways in which various settings (e.g., schools, community centers, neighborhoods) serve to enhance and impede acculturation, language acquisition, identity development, academic performance, peer relationships, and mental and behavioral health for immigrant-origin individuals across the life span" (APA Presidential Task Force on Immigration, 2012). Our study aims to expand the understanding of how Asian immigrant and second-generation MSM experience their social environments by exploring perceptions of belonging and discrimination in both ethnic and gay communities in Canada and whether these experiences differ by immigrant status. The following research questions are addressed: (a) What is the experience of Asian MSM in their ethnic communities? (b) Are there generational difference and, if so, why are these experiences different? (c) What is the experience of Asian MSM in the gay community? (d) Are there generational differences and if so, why are these experiences different?

Method

Design

Fourteen semistructured focus group interviews were conducted with 49 Asian MSM in Vancouver, Canada between March and July 2011. Data collection through focus groups is advantageous as they encourage opportunities for participants to answer open-ended questions with their own vocabulary and expand on topics of interest (Kitzinger, 1995). Interactions among group members can reveal the different forms of communication participants use in their daily lives (i.e., jokes, anecdotes) as well as highlight cultural values and norms that may not surface during one-on-one interviews (Kitzinger, 1995).

Because of the invisibility of the Asian MSM population, a convenience sampling approach was applied. Participants were recruited by print and online advertisements, as well as through email blasts to LGBT organizations. All participants provided written consent, and ethical approval was granted by the Office of Research Ethics at Simon Fraser University. Participants received $50 for their participation.

Participants

To be eligible for the study, participants had to self-identify as 19 years of age or older, Asian, have had sex with other men, and live in Greater Vancouver. Prior to participation in the focus group, participants completed a demographic questionnaire. Thirty-six participants were foreign born, out of which nine immigrated to Canada before the age of 12. Past research has termed these preadolescents as the *1.5 generation* (Rumbaut, 2004). Unlike first-generation immigrants, a large proportion of their socialization, particularly their schooling, occurred in the host country. Therefore, much of the behaviors and attitudes resemble those of second-generation immigrants. Past studies have often combined the 1.5- and second-generation under one group in their analysis because of their cultural similarities (Aparicio, 2007; Kibria, 1999; Wiley, Deaux, & Hagelskamp, 2012; Zhou, Lee, Aquis Vallejo, Tafoya-Estrada, & Xiong, 2008). For these reasons, we combine the 1.5- and second-generation participants in our analysis. In total,

27 participants were labeled as *first generation*. Twenty-two participants who were either born in Canada or immigrated as children before the age of 12 were labeled *second generation*. The majority of participants were university educated (over half for both groups). Those who identify themselves as Chinese represent a majority in our sample, which reflects the majority Asian population in Vancouver. Table 1 highlights participants' demographic characteristics.

Procedure

Eligible participants were assigned to focus groups based on language preference. The majority of the focus groups were conducted in English, while some were conducted in the native language of the participants. Eleven of 14 focus groups ranged from three to six participants. Because of unanticipated absences, three interviews had one or two participants. All interviews were led by an Asian-Canadian male moderator, who used a semistructured questionnaire that explored seven broad topics including community participation, meeting partners, discussing sex, disclosure, risky behavior, health concerns, and social support. Because of the flexible nature of the focus groups, participants often raised issues outside the structured script. The averaged length is between 60 and 90 minutes. A note taker, who also served as the transcriber, observed the focus groups to assist in identifying participants with quotes. Focus groups were taped, translated by a native speaker when not in English, and transcribed. All transcripts were checked and corrected by someone other than the transcriber to ensure accuracy.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Focus Group Participants

Characteristic	First generation (*n*)	Second generation (*n*)
Age		
19–29	7	11
30–39	10	5
40–49	5	5
50 and over	5	1
M age	37	32
Income		
Unemployed	6	4
$0 to <$30K	3	10
$30K to <$50K	8	1
≥$50K	9	6
Did not answer	1	1
Education		
Completed University	20	12
Ethnicity[a]		
Chinese	9	13
Filipino	4	1
Indian	4	1
Japanese	5	1
Korean	1	0
Southeast Asian	1	3
Other	4	5
N	27	22

[a] The number of ethnic identifications may exceed the total number as some participants identified with more than one ethnicity.

Data Analysis

We used strategies that follow the process of thematic analysis, a method used to make sense of qualitative data by identifying and recognize patterns from observable phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998). We followed a generalized six step process as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). All transcripts were analyzed using NVivo 9, a high-quality tool as it provides users the ability to record, sort, match, and link coded qualitative data in a systemic and verifiable manner (Auld et al., 2007; Bazeley, 2007). Interviews were read and coded independently by the first and second authors using codes initially generated from the seven topics developed a priori. We then generated and search for subthemes to highlight feelings and attitudes that describe the participants' sense of belonging and experiences with discrimination with repeat readings of the transcripts. For this particular analysis, we analyzed responses to the question "How connected do you feel to the gay community in Vancouver?" to capture their sense of belonging. For the perception of discrimination, we analyze the responses to the question "To what degree do you think that the gay community is welcoming to Asian men?" Similar questions were asked regarding their experience in the ethnic community. In our analysis, we focus on the response count (answers were converted into a three-point scale) as well as the social context of their experiences. To capture the context that helped to explain their feelings and attitudes, key passages were coded by paying particular attention to responses that included (a) specific experiences within or general feelings toward either communities; (b) words such as friends, discrimination, racism, homophobia; and (c) references to sense of belonging or discrimination in response to other questions during the focus groups. To ensure consistency of coding, meetings were held after the coding of each transcript to discuss the analysis. The final themes were also established together to ensure consensus of interpretation. Based on NVivo's coding comparison query (a tool that measures interrater reliability), the percentage of agreement for relevant nodes is over 95%. Lastly, key demographic characteristics and responses were cross-tabulated for generational comparisons.

Results

We examined the experiences of Asian MSM in both ethnic and gay communities in terms of perception of discrimination and sense of belonging. Participants provided context for why they felt connected or disconnected from the respective communities. The similarities and differences by generational status were also compared.

Experiences in the Ethnic Community

The interviews revealed that many Asian MSM (24 out of 38)[1] perceived their ethnic community as homophobic and that these discriminatory attitudes often stem from three factors: the perception of sex as taboo, stereotypes about being gay, and religious affiliation. The findings also revealed that a higher proportion of first-generation participants (15 out of 21 first-generation vs. nine

[1] The response comparison is sometimes less than the sample size as not all participants responded to all questions.

out of 17 second-generation) sensed homophobia in their ethnic community. In addition, more first generation Asian MSM (14 out of 23) did not feel involved in their ethnic community compared to second generation participants (seven out of 20).

Sex as Taboo

The first factor that underscores homophobic attitudes stems from seeing sex as a taboo topic in everyday discourse. Most participants acknowledge that in their culture they "just don't talk about it." Sex is perceived to be a private matter and therefore not openly discussed.

> There is a trend that we don't talk about sex—period. You don't put sex in front of anyone's face, whether even straight or gay or whatever; you just don't talk about it. And if you do talk about it, it's offensive . . . it is not that people think that it's a crime or that you will go to hell. It is something that people just don't talk about. (Evan, second-generation, 22, Chinese)[2]

Because sex is generally not openly discussed, this exacerbates the discomfort and taboo around homosexuality. As the participant below explained, homophobia may not be verbalized and, like other sexually related topics, talking about homosexuality is avoided.

> Asian people are not really talkative in terms of making any homophobic comments . . . it seems like it's not something they would talk about . . . They are trying to avoid the topic, instead of making homophobic comments or anything like that. (Mitchell, second-generation, 20, Chinese)

Stereotypes About Being Gay

Silence around sex and sexuality only compounds misunderstandings about what it means to be gay. One of the most common misunderstandings discussed by participants was about the relationship between homosexuality and HIV/AIDS. Some participants remarked on their family's reaction when they came out to them as gay.

> The first thing would be the fear of AIDS, that's the first thing Asian communities jump to. "You have AIDS!" They don't even care just you have mentioned you are gay. They associate that synonym to AIDS. That is the first thing that I would face. I will not sit near you, or eat the same things; they make sure that I don't touch them . . . that sort of thing. (Oliver, second-generation, 45, Chinese)

Another stereotype includes equating homosexuality with losing one's culture. As one participant succinctly stated, "they think that it is Western culture that is making me gay." Others also report similar experiences.

> It's how they juxtapose queerness with Western culture, like for example my parents unfortunately are in that group where they assume that . . . if you're gay then you are kind of conforming to Western culture. . . . It's just the idea that Asian people can't be gay. (Kyle, second-generation, 23, Chinese)

Religion

Religion was not a topic that was specifically addressed by the interview questions but was brought up by several participants when discussing their ethnic community. Our interview data showed that religious affiliation often reinforced traditional ideologies that are rooted in Asian culture and negative attitudes toward homosexuality are often rooted in religion. A 38-year-old Japanese first-generation immigrant spoke about avoiding Asian communities in general due to their religious affiliations. "I live in Burnaby and there are a lot of Korean and Chinese. They are very conservative especially Koreans because of Christianity, so I cannot be in their community." Another participant, a 25-year-old bisexual Filipino who recently immigrated to Canada calls religion a "big factor" that keeps him from accessing his ethnic community. He commented on the popularity of Catholicism in his ethnic community and how new immigrant friends echo much of the conservative, religious mentality he sees back home. Fearing rejection, he has yet to disclose his sexual orientation to them.

One participant experienced formal excommunication from an ethnic church and an Indonesian-born participant who has been in Canada for 10 years, was officially voted out of his church.

> Ethnically I am a Chinese Indonesian and I was involved in a church a lot and it was not a gay friendly church. So that was my initial introduction to my ethnic group in Vancouver, I guess. And then I got kicked out . . . so, that was kind of my last . . . connection to my ethnic community. (Adi, first-generation, 28, Chinese Indonesian)

When asked about their perception of connectedness and discrimination in their ethnic community, a majority of participants described it as largely unsupportive of their sexual identity. Only a few participants (two out of 21 for first-generation and one out of 17 for second-generation) perceived their ethnic community as accepting. Similarly, a small proportion of participants from both groups responded in the affirmative to being involved in their ethnic community (two out of 23 first-generation and four out of 20 second-generation). Generational differences were observed when comparing perceptions of discrimination and community connectedness. When asked about the ethnic community, 15 out of 21 first-generation immigrants perceived high levels of discrimination in ethnic community whereas nine out of 17 second-generation immigrants had similar views. First-generation immigrants were also much less connected to their ethnic community. Close to two thirds of first-generation participants (14 out of 23) reported no connection to their ethnic community while only one third of second-generation participants (seven out of 20) reported this. Unlike second-generation Asian MSM who can seek relationships outside the ethnic community, new immigrants have less access to alternative sources of social support. However, to avoid discrimination, they seem to disconnect themselves from their ethnic community.

For those who choose to maintain connection to the ethnic community, they hide their sexual identity and lead "dual lives." As one Indian immigrant remarked:

> My culture, my root, my ethnicity is important to me. It identifies who I am. And I go to temple every week, I know the community . . . I know straight married people from my community. But I'm not out to them . . . so it's like living a dual life . . . but then again, as I said, my culture identifies me as who I am and it's important to me. So I make

[2] All participants are identified by a pseudonym, generational status, age and ethnicity.

> an effort to go and attend all these events . . . it is my ethnicity, my root, my culture. (Navin, first-generation, 42, Indian)

Experiences in the Gay Community

Although participants had more negative feelings about their ethnic communities, feelings were mixed when it came to the mainstream gay community. Some felt that the gay community was very accepting of them (12 out of 44), whereas others reported racism within the gay community (11 out of 44). Interestingly, these opinions did not cluster by generation whereby first- and second-generation Asian MSM seemed to experience the gay community in similar ways. Less participants perceived the gay community as discriminatory (11 out of 44) compared to the ethnic community (24 out of 38). Much of their experiences are derived from their social involvement as well as their dating experiences.

Social Involvement

Participants described their social involvement in the gay community within the context of spending time in the gay neighborhood, participating in recreational activities, or attending events such as Gay Pride. Many participants also reported that they have either worked or volunteered within the gay community (10 out of 19 first-generation and 12 out of 16 second-generation). Although the perceptions of the gay community are slightly more positive compared to the ethnic community, it is noteworthy that there are those who feel discriminated against and disconnected from the gay community. Although many participants found roles to play as volunteers in the gay community, many described making friends and meeting people as difficult. Some have described the gay community to be "cliquey" and "hard to crack."

> It seems like Vancouver is pretty cliquey in a way that people are always in groups, and especially the gay community . . . In Vancouver, Caucasians are the majority in the gay community. So, they are, I would say the dominant group. . .they have their kind of judgment toward gay Asians . . . (Mitchell, second-generation, 20, Chinese)

> The gay scene . . . actually the general social scene in Vancouver, I have been told, it's kind of hard to crack. And I actually find that I go sometimes to the bars . . . if I meet somebody, it is usually very superficial . . . may be a one night stand or something. It's very, very hard to crack. (Arnie, first-generation, 49, Filipino)

Discrimination and Sexual Objectification

When asked about discrimination in the gay community, many draw from their dating experiences as well as their social interactions within the community. About a dozen participants in our sample regarded the gay community to be overtly racist, whereas an equal number denied that the gay community is racist. The rest of the participants tended to see segregation or avoidance of Asians as a matter of "sexual taste" rather than outright discrimination. This perception holds true for both first- and second-generation immigrants and seems to be derived mainly from their opposing experiences during courtship.

A majority of our participants, regardless of immigrant status, have encountered the phrase "No Asians" explicitly during their dating experience. Almost all of our participants used gay online dating sites to find sexual partners and many mentioned seeing "No Asians" stated directly in the dating profiles or email responses by potential dating partners. In a discussion about online profiles that read "No Asians," one respondent found it insulting.

> Just seeing ads online that's saying 'no Asians', I find that very offensive, because they're singling out a group . . . why don't they say preferences, you know, why don't they say, "Oh, I am into white guys," which is really what they want to say. But they are saying "no Asians." And that's like no. . . like none. . . not even one . . . I am just saying it's not nice to see that. (Adam, second-generation, 34, Chinese)

At the same time, many participants regardless of generational status (26 of 32 participants) discussed being sexually pursued by older White men. A 43-year-old Indian immigrant stated, "it's just so strange that it's the White people who are more interested in me than men of color." While another participant reports,

> I have had older white guys . . . say, "oh I can look after you for the rest of your life". . .I was like. . .I don't need someone to look after me . . . It's not valid . . . I have people let's say, "oh I can marry you and then you know you will be Canadian." (Jian, first-generation, 31, Chinese)

These opposing experiences of being both desirable and undesirable often lead to ambiguous feelings about racial attitudes within the gay community. Many interpret dating rejection within the community as a matter of "sexual taste" rather than racial discrimination. Some participants note that Asians themselves do not date other Asians, whereas others acknowledge some White gay men prefer to date Asians exclusively.

> I think it's more like a personal preference. Like I do think it has to be based on physical attraction. Like if you are not like physically attracted, it kind of hard for you to take the next step. . . So I think people that prefer Asians, it's more like their personal preference. So I don't really find that insulting because personally I would say like most time I'm attracted to White guys. But that doesn't mean I am discriminating against any other races. Yes, I think it just personal preference. (Mitchell, second-generation, 20, Chinese)

Another reason that participants may have mixed feelings about discrimination is that they have internalized some of the racist messages that they encounter. As Mitchell's quote points out, some Asians are not sexually attracted to other Asian men. This may be due to internalization of the societal messages of who is desirable and who is not. Being desired by and sexually pursued by a White man may be interpreted as rising in social rank, particularly because they also are aware that some White men outwardly reject Asian men as discussed earlier with the "No Asian" messages that participants commented on.

Another reason why participants may see rejection as a result of sexual taste is that they do not witness blatant racism on a day-to-day basis and generally believe that ethnic minorities are fairly treated in Canadian society. Canada is proud of being a multicultural society and policies that allow for a steady stream of new immigrants can give the impression that institutional racism is not an issue in Canada. Therefore, participants may downplay their experiences with discrimination as isolated incidences, mainly by individuals who are culturally ignorant and do not label them as acts of racism.

> I have never faced anyone who tells me that "you are fucking Chinese. . . get out of the bar," no. But [if] I want to talk to some good-looking guy and he just brushed me off. . . I don't interpret that as racism. And I don't see any organized racist or institutionalized racist organizations or attitude here. If there is, it's individual and individual everywhere, every city; everywhere in the world there are individuals like that . . . it is individual incidences and . . . and isolated incidence and not an organized or a trend that we have to face. (Cheng, first-generation, 57, Chinese)

Cheng's experience demonstrates the distinction between institutional and interpersonal discrimination. Because he has not observed institutionalized racism, he does not interpret interpersonal rejection as having any relation to racism. He makes the distinction that individual people and incidents may be racist, but that it is not organized or institutionalized. This interpretation may allow the participant to not feel bothered by "individual incidences."

In sum, both groups do not exhibit much difference in their involvement and perception of discrimination in the gay community. For first- and second-generation Asian MSM, there are those who are involved and feel accepted, and at the same time, there are those who feel disconnected and rejected. However, on the whole, regardless of generational status, participants were more positive toward the gay community than their ethnic community.

Discussion

The present study advances our understanding of Asian MSMs experiences in Canada and their perceptions of connectedness and discrimination in both their ethnic and gay communities. Comparing their experiences by generational status gives insight to the unique experiences of sexual minority immigrants. Although previous research has focused on the benefits of ethnic community involvement (Noh & Avison, 1996; Tran, 1987; Zhou, 1992), our findings demonstrate that Asian MSM in our sample, particularly immigrants, do not feel accepted in their ethnic community. First-generation Asian MSM in Canada are less likely to access their ethnic communities for support as many have encountered discrimination and rejection from members of their ethnic community. Overall, participants perceived less negative reactions from the gay community than the ethnic community despite blatant messages of rejection that they witnessed (e.g., "No Asians"). Interestingly, participants did not differ in experiences with the gay community by generational status, which implies that the position of Asian MSM in the gay community does not improve with generational status. As a result, Asian MSM encounter difficulties with social integration in both communities.

Ethnic Community

Past literature suggests that the rejection of homosexuality by some Asian cultures is not based on religious morality but on traditional values associated with the family unit, which rejects homosexuality because it threatens to disrupt the continuation of familial lineage and patriarchal gender roles (Boulden, 2009; Chan, 1995). However, our participants discussed the role of Western religion, which reveals new insights into the dynamics of contemporary immigrant communities. Some Asian immigrants adopt Christianity either before they immigrate or convert after they immigrant to Canada. Their religious affiliation permits them to subscribe to the existing homophobia as exhibited in mainstream society while using religion to reinforce their own cultural ideology. Thus, participants identified that religion facilitates and legitimates antigay attitudes and churches often create a second barrier that inhibits Asian MSM from accessing resources in their ethnic communities. Unlike most immigrants who are welcomed by ethnic churches, our participants are forced to hide their identity to fit in, rejected due to their sexual orientation, or self-exclude to avoid rejection.

Although past literature often celebrates the role of ethnic communities in providing social support for new immigrants (Noh & Avison, 1996; Tran, 1987; Zhou, 1992), the reverse is true for Asian MSM in our sample. When comparing generational statuses, our results showed that a larger proportion of first-generation immigrants perceived the ethnic community as homophobic compared to second-generation participants. In addition, first generation Asian MSM have a lower sense of belonging and seem to be less involved when it comes to the ethnic community compared to their second-generation counterparts. This may reflect that the ethnic community is accessed by second-generation Asian MSM on occasion through familial obligations, which may keep them somewhat connected to their ethnic community. Our second-generation participants are likely to have more resources at their disposal and can turn to other places for supplemental support. Therefore, they may rely less on their ethnic communities and have less expectations of support, which may translate into more satisfaction with their occasional involvement. These findings suggest that first-generation Asian MSMs are more likely to be impacted by the homophobic attitudes in their ethnic communities and less likely to seek support from them. For immigrants, the consequences of rejection may be more dire as they are pushed to the margins with little support due to the unfamiliarity with the mainstream culture and/or language barriers.

Gay Community

When it comes to the gay community, our findings show that Asian MSM in our sample felt more positive compared to their feelings about their ethnic communities. Although many have encountered racism, they often regarded this as isolated incidents rather than a systemic problem. Furthermore, in contrast to the generational differences we observed regarding the ethnic community, generational status does not seem to matter when it comes to views about the gay community.

A closer examination reveals that this may be attributed to their interactions with White MSM during courtship as many spoke about their perception of the gay community based on their dating experiences. Asian MSM receive mixed messages about their desirability as sexual partners. On the one hand, they see blatant messages on dating websites that specify "No Asians," but on the other hand, they are aware that some, typically older, White men, seek out Asian men exclusively. This contradictory experience may condition Asian MSM to perceive dating exclusion based on race as "sexual taste" rather than discrimination. This is further compounded by the fact that many also spoke of their own preference for White men and rejection of other Asians as dating partners, which is consistent with previous research (Wilson et al., 2009). Rather than labeling their own preferences as internalized racism, they used their own desires to justify that it is just a matter

of attraction. Because their status in the hierarchy of desirability is more governed by physical appearance than by immigrant status, both first- and second-generation Asian MSM did not differ in their sense of belonging or level of perceived discrimination in the gay community. In other words, both generational groups are equally likely to be rejected by young White men but are at the same time equally likely to be pursued by older White men. This may be due to Asian MSM remaining in the role of an exotic "perpetual foreigner" which to some members of the gay community is fetishized and to others is seen as an undesirable trait (Han, 2008, 2009). Thus, Asian MSM are either rejected or sought for being minorities and are never viewed as just another gay Canadian man.

Community Comparisons

Our findings demonstrate that Asian MSM experience the ethnic and gay communities in very different ways. On the one hand, the ethnic community poses more of a problem for first-generation Asian MSM than their second generation counterparts, whereby over time second-generation Asian MSM seem to be less bothered by the homophobia within the ethnic community. On the other hand, although the gay community is seemingly more welcoming, the sense of belonging expressed by second-generation Asian MSM does not differ much from their first-generation counterparts. Second-generation Asian MSM may fare better in dealing with the ethnic community, but they are no better than immigrants when it comes to the gay community.

On the whole, Asian MSM not only experience the disadvantages of being ethnic minorities, but also hold a stigmatized identity in their ethnic community. Together, these twin forces increase their social isolation and may obstruct their access to resources from in both places. Experiencing discrimination in the gay community and the ethnic community can make it challenging to develop positive self-identity and may leave Asian MSM feeling isolated and without support. These experiences may have detrimental effects on their mental as well as physical wellbeing in the long run. Although the presence of a gay Asian community could theoretically offset the problem, participants in our sample did not endorse belonging to such a community. As one participant succinctly responded when asked about the Asian gay community: "What community? I didn't know there was one."

Research on other gay men of color have pointed to similar themes of rejection and discrimination from the various communities that they belong to. For example, in a qualitative study of Black gay and bisexual men, Bowleg (2012) found that they experienced racism and racial microaggressions within the White LGBT community and heterosexism in the Black community. In a sample of LGBT people of color, Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, and Walters (2011) found a relationship between racial microaggression experienced in romantic relationships and poor mental health outcomes. In addition, they reported that experiencing heterosexism within ethnic communities was also associated with poor mental health and may actually be more harmful than experiencing discrimination within the gay community (Balsam et al., 2011). Mental health outcomes of discrimination faced by Asian MSM in ethnic and gay communities should be further explored.

Limitations

Although the present study furthers the understanding of the experiences of Asian MSM, there are several limitations. First, Asians are not a monolithic group and in an attempt to be inclusive of this diversity, important intergroup nuances were likely overlooked. Future studies may identify differences among Asian ethnic groups if these groups are analyzed separately. For example, experience in their ethnic community may be related ethnic community size, whereby Chinese MSM, for example, may have different experiences belonging to a large ethnic community in Vancouver compared to someone who belongs to an ethnic group with a smaller population, such as Thai or Indonesian. In addition, Indian MSM, for example, may experience different stereotypes within the gay community or social pressures from their ethnic community than Japanese MSM. Second, the analysis did not account characteristics that may explain their level of integration in both communities (i.e., duration in Canada, level of acculturation, or level of disclosure of sexual orientation), which may affect their sense of belonging in either community. Third, those who were not comfortable identifying themselves as MSM were unlikely to participate in this study, which limits the generalizability of our findings to those who are more open about their sexual orientation.

Implications

Despite the limitations of this study, our findings have important theoretical implications for understanding the experiences of Asian MSM in Canada, who are a growing, yet understudied group. Despite the fact that Asians are the largest racial minority in Canada and that Canada's progressive laws protect the LGBT population from discrimination to a certain extent, Asian MSM are still at the margins. This highlights the importance of considering Asian MSMs experiences through an intersectional lens that recognizes that their lives are not unidimensional, nor are they additive, giving them the benefits of being part of two distinct communities. Instead, this study provides a view of Asian MSMs multiple, intersecting identities and the challenges that come from their interlocking identities that can exclude them from their communities.

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