Second-Generation Asian American Women’s Gendered Racial Socialization

Lydia HaRim Ahn¹, Brian TaeHyuk Keum², Gintare M. Meizys³, Adil Choudry⁴, Michelle A. Gomes³, and Lei Wang⁵

¹ Department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education, University of Maryland, College Park
² Department of Social Welfare, University of California, Los Angeles
³ Department of Psychology, University of Maryland, College Park
⁴ Department of Philosophy, University of Maryland, College Park
⁵ Department of Graduate Psychology, Chatham University

Utilizing an intersectional framework (Crenshaw, 1989) and socioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), we investigated the gendered racialized messages Asian American women receive growing up, otherwise known as gendered racial socialization, from their family, peers, and mass media. Consensual Qualitative Research was used to analyze interview data from 12 second-generation Asian American women. The results demonstrated that (a) family socialization messages included gendered racial discrimination, body image and physical appearance, marital/dating attitudes, role responsibilities and expectations, and academic/work expectations, (b) peer socialization included oppressive messages (e.g., physical objectification, denial of identity, lack of presence) and affirming messages (e.g., positive self-concept messages), and (c) mass media socialization included oppressive messages (e.g., lack of representation, stereotypical depictions), and affirming messages (e.g., messages about empowerment). These messages impacted Asian American women’s views on their body image and physical appearance, self-esteem, career/work, mental health, and critical consciousness. Implications and findings of the need to dismantle interlocking oppressive forces are discussed.

Public Significance Statement
Asian American women receive multiple gendered racial socialization messages from their parents, peers, and mass media that are rooted in interlocking systems of oppression surrounding racism and sexism. The present study provides implications for future prevention and intervention efforts to mitigate these negative effects on Asian American women.

Keywords: gendered racial socialization, Asian American women, intersectionality, consensual qualitative research

Despite the dominant narrative that Asian Americans are “model minorities,” or high achieving, economically successful, and well-adjusted, Asian American women are at risk of alarming mental health concerns. In fact, 15.93% of U.S.-born Asian American women report suicidal ideation and 7.15% indicate suicide plans (Duldulao et al., 2009), and are at higher risk for anxiety disorders than foreign-born Asian women (Takeuchi et al., 2007). A nationally representative sample suggests that Asian American women report higher rates of mental health concerns including major depressive disorder and suicidal ideation, and physical health outcomes such as chronic headaches compared to Asian American men (Hahn et al., 2010). These disparities may be because Asian American women face barriers related to being both racial and gender minorities (Li, 2014) and are victims of gendered racism (Essed, 1991; Mikkamala & Suyemoto, 2018). Given these concerns, there is a critical need for scholarship that investigates factors that contribute to these health outcomes.

Historically, scholars have investigated how parental messages about race can counteract and protect racial/ethnic minorities from the detrimental effects of racism (e.g., Atkin et al., 2019). However, research is increasing on how gender plays a role in the racial socialization process with African American families (e.g., Davis et al., 2019; Thomas & King, 2007), and scholars have noted the need to incorporate intersectionality theory to expand our understanding of racial socialization (Davis et al., 2019). The intersectionality scholarship in the field of counseling psychology, however, has often failed to address how intersecting systems of oppression and identities generate unique lived experiences (Shin et al., 2017). In addition, there also seems to be a neglect of research on developmental processes in counseling psychology research. In advancing these concerns, we aimed to investigate the explicit
and implicit messages Asian American women received in being both an Asian American and a woman, also known as gendered racial socialization. Investigating messages that Asian American women receive about their gendered racial identities growing up may help assist in our understanding of how certain messages may be beneficial or detrimental to their psychological well-being.

Racial and Gender Socialization

Asian Americans are the fastest-growing racial group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020), and they experience unique stressors due to race/ethnicity, especially known as Asian American identity (Ko, 2016). Most often, parents are the first socialization agent, consciously or unconsciously sending messages about their identities. For example, parents may tell them to be proud of their culture, assimilate into the mainstream culture, or treat everyone equally (Jang et al., 2016). However, this may differ by gender; specifically, second-generation Asian Americans, or those that were born in the U.S. and have immigrant parents, may have a unique socialization experience. Parents may immigrate to the U.S. for a variety of reasons such as economic and political factors, or for other family members already living in the U.S. Thus, some parents may tell their children to stay silent and focus on education rather than attending to racial matters, or they may not be as conscious or aware of discrimination and racial dynamics (Jang et al., 2016; Keum, Miller, et al., 2018). These parents may also be navigating a new culture and concept of identity in the United States and consequently may not be sending any explicit racial messages to their children (Young et al., 2020). Thus, other socialization agents may be salient in how Asian American women construct their identity. In addition, although there is emerging research on how parental racial socialization affects Asian Americans more broadly (e.g., Jang et al., 2016), Asian American women in particular receive unique messages given their minority gender identity.

Racial socialization theorists note that parents deliver unique racial socialization messages dependent on their child’s gender (Hughes et al., 2006). Evidence with Black families, for example, demonstrate that parents are more likely to send cultural pride messages to their daughters compared to their sons (Bowman & Howard, 1985). Similarly, Asian American women may receive unique messages and thus gender needs to be accounted for when examining racial socialization. Gender has been a major topic in the field of developmental psychology to understand how individuals are socialized to develop their gender identities starting as early as their early childhood (e.g., Bem, 1981; Bigler & Liben, 2006). Research posits that individuals develop their gender-related beliefs, thoughts, feelings, stereotypes, and behaviors based on their internal mechanisms (Bem, 1981) and their associations with their surroundings (Bigler & Liben, 2006). Thus, gender differences are a product of early socialization through development from parents and peers (Maccoby, 1988). Recently, scholars are examining children’s gender as an active part of the racial socialization process (Davis et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2015) and note that gender is shaped by race/ethnicity (Cole, 2009). To our knowledge, however, we only know of one study that examines how racial socialization may differ dependent on the child’s gender with Asian Americans.

Nguyen et al. (2015) examined the relations between family ethnic socialization, ethnic identity, and psychological well-being with Asian Americans. They found that for Asian American men, higher levels of family ethnic socialization were more strongly related to psychological well-being than for women. However, only for Asian American women, ethnic identity explained the relationship between family ethnic socialization and well-being. Given the weaker relationship between family ethnic socialization and well-being for women, it is possible that women’s experiences with their families involved stricter parental control. This study pushes the field in thinking about how gender may play a role in racial socialization experiences. However, the study only suggests that the racial socialization messages parents send may impact Asian American women and men differently. It is possible that families also deliver different types of content based on the child’s gender. The racial socialization theoretical frameworks with Asian Americans have largely omitted gendered experiences. Thus, our research aims to extend previous frameworks by proposing an intersectional approach to examine socialization experiences for Asian American women.

Theoretical Frameworks

It is important to consider the compounding of gender and race in socialization experiences, especially given the unique oppression Asian American women face that is more nuanced than considering their racism and sexism experiences individually (Keum, Brady, et al., 2018). The framework of intersectionality, rooted in the promotion of social justice for Black women, is an analytical tool that describes how intersecting systems of oppression impact marginalized groups with regard to race, gender, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, religion, and other social identity groups (Crenshaw, 1989). In the past few years, studies have investigated the specific, intersectional messages about the realities of being both Black and a woman/girl (Stokes et al., 2020), also known as gendered racial socialization. Research is emerging on gendered racial socialization messages with Black women (e.g., Brown et al., 2017; Davis et al., 2019; Stokes et al., 2020). In this article, we extend the literature to investigate gendered racial socialization with Asian American women.

Understanding socialization experiences of Asian American women from a predominately racialized standpoint would undermine the interlocking systems of oppression and historical context of the development of their womanhood, particularly since their experiences have been overshadowed and inadequately represented when viewed through a singular racial framework (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017; Shin et al., 2017). For example, the generalized foreigner and model minority myth stereotypes capture only part of their stories in navigating the world from an Asian American woman’s perspective. The intersectionality framework allows us to get closer to centering the socialization experiences of Asian American women and illuminating their unique lived experiences. In addition, Asian American women are victims of multiple, intersecting oppressive systems (racism, sexism) that contribute to these experiences. By investigating the impact of these systems, the present study aimed to understand and challenge these systems of power, privilege, and oppression (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017).

In addition, these intersectional, gendered racial socialization messages must be considered in various contexts. Thus, we utilized
a socioecological perspective given that there are multiple influences on child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Although the majority of socialization research has focused on parents, scholars also push for an examination of other agents of socialization (Priest et al., 2014). Theory suggests the importance of multiple agents, given that parents are not the only informational messengers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Priest et al., 2014), yet there are only a few studies that consider other agents of racial socialization (e.g., school besides parents (Ahn & Keum, in press; Byrd & Ahn, 2020; Su et al., 2020). Thus, in addition to parents, who are often the focal point of racial socialization studies (Priest et al., 2014), we also asked participants about messages from their peers and mass media for an integrated model of socialization (Davis et al., 2019). The microsystem is the first level, which reflects those with direct contact with children. The exosystem reflects social structures that indirectly affect children such as mass media and the neighborhood (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this study, we chose to not only examine parents, who are often the first socializing agents in the microsystem, but also asked about messages from their peers (microsystem) and mass media (exosystem) for a sociocultural understanding of the socialization process. Peers also serve as a proximal influence growing up and become increasingly important in the microsystem throughout development (Arnett, 2000). In addition, given that Americans on average spend half the day consuming media (Watson, 2020), we posit that the media may be a critical source of influence on Asian American women. Growing up, Asian American girls/women may receive various messages from their parents, peers, mass media, and popular culture (Tokunaga, 2016). Thus, investigating gendered racial socialization messages from multiple sources is instrumental to gain a more holistic understanding of Asian American women’s experiences.

Family Socialization

Much of the literature on racial socialization has focused on parent’s transmission of racial messages to their children. However, research with Black women have suggested that parents send distinct information about their identity including messages about their skin and hair (Davis et al., 2019), self-determination, spirituality (Thomas & King, 2007), gendered racial pride and empowerment, family expectations and responsibilities, internalized gendered racial oppression, sexual behavior, and independence/career/educational success (Brown et al., 2017). There are few studies with Asian American women surrounding parental socialization messages. Although studies have noted the impact of parenting on suicidal ideation and attempts (Augusberger et al., 2018), less is known about the specific messages that are being sent from parents. Some of the predominant themes across these studies are the gendered messages from parents expecting Asian American women to develop hyperfeminine, domesticated gender roles including staying quiet (Pyke & Johnson, 2003), and policing of restrictive sexuality expressions revolving sexual virtuosity, modesty, and innocence (Le Espiritu, 2001; Kim, 2009). A more recent qualitative study indicated that their parents influenced body dissatisfaction by pointing out their flaws such as body weight and acne (Brady et al., 2017). It is possible that Asian American parents may have also internalized White supremacy and patriarchy as a means of maintaining proxy privileges (Liu, 2017; Liu et al., 2019). However, some may challenge and resist traditional gender norms, such as mothers making decisions in the household and fathers doing chores such as cooking and cleaning (Pyke & Johnson, 2003). Although the previous studies have illuminated aspects of gendered racial socialization messages for Asian American women from their family such as messages about their bodies and expectations of being quiet, they have focused on specific types of messages (e.g., body image). We hope to expand this framework by investigating a more general understanding of the types of messages parents are sending to their Asian American daughters.

Peer Socialization

Although parents have been primarily the focus of gendered racial socialization studies, one recent study noted that peers can also be an important socialization agent (Davis et al., 2019). Through adolescence and young adulthood, peers become increasingly important socializing agents (Wang et al., 2015), as adolescents begin to individuate from their parents and spend more time with peers (Arnett, 2000). In fact, young people spend more time with peers and thus are more influenced by their peers than families during development (Brown & Larson, 2009).

For Asian American women, evidence demonstrates that peers impact their alcohol use (Iwamoto et al., 2011), body image experiences (Javier & Belgrave, 2015; Wong et al., 2017), and disordered eating (Phan & Tylka, 2006). A recently developed Gendered Racial Microaggressions Scale for Asian American women elucidated the following types of microaggressions against Asian American women: expectations of submissiveness, fetishism, media invalidation, and assumption of a universal appearance (Keum, Brady et al., 2018). Although gendered racial socialization messages can include discriminatory messages, there may be other types of messages that are sent. For example, peers may also engage in cultural socialization such as telling their peers to be proud of their culture (Lesane-Brown et al., 2005; Wang et al., 2015). Although these studies illuminate certain types of peer messages (e.g., cultural socialization, gendered racial microaggressions), gaining a broader understanding of peer socialization will be useful to examine how Asian American women must navigate multiple types of information from peers.

Mass Media Socialization

Mass media such as television, cinematic representations, and popular media culture continues to become a growing influence on child development (Subrahmanyan & Smahel, 2010). As of 2020, American consumers tend to interact more with the media than the global average, with adults spending almost 4 hr watching television on a daily basis (Watson, 2020). Given the growing consumption of mass media, it is critical to examine how Asian American women are represented on these platforms. Crenshaw (1991) theorized representational intersectionality as the media and images perpetuating a system of power, privilege, and oppression, and Collins (2000) noted that controlling images are false representations that justify and reinforce the oppression toward women of color. These controlling images define who and what people are in relation to each other, and how they can act and function in society. Although controlling images are false, they have a powerful force on both privileged and marginalized groups in proceeding with the status quo and resisting change.

Unfortunately, Asian American women often experience intersectional invisibility, or the failure to recognize and capture the unique
experiences of those with intersecting identities and instead distorting their characteristics to fit into their constituent groups (Coles & Pasek, 2020; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). In fact, only 3.3% of series regulars are Asian American women and when they are represented, they are often exoticized and hypersexualized (Chin et al., 2017) and portrayed as emotionally distant (Keum, Brady, et al., 2018). Some studies with Asian American women indicate that the media negatively affects Asian American women’s body image dissatisfaction due to the internalization of White beauty ideals (Lau et al., 2006) and internalization of thin ideals (Javier & Belgrave, 2015). Unfortunately, few television shows exemplify Asian American women in nonstereotypical forms. Chin et al. (2017) suggested that there are only a few shows, such as Fresh Off the Boat, with multifaceted representations of Asian Americans on television.

The Present Study

Studies have examined specific aspects of Asian American women’s experiences such as their body image experiences (e.g., Brady et al., 2017) and gendered racial microaggressions (e.g., Keum, Brady, et al., 2018). The present study extends the literature by investigating the various gendered racial messages second-generation Asian American women receive growing up. In addition, we investigate these messages from various domains, including parents, peers, and mass media. Using intersectional and sociological theories, we hoped to elucidate the inter sectional messages that are sent to Asian American women across multiple social contexts, and the impact of these messages. Our two main research questions were: (1) What are the messages Asian American women received growing up from their family, peers, and mass media? and (2) What are the consequences of these messages?

We used Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) methodology to provide a rich, descriptive understanding of these messages and to amplify the voices and lived experiences of Asian American women (Grzanka et al., 2017). We acknowledge that there is a considerable amount of heterogeneity within this group that we were not able to capture. Yet, we hope to shed light on some of the experiences of second-generation Asian American women may face, who belong to multiple subordinated categories (Cole, 2009) and are victims of oppression by giving them a voice through this research.

Method

Consensual Qualitative Research

We employed Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) given the exploratory nature of the study and the lack of empirical research on this area (Hill, 2012; Hill et al., 1997). CQR is a rigorous qualitative, descriptive, inductive research methodology that uses open-ended interview questions to understand the inner attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of individuals (Hill, 2012). Thus, CQR was suitable given that we wanted to identify themes and study in-depth inner experiences of Asian American women (Hill, 2012). The goal of CQR is to uncover the participant’s beliefs and experiences rather than concretely meaning. CQR also uses multiple researchers and perspectives, emphasizes reaching consensus, and uses an external auditor at each step to increase trustworthiness (Hill, 2012; Levitt et al., 2018). In addition, compared to other qualitative approaches, CQR uses a relatively structured method for data analysis, which facilitates replicability (Hill, 2012). Existing studies have used CQR to investigate intersectional experiences (e.g., Liang et al., 2017; Nadal et al., 2015). Thus, CQR was appropriate for our research questions given that we wanted to investigate inner experiences and capture participants’ lived experiences, while ensuring methodological rigor and trustworthiness of data.

Positionality

The research team included a 27-year-old, Korean cisgender female, international student, and doctoral candidate in counseling psychology who grew up in the U.S. for approximately 9 years during her childhood (Lydia HaRim Ahn); a 34-year-old, Korean Canadian cisgender male Assistant Professor with a counseling psychology background (Brian Taehyuk Keum); a 21-year-old, Lithuanian cisgender female undergraduate psychology student (Gintare M. Meizys); a 21-year-old Indian American cisgender male philosophy undergraduate student (Adil Choudry); and a 23-year old Bengali American cisgender female psychology master’s student (Michelle A. Gomes). Lydia HaRim Ahn on the team conducted all the semi-structured interviews with participants and had previous experience working with CQR methodology. Brian Taehyuk Keum also had previous experience with CQR and served as the internal auditor for the study given their expertise in Asian American mental health and intersectionality. The other research team members did not have previous experience with CQR, so training was given by Lydia HaRim Ahn who has had previous training experience from the developer of CQR. An Assistant Professor (Lei Wang), a 30-year old Taiwanese cisgender female, who has experience with CQR methodology and is an expert in Asian American mental health and psychology, served as an external auditor. All undergraduate coders were screened before signing up for the project, based on time commitment, qualitative experience, and personal interest in the research topic. The researchers ranged from ages 21 to 34 (M = 25.6, SD = 4.67) and represented a diverse group of individuals to examine various perspectives on the topic.

CQR’s axiology includes constructivist elements by acknowledging that researcher biases and expectations are inevitable. However, CQR’s constructivist axiology is limited in that we cannot dislocate our own social positions and lived experiences in conducting this research and interpreting the data. Thus, it is critical for our work as researchers to be transparent in our own experiences to increase the trustworthiness of our findings (Levitt et al., 2018). The members of the team were all interested in research pertaining to Asian Americans, mental health, social justice, and advocacy. We discussed our own identities and intersectional social locations before and during data analysis. Our own gendered racial socialization experiences growing up influenced our interpretation of the data such that some members on the team (specifically Asian women) shared similar lived experiences with some of the participants. We were cognizant of wanting to remain curious with the data, yet at times, it became difficult to separate our own reactions and experiences. At the same time, having Asian American women on the team was pertinent to not solely conducting research but being able to have a greater understanding of the participants’ lived experiences. Given that Lydia HaRim Ahn is an Asian woman, we believe that it may have been easier to establish rapport with many of the participants given shared experiences. Lastly, we are all influenced by white supremacist culture. Although we are social justice-oriented researchers, some of our interpretations may have been
affected by our own perceptions living in a world based on structures of White supremacy (Liu et al., 2019).

Participants

The sample included 12 participants who self-identified as second-generation (born in the U.S with at least one immigrant parent) Asian American women from ages 20 to 29 (\( \bar{M} = 23.67, SD = 2.56 \)) with a variety of demographic backgrounds (see Table 1). The recommended sample size for CQR studies ranges from 8 to 15 participants (Hill, 2012).

Interview Protocol

The semistructured interview protocol (see Appendix) was developed from the primary (Lydia HaRim Ahn) and secondary authors’ (Brian Taehyuk Keum) personal experiences and knowledge of the research topic. The questions were also derived from a previous gendered racial socialization study (Davis et al., 2019) and intersectional research (Bowleg, 2008). The interview was semistructured to probe and empathize with the interviewee’s experiences, while also keeping consistency across participants. Topic areas included role responsibilities, expectations, physical appearance, dating/marriage, intelligence, and more generally what messages they heard about being an Asian American woman from their parents, other family members, peers, and mass media.

Procedure

Data Collection

The Institutional Review Board approved the study at Lydia HaRim Ahn’s home institution before recruiting participants. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling, personal connections, and emailing an Asian American listserv at a large, mid-Atlantic university. Snowball sampling may be especially effective for sensitive topics such as sharing about their parents and family. To participate in the study, participants had to self-identify as an Asian American woman ranging from ages 18 to 29 and identify as a second-generation immigrant, given their unique lived experience of their parents being the first to arrive in the U.S. Emerging adults were chosen, as this time period is marked by the age of identity exploration of the self (Arnett, 2014). Participants were told that the study was on exploring the messages they received about what it means to be an Asian American woman and that the study was completely voluntary. If the criteria were met and they agreed to participate, they signed consent forms, were reminded and asked if they could be audiotaped, and Lydia HaRim Ahn interviewed participants in person or over the phone for approximately 45–90 min. For consistency, each interview was conducted by Lydia HaRim Ahn. The research team transcribed the interviews verbatim and were then checked by the primary investigator. Identifying information was removed and code numbers were assigned to each participant.

Data Analysis

The coding team met weekly over the span of an academic year (Fall 2019–Spring 2020) to conduct coding. In accordance with CQR methodology, the team followed the three steps in developing domains, core ideas, and cross-analysis. First, the core team (Lydia HaRim Ahn, Brian Taehyuk Keum, Adil Choudry, Gintare M. Meizys, Michelle A. Gomes) independently developed possible domains using the first two transcripts. The team then read the two transcripts together and created a domain list until consensus was reached. The domains were revised and recreated throughout the beginning of coding the other transcripts. The primary team met weekly and coded the participants’ statements in each transcript into the relevant domains. In addition, for each participant statement on the transcript, they developed core ideas (a brief summary sentence of the statement) until consensus was reached. After the coding for each transcript was finished, an external auditor (Lei Wang) checked all core ideas and domains to ensure the trustworthiness of findings.

After coding all 12 transcripts, a monster table was created with all the core ideas from each transcript under each domain. For cross-analysis, Lydia HaRim Ahn, Adil Choudry, Gintare M. Meizys, and Michelle A. Gomes then developed categories and subcategories in each domain, and each core idea was then moved to a category and/or subcategory. If the core idea did not fit under any category, it was put under “Other.” Brian Taehyuk Keum and Lei Wang served as the internal and external auditors during this stage, and they provided

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant number</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age (yr)</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Sexual orientation</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Childhood neighborhood demographics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>Asexual/hetero-romantic</td>
<td>Graduate student</td>
<td>Predominately Filipino area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Joanna</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Taiwanese-Chinese</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Graduate student</td>
<td>Predominately White area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Data scientist</td>
<td>Ethnically diverse area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Graduate student</td>
<td>Predominately White area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Data scientist</td>
<td>Predominately Asian area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Undergraduate student</td>
<td>Ethnically diverse area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Priscilla</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>Graduate student</td>
<td>Predominately White area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Crystal</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>Graduate student</td>
<td>Ethnically diverse area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Nellie</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Undergraduate student</td>
<td>Predominately White and Asian American area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Belle</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Undergraduate student</td>
<td>Predominately White area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Intelligence analyst</td>
<td>Ethnically diverse area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Banker</td>
<td>Ethnically diverse area</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
edits and suggestions independently. The categories were revised and incorporated into the final edits if the core team agreed upon them. At the final stage, a draft of the manuscript was sent out to all participants to ensure confidentiality and to review for any errors. Seven out of the 12 participants responded, and their edits were incorporated into the final manuscript.

**Results**

In accordance with CQR guidelines (Hill, 2012; Hill et al., 1997), general results included all or all but one of the cases (11–12 participants), typical included 7–10 participants, and variant included 2–9 participants. Pseudonyms were given to all participants to protect confidentiality. Table 1 includes demographic information of the participants, and Table 2 describes the frequencies and results. Quotations and ellipses ( . . . ) are used in the results section to describe participant experiences. In the sections below, we report participants’ perceptions of their parents, peers, and mass media’s messages.

**Domain 1: Family Socialization**

**Messages About Gendered Racial Discrimination**

Participants typically talked about how their parents told them to ignore, be silent, or accept the gendered racial discrimination. Joanna’s parents told her that if she is being discriminated against, “to just like accept like where you are and to just kind of like ignore them.” Similarly, Chloe’s parents told her “the fact that we’re in America is a blessing” and although they are going to face discrimination, she should not complain because they “had the opportunity to come to America.” Priscilla’s parents said to get through experiences of discrimination with “the path of least resistance” and to “just get through it.” Jasmine noted that her mom never left the house, so she never experienced discrimination and did not talk about it much. In contrast, families also taught their daughters about how to cope with gendered racial discrimination, either by preparing them that they will experience bias in the world and/or by self-disclosing their own experiences. Belle’s parents told her:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Domains/Categories/Subcategories for Asian American Women’s Gendered Racial Socialization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domains/Categories/Subcategories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family socialization</td>
<td>Messages about gendered racial discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ignore or accept discrimination/Silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coping with discrimination (e.g., family self-disclosure, preparing for bias)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fight against discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Body image/Physical appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White supremacist beauty standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colorism/Skin tone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comments about weight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital/Dating beliefs</td>
<td>Caregiver role in marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dating preferences based on race/ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not allowed to date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role responsibilities/expectations</td>
<td>Adherence to submissiveness/domestic responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defiance against traditional Asian women roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic/work expectations</td>
<td>Pressure to excel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower expectations due to being an Asian American women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer socialization</td>
<td>Oppressive messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical objectification messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Denial of Asian American woman identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Passivity messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affirming messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive self-concept messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass media socialization</td>
<td>Oppressive messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stereotypical depictions of Asian American women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affirming messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Messages about Asian American women empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>Body shame/Insecurities about physical appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Career barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical consciousness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* G = General (11–12 participants), T = Typical (7–10 participants), V = 1–6 participants.
Even just like walking at night they’re like don’t do that, always walk with a group of people not just because you’re a woman but because you’re an Asian woman and there’s a lot of stereotypes and a lot of things that get attached to that. She [her mother] takes it more to heart than my dad and she just wants to me to be more extra careful and stand up for myself but also not in a way that would be dangerous.

In addition, her parents were supportive of her wanting to go to a more creative arts field (e.g., creative writing), but worried her that she may not have the same opportunities as a White woman, White man, or a White passing person and not just because she is Asian, but because she is “a woman, an Asian woman.” In addition, Jessica’s mom told her about her previous marriage to a Jewish man who would make fun of her and think she is not intelligent. Jessica stated that her mother also disclosed her experiences with discrimination “because of her frame and her size, and just her accent and think that she’s a vulnerable person to like being picked on but she would show them otherwise . . . .”

Even more so, a few participants indicated that their parents told them to actively fight against these gendered racial discriminatory experiences (variant). For example, Jessica’s mom told her that she would be discriminated against, because they view her as a submissive Asian woman, and this could damage her and make her reliant on other people. Her mom told her that just because “someone doesn’t think that you’re capable of doing things or you need to have a certain role, you shouldn’t be defined by society in that way.” Both Belle’s mom and dad told her to stand up for herself because it is not worth the treatment she gets. They stated that “if they are ignorant then educate them because . . . then they are not being malicious about it . . . but at the same time not to the point where you have to go out of your way.”

**Body Image/Physical Appearance**

**White Supremacist Beauty Standards**

Typically, participants received messages to adhere to White supremacist beauty standards. For example, Jessica’s family would brag about her nose, “because it’s so pointy so they would say ‘oh you have such a nice nose, it’s not a Filipino nose.’” Karen’s aunt implied that if she had double eyelids then she would be pretty. This moment was significant to her, even though she did not report feeling extremely hurt, because a part of her agreed like “Oh, if I only had a crease, like I can be like actually really pretty type of thing.” When Belle told her mom “I kind of want more freckles,” her mom told her “no that’s going to look messy.” Belle wanted to have a nose job to have more dimension, and her mom also supported this by stating “don’t worry there’s surgery.” Jasmine stated that “girls are supposed to have long, straight silky hair which is the complete opposite” of what she has, so when she went to India, they forced her to chemically straighten her hair when she was young. Crystal’s parents told her that her hair is pretty, “because it was like really brown . . . like it’s a lot lighter than other Asian people.”

**Colorism**

Typically, participants also received messages that they needed to be lighter and stay out of the sun. Chloe stated that her mother nags her about “sunblock, sunblock, sunblock, put sunblock on your face! put sunblock on your face!” because tan is equivalent to lower socioeconomic status and thus, she needs to maintain “blemish-free, shiny, paler skin.” Crystal’s parents told her “being pale and white was definitely like more beautiful.” Priscilla noted that “colorism is very much a thing” and she was told to “stay out of the sun . . . and like how getting a tan was a bad thing.” Belle stated that she is tan, so gets really brown in the summer, and remembers her dad saying that “if she were white, he would feel better or [she would] look better . . . .”

**Comments About Weight**

Asian American women typically also heard comments about their weight. For example, Jane’s dad told her that she is “fat” and would “talk about intermittent fasting in high school and like starve for 2 days and then eat.” Jane’s dad sent her to Korea for what she calls “fat camp” by going on climbing trips to the mountains and runs while “constantly surrounded by people telling you to lose weight.” Annie’s body shape was also always up for discussion depending on if she lost or gained weight. Jasmine received messages that her body shape was “wrong.” Jasmine’s extended family would send conflicting messages about needing to eat, to not be too skinny, but also to not gain weight. She stated that “any type of change in appearance, they would comment and be like ‘Why did you do this?’” and felt like “it might be well intentioned, but it always comes off as ‘Why do you have to look at my body so much?’” However, Chloe shared that “in terms of body and appearance and things like that, she’s [her mother] been very positive.”

**Marital/Dating Beliefs**

**Caregiver Role in Marriage**

Generally, participants were told that their role in marriage is to be a caregiver, and specifically to get married and raise children. Jasmine’s parents told her to be more like a “traditional housewife” and her mom would teach her to cook and clean and told her “you’re going to have to do this your entire life, even when you get married.” In contrast, her mom told her brother that he is going to marry someone to do those tasks for him. When Crystal turned 25, her parents asked her where her husband was and was expected to get married and have kids. Crystal’s parents told her that she would be the “caregiver and the caretaker,” make her husband happy, do what he wants, keep peace, and “don’t do anything too kind of crazy.” In her culture, the message she received was that the groom’s family should pay for everything because they are gaining a daughter and her family is “losing her.” She noted that “it’s definitely this idea of like, you know, once you get married, like that’s kind of, he is your provider. He is your family.” Karen’s mom wanted her to be good at chores and possibly to be a “good mom or take care of [her] family” even though it was never explicit. Nellie shared:

Being a female Asian woman . . . [there’s] messages about marriage, and how to be very proper and so my mom really wrestled a lot with wanting to raise us, she has three daughters, wanting to raise us as good housewives but also making sure that we all knew that education was the most important because she couldn’t really do that for herself so kind of like wrestling against two worlds. Like what does it mean to be a good woman?
Dating Preferences Based on Race/Ethnicity

Participants typically also were told that they should date people based on race/ethnicity. Many participants’ parents wanted them to date within their own ethnic group, and some explicitly stated to not marry Black men. Jessica’s mom wanted her to date a Filipino man, and preferably of her own regional ethnicity from the Philippines. Jane received messages that she does not need to date a Korean man, but at the same time “she [her mother] will be like ‘Let me introduce you to a Korean guy, I’ll do sogoating [blind date] for you.” Crystal’s parents said that “it was always kind of like Asian is the best, Chinese . . . and then White—those are the two acceptable options like nothing else for sure.” Karen’s parents told her that she would have more difficulty if she dated someone Black because it “feels like such a different culture.” Belle’s father wants her to date a Korean American, Korean guy, or at least East Asian. Her mom “doesn’t care at the end of the day” but at the same time thinks they would not like it if she “married a Black guy.” Jasmine’s family expects an arranged marriage, has her life planned out for her, and for them, the guy she will “marry is Punjabi, is of the same caste.”

Not Allowed to Date

Variantly, some participants reported not being allowed to date. For example, Jessica was not “allowed to date or have a boyfriend,” but did it anyway after watching her sisters date. Annie was not allowed to date until she left high school, because “like worst case scenario, they did not want their daughter to be pregnant at 16.” Priscilla’s parents thought that she was “too young” to start dating and would rather her not date at all but she did anyway. She believes her parents “anger was also probably fear,” because they could not guide or teach her anything because they had an arranged marriage. Crystal’s family told her “no having sex, no dating, and your body’s basically only for your husband.” At the same time, when she turned 25, her parents asked her “where’s your husband?” and was expected to get married and have kids.

Role Responsibilities/Expectations

Adherence to Submissiveness/Domestic Responsibilities

All participants were told that they needed to adhere to a submissive and domestic role in their family. For example, Joanna’s parents expected her to do chores, watch after her sister, and was expected to “listen and respect them [her parents].” Jane’s mom swore that they would treat her and her brother equally, but she also received messages about how a woman should act, to learn about etiquette, and her mom would ask “why aren’t you more lady-like, all I asked for was a daughter.” She also received messages about being less hard-headed by listening to everyone’s sides, to constantly apologize, and is now indecisive and avoids conflict. Priscilla was also told that she had to help her mom in the kitchen and serve tea to the oldest male first. Crystal’s role was to be respectful, humble, demure, “really polite, really like always saying hello to your aunts and uncles, being really well behaved,” which meant “no cussing, no dressing provocatively.” She was also expected to be a caregiver to her younger sister and her parents when they get older, while simultaneously expected to get married, have kids, take her future husband’s last name, and that her parents would move in with them. Nellie’s mom told her to be a good Asian woman “was [to exist] between the domestic and academic spaces.” When guests were over, there was almost “this choreography” where one of her sisters would get water, one would greet people, one would put the chairs around the couch, which was “very mechanical, very much expected” compared to her male cousins who were very independent and did not have to do chores. Nellie stated that as a child, people would dump their problems and confided in her, and she had to be a listener: “never boisterous, never loud, never screaming.” Jasmine talked about how the ideal daughter was to not “speak unless spoken to, follow whatever anybody says if someone asks you to do something” and noted that “you kind of exist to serve others.”

Defiance Against Traditional Asian Women Roles

Variantly, few participants heard messages to go against traditional Asian women roles. For example, Jessica stated that her mom told her to be a strong, independent woman, to respect oneself, and to not let men disrespect her. Crystal’s mom told her to put her clothes on top of her future husband’s clothes during their wedding, to symbolize that “you should never let the husband fully control you ever” and to also assert her power.

Academic/Work Expectations

Pressure to Excel

All the participants in the study also felt pressure to excel from their parents. For example, Crystal’s parents told her as an Asian American woman, she has to “work harder than anyone” to get anywhere, and also to make everything “worth it,” since they came over to the U.S. as refugees and suffered. Nellie’s parents pushed academics and specifically Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) because they did not get the same educational opportunities. Her mom had expectations that Nellie would buy her a big house, which made the participant feel more anxious. Jane’s mom stated that her mom was “hammering about Scholastic Assessment Test; SAT’s and stuff” and Jane responded “like a spoiled little brat was like, ‘Hey but honestly, when was the last time you asked me about my day?’” Her dad would tell her “you’re dumb you know?” because “he’s a practical man so the emotional aspect is not quite there.” Annie’s parents also “valued book-smarts over having emotional intelligence,” and told her she needs to work hard, because her parents gave her an opportunity they never had. Jessica’s parents expected her to be academically successful and instead of being a doctor, ideally to become a nurse due to the immediate monetary benefits to support the family, and her responsibility to bring her family from the Philippines to the U.S.

Lower Expectations Due to Being an Asian American Woman

Variantly, some participants’ parents had lower academic expectations due to being an Asian American woman. For example, Crystal’s parents told her that she is too smart for her own good because she’s too opinionated and vocal, so her parents felt like she is too educated and “they do not have as much power” over her. Jasmine’s parents told her that education is not as high of a priority because she is a woman, but because she is smart, people would also expect a lot from her. Her relatives would also push back when she was younger to make sure that “she was learning the domestic
work,” to not let her do whatever she wants just because she is in school, and “keep an eye on her and keep her on a leash.”

Domain 2: Peer Socialization

Oppressive Messages

Physical Objectification. Many participants heard messages about their physical appearance from peers. For example, Jessica felt like an object when people were debating whether she was Filipino or not due to her lighter skin. When she would talk about her Filipino heritage, people would question her by asking “Oh are you sure? How come you’re not dark?” Karen’s peers would ask if she was mixed race because she has lighter hair, and at a retreat in high school, others would be “envious of [her] nose” because it is sharper. In addition, she fits the stereotype of being short and thin and people would make comments on it. Crystal was told that she “was so pretty” because she looks half white.

Denial of Asian American Woman Identity. A few Asian American women in our sample also received messages that denied their identity. For example, Jane received messages that discrimination is not real from her peers. Karen felt like her peers ignored the fact that they “were different races” and tried not to “draw attention” that they were different races. Nellie’s peers would ask “oh are you guys related” to other Indian people and have “all these assumptions” about her parents and family.

Passivity Assumptions. Lastly, three participants received messages that assumed that they were passive. Karen stated:

At work, [he] . . . stopped by my desk and he was like . . . ‘I think this job will be really good for you in developing a sense of presence’ and I was kind of taken aback because I was like I’ve barely interacted with you . . . he said something about how a woman with shorter stature especially are taken less seriously. And so even though he never mentioned my race, I couldn’t help feeling like being Asian and being an Asian female had definitely played into that.

Crystal would get offended because people would assume she “was like a very quiet person” throughout college and afterward. She felt very annoyed and would try to speak up more and advocate for herself. Nellie felt exiled out of her community, because she was surrounded by mostly Indian men who thought she was not Indian or feminine enough for them.

Affirming Messages

Positive Self-Concept Messages. Some participants received affirming messages about their Asian American woman identity and were more curious about it. For example, Chloë’s friends ask her about certain elements of her culture and race, which helps her also be more open to fostering better learning and understanding about herself. Annie “had a lot of Asian friends growing up” and “shared the same type of experiences” and was able to process and talk about them. The majority of Ashley’s peers were also South Asian, so they were able to talk about “very similar stuff and talking through it with each other.” Jane used to have a lot of body image issues about being thin but after meeting her boyfriend, she is at a place where she is “a lot stronger and it’s more exciting” to her.

Domain 3: Mass Media Socialization

Oppressive Messages

Lack of Representation. Typically, participants reported a lack of representation of Asian American women in mass media. Jessica felt deprived of not having media representation. Jessica’s mom also enrolled her into acting school, because she had a vision for her daughter to be a celebrity, but “eventually she was just like maybe you could do it in the Philippines because there’s not a lot of Asians in America.” Chloe was curious and googled “who is the most influential Asian American female in the United States” and was shocked to find very few. She also watched a lot of non-Asian YouTube makeup tutorials growing up to try and learn how to put makeup on and remembered when she got to the eyeshadow part, that she does not “have the crease,” her “eyes are smaller,” and she saw “people with big, beautiful double-creased eyes” and wanted those. Ashley got messages that an Asian American woman’s role is a support person and not the main storyline.

Stereotypical Depictions of Asian American Women. Typically, participants also received stereotypical messages of Asian American women. For example, Jessica stated:

In terms of mainstream media, Asians are submissive, Asian women need to do stuff around the house. They need to learn how to cook. They need to take care of babies. Those are the really obvious kind of messages about how women need to be.

Karen felt uncomfortable watching a movie with an Asian girl turning into a “snake dragon type of character,” because it stereotypical Asian females as exotic, dangerous, beautiful but different and foreign. She felt like she sees the yellow fever in the media or that they are smart one, quiet, socially awkward, and nerdy. Crystal always felt like “an odd duck,” because she was very tall and bigger instead of a dainty, pretty little Asian in the media. Annie felt like Asian women are put in a box and that “they are either cooking or have colorful hair, so they’re a little bit edgy.” Ashley feels like they are put into stereotypical roles such as the computer or forensic scientist, are meeker, background characters, and there was not “someone who was cool.”

Messages About Asian American Women Empowerment. Lastly, two participants received empowering messages from mass media (variant). Jasmine for example started appreciating her hair “after the natural hair movement was beginning to pick up” in the media, and she started to get more compliments on her natural, curly hair. Jessica watched media that depicted Asian American women being independent and powerful.

Domain 4: Impact

Body Shame/Insecurities About Physical Appearance

The participants expressed feeling insecure about their appearance, such as Karen, who stated she feels “still insecure about what [she] looks like . . . ” especially as she is “talking to like white males.” However, she also shared that “I think being in college and like a lot more surrounded by Asians, I became a lot more comfortable in how I looked.” Jane felt like her family being so brutally honest about her weight “hardened her” and the mixed messages to lose weight and to eat led to her bulimia for a month in middle school. Priscilla described that she “hate(s) working out now
because it has always been associated with like you need to do this in order to lose weight,” and “hated it as a kid” because it was something that she was forced to do. Chloe recognized “beauty is clearly defined by Western beauty,” and although she received a lot of “high praises” about her looks from her mom and friends growing up, she “was too busy focusing on the things that [she] didn’t think were beautiful” about herself.

Self-Esteem

The messages also affected their sense of self and self-esteem. For example, Karen explained that she struggles with “talking in classes and group discussions” even though she is a “pretty opinionated type of person,” due to her lack of self-esteem. Crystal feels like she is very humble, has a hard time talking about herself, “especially like receiving compliments.” However, she stated that she is working to “push the boundaries” and is “definitely more opinionated.”

Career Barriers

Most women’s career and work were affected as well. Chloe felt like she had to prove herself because she can only “make it so far as a female and Asian American,” so the most important thing she can do is to gain knowledge, become an expert in a field so people can respect her. Jane explained that if “I’m not the best then I just won’t go for it,” and stated she “always felt sad because I think there’s this expectation to be smart and I never fulfilled it, and I still feel that way now,” even when she got into graduate school. Ashley explained that the high expectations pushed her to work harder, but her parents were not supportive of her social science major which hurt her. She also reflected on whether she chose her social science major, because she never considered herself as smart. Jessica considered being a celebrity growing up, but felt like there was a “some type of animosity if there was another Asian person in the room,” because they both would know they would have to be “the token Asian person.” She would feel competitive because she knew that they both could not get the position for the “token role,” and so her mom believed that it may be a lot easier to do it in Asia, which was very discouraging for the participant.

Mental Health Concerns

These messages variably impacted participants’ mental health. Karen described herself as very anxious and said “I don’t want to think of myself as like, a victim of the past,” but still feels sad. Jane stated that “as a person I’m like very anxious, a little scared of the world and people out there.” Nellie was “really quiet” so she built up anger, frustration, and resentment of the expectations required of her, and has “always been very depressed as a person.”

Critical Consciousness

Lastly, variably, participants described how these messages have shaped their critical consciousness about the realities of living in a White supremacist, patriarchal world. For example, Chloe believes the benefit of these messages is that “they made me aware of the realities of life” that she was going to face and made her better prepared. She stated that because she was aware of the inequalities and the “glass ceiling” as an Asian American woman, she was able to tailor her life to be more productive given her situation. Belle feels like she became more pessimistic toward society with “frustration, anger, and this desire to change the world” due to the discrimination she experienced.

Discussion

Historically, Asian American women have remained invisible and powerless (Chow, 1987). Women of Color politics and Asian American feminism centers on those that are historic and systematic victims of oppression and recognizes Asian American women as producers of change (Fujiwara & Roshanravan, 2018). The present study used a qualitative approach to amplify and give voice to 12 Asian American women, who are often silenced, defined by the voices of others, and not given space for their lived experiences. Using intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and socioecological theories (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the present study examined gendered racial socialization that Asian American women receive growing up from their family, peers, and mass media. We provide an expansive understanding of the various intersectional messages about what it means to grow up as an Asian American woman in an oppressive world.

Overall, our findings illustrate how Asian American women are being bombarded with the overwhelming expectations of others, and many of these participants are not given the agency and choice growing up to define who they are. Rather, explicitly or implicitly, they are constantly hearing information about what role they should play in their family, among their peers, and society (e.g., submissive, passive, quiet). Asian American women live in a world of multiple and often contradictory messages about themselves and how to navigate their world (Tokunaga, 2016). Consequently, these women may struggle with navigating displacement and with their sense of belonging (Anzaldúa, 2002).

Our results demonstrate how the interdependent, interlocking systems of racism and sexism (Cho et al., 2013) are enacted across multiple settings (Roy, 2018) by actively suppressing Asian American women’s ability to explore parts of themselves. During adolescence, people start asking questions about who they are and trying on different parts of themselves to discover their identities (Erikson, 1968). However, if they are pressured to conform to others’ ideas about their sense of self, they will be unsure of their identity and consequently, struggle in their future selves (Erikson, 1968). These women seem to have limited or lack of space for self-exploration, as they are constantly pressured in diverse contexts to fit into specific stereotypes and expectations. The lack of self-exploration may contribute to identity confusion, such as deciphering and questioning who they are and as separate from a product of socialization messages learned growing up. However, a novel contribution from our study is that these women do receive empowering messages, albeit few, that may be paramount for them to actively challenge societal oppression and to have the power and choice to begin constructing their own narratives. Below we highlight the gendered racial messages Asian American women receive and the impact of these messages.

Main Findings

Consistent with previous studies with Black women (Davis et al., 2019), the Asian American women in our sample received the majority of gendered racial socialization messages from their
families. Participants received a wide range of information that were both explicit and implicit, perpetuating and also resisting systems of oppression. For example, consistent with recent research (Young et al., 2020), many participants were told to ignore, accept, or be silent about gendered racial discrimination, possibly because Asian Americans may use avoidance coping strategies (Chang, 1996) or because parents may also be new to experiencing discriminatory encounters. This also may have been an adaptive strategy for immigrant parents who were trying to survive amid a racist country. However, they were also told how to cope with messages through parents’ own self-disclosure or by preparing them for bias, such as telling them to not walk alone for safety. Some were explicitly told to fight against discrimination, and these parents may be working to ensure that their daughters are actively resisting against harmful messages.

At the same time, many parents may also have perpetuated dominant White supremacist beauty ideals, colorism, and ideal body shapes, consistent with previous research (Brady et al., 2017). This may reflect how parents consciously or subconsciously understand that being privileged is to be closer to Whiteness (Liu, 2017; Liu et al., 2019), and one way to achieve that for these women is for parents to emphasize White beauty ideals such as a taller nose and paler skin. The perpetuation of Western beauty has historically existed in Western and Eastern cultures (Leong, 2006), and it is possible that the increased contact and globalization of Europe was an important period in which white privilege was also globalized (Jones, 2013). During the Korean war, David Ralph Millard, an American plastic surgeon stationed in Korea, created double-eyelid and nasal bridge procedures to get rid of Asian features and for Asian women to become more appealing to American soldiers. Consequently, the dominance of White supremacy beauty ideals and the physical objectification of Asian American women may also have trickled down into families, including parents also endorsing their daughters’ identities being tied to their physical features. These may be reflective of a “racial socialization paradox,” or family practices that engage in celebrating culture, while also simultaneously endorsing colorism (Davis et al., 2019).

In addition, families may be actively trying to protect their daughters given the sexual violence against Asian American women (Hahn et al., 2017; Kim & Ward, 2007) by restricting dating until marriage because of possible consequences such as getting pregnant. When they were expected to get married, they were told that their role is to be a caregiver. Given the patriarchal family structure, Asian American women are often expected to play a passive, subservient role (Pyke & Johnson, 2003; True, 1990). These messages imply that their existence relies on their role for others. Many families also wanted their partners to be within their own race/ethnicity, with the exception of dating White men. Their openness to dating White men may again reflect how the proximity to Whiteness brings people of color closer to privilege and power (Liu, 2017). Some parents also told them not to date Black men, reflective of the sociohistorical pervasiveness of anti-Blackness in the U.S. and the intergroup historical rifts between Asian and Black communities (e.g., the 1992 uprising in Los Angeles).

Similar to their role in dating/marriage, Asian American women’s responsibility in their family was to adhere to submissive/domestic responsibilities. Research has consistently demonstrated that an Asian woman’s identity is often defined by being submissive, subordinate, and a caretaker in the family (Chan, 1987; Wu, 1992). Not only do Asian values highlight the importance of collectivism and interdependence, but being a woman also means to adhere to traditional female roles. Again, on the other hand, some participants were told to defy and go against traditional gender roles. Parents may also be striving to counteract the historical role of Asian American women to be submissive and passive, fighting for Asian American feminism (Fujiiwara & Roshanravan, 2018), which may promote engagement in social justice and advocacy.

Lastly, the women in our sample had to adhere to caregiving roles in their families while also expected to excel academically. Qin (2006) found that girls may face additional pressure to academically achieve, which may negatively impact their success. At the same time, there were also lower academic expectations due to being an Asian American woman. Although studies have found that Asian families expect high standards for both men and women (Lew et al., 1998), Asian women also receive messages to choose less demanding careers (Kim, 1993). These conflicting messages may be because of academic success as a means for upward mobility (Su & Okazaki, 2009), but the lower expectations may also be reflective of patriarchal family norms as men being the providers. Thus, Asian American women face a conundrum in which families expect high academic/career achievements and yet, are criticized if they do not meet the expectations as a caregiver due to focusing on their career development. This bind demonstrates the constant pressure and conflicting messages these women face.

Peers become increasingly more important throughout development, and our research highlights the majority of peer messages are restricting their sense of self. These messages surrounding passivity, physical objectification, and denial of their identity reflect the dominant, oppressive narratives that peers perpetuate. Previous research has noted that Asian American women are expected to be submissive and are fetishized (Keum, Brady, et al., 2018). White coworkers expected them to be passive, deferential, and were surprised when Asian American women spoke up (Pyke & Johnson, 2003). Our participants were also told that they are passive, that their identity and related experiences are not real, and when they are seen, it is through their physical bodies.

At the same time, some participants heard affirming messages, especially from peers of their same race/ethnicity. Peers may send positive racial socialization messages such as telling them to be proud of their race/culture, which can buffer against racist messages (Su et al., 2020). In our study, participants described receiving affirming messages such as being given space to process and talk through their gendered racial experiences with their friends of the same racial/ethnic background. Some White peers would directly ask and initiate a conversation about what it means to be an Asian American woman. These peer experiences are a direction for future research, as they may give these women the opportunity to be humanized and seen for who they are.

Mass media socialization depicted a form of representational intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) and controlling images (Collins, 1990) by diminishing women of color. Participants shared that Asian American women on the media were stereotyped as being submissive, caretaking, exotic, smart, socially awkward, or background characters. Recent research has found that Asian American women play characters such as a sidekick or Kung Fu woman (Keum, Brady, et al., 2018). If they were not depicted as stereotypical characters, participants noticed that there was a lack of representation of Asian American women.
in mass media (Keum, Brady, et al., 2018). One woman even described looking up the most influential Asian American women on the internet and finding very few search results. The erasure in the media reinforces the invisibility and, consequently, Asian American women’s negative perceptions of their own racial group (Mok, 1998) as they internalize the absent portrayals that devalue their self-worth.

However, there also seems to be a sense of hope, as some participants described receiving empowering messages such as watching Asian American women being powerful and seeing women embrace their natural hair. Media such as “Fresh Off The Boat” are becoming popularized in mainstream U.S. culture, and may depict the heterogeneity of Asian American experiences (Chin et al., 2017). In addition, mass media that counteract stereotypical messages seem to be empowering for Asian American women to be able to rewrite and develop their own life narratives.

The Consequences of Gendered Racial Socialization Messages

As a result of these messages, participants shared their views toward their own body image and physical appearance. Previous research demonstrated that heightened perceived pressure for thinness has been linked with disordered eating among Asian American women (Akoury et al., 2019), which can be accounted due to the internalization of media standards of body image (Cheng et al., 2017) and gendered racial microaggressions (Le et al., 2020). Our study also suggests that Asian American women must navigate peers and their family dictating their physical body and being, thus being detrimental to their views toward their own bodies.

In addition, participants’ self-esteem and mental health were affected by gendered racial socialization messages. Many described losing their voice, while few described wanting to push the boundaries to increase their confidence levels. Across all contexts, the harmful gendered racial socialization messages de-humanize Asian American women, treating these women as objects to maintain the status quo of systemic inequality (Dover, 2019). Rather than allowing these women to be themselves, the messages serve as a painful reminder of the pressure to act and align with these messages in order to be worthy. This is consistent with research that found that Black women’s awareness of other people holding negative stereotypes negatively affect their mental health (Jerald et al., 2017). Similarly, it is possible that the messages about needing to be submissive have impacted these women, especially if they internalized these messages from their parents, peers, and mass media from a young age.

Our sample also conveyed the impact of these messages on their career and work. Many reported needing to prove themselves or they believed that they are not smart. Many of these women seem to be experiencing imposter syndrome, an internal feeling of phoniness despite academic success (Clance & Imes, 1978). Being told that they have to academically excel while simultaneously needing to attend to domestic duties at home may generate high levels of pressure and exhaustion for these participants. Future studies would benefit from exploring the simultaneous need to play multiple roles.

Lastly, some participants reported greater critical consciousness after hearing these gendered racial socialization messages and became more aware of systemic inequalities and oppression. Given that our participants are emerging adults with higher education, it is possible that they have higher critical consciousness levels and a greater ability to externalize some of the negative messages. With more awareness, participants felt frustrated, internally reflected on their own biases, and had a greater desire to change the world.

Limitations

Although the present study elucidates second-generation Asian American women’s gendered racial socialization messages, there are limitations that should be considered. First, there are sample-related limitations, such as the lack of heterogeneity with other identities (e.g., sexual orientation) and ethnicities within the Asian American community. However, the goal of qualitative research is not statistical generalizability (Luker, 2008), but instead to generalize theoretically such that the concept of gendered racial socialization could be applied to other groups and populations.

In addition, the information that we gathered were likely impacted by the quality of the interviews and participants’ willingness to talk about their experiences. Since we utilized open-ended questions, the data were based on participants’ willingness to volunteer information. Participants varied in the amount that they talked and shared information about themselves. Variability in how much participants shared could be due to social desirability bias or discomfort from the sensitivity of the topics discussed. Moreover, some participants did not expand on all three areas that we asked about (i.e., family, peer, and mass media) or the impact of these messages on their lives, which may have prevented us from gathering comprehensive results. It is also possible that participants did not share as much due to difficulty in recalling messages that they have received growing up. Future research may benefit from other methodologies such as observational methodologies with Asian American parents and adolescents. In addition, these messages may reflect conscious experiences, and we were not able to assess unconscious experiences. Lastly, there are other interlocking identities that may reflect privilege and oppression (e.g., heterosexism, classism) that we did not specifically ask about yet impact these women’s lived experiences (Bowleg, 2008). Most women in the study identified as heterosexual and received higher education, suggesting that the intersection of their privileged identities have also affected their lived experiences.

Implications for Research, Practice, and Advocacy

Overall, the majority of our findings reflect the lived experiences of the interlocking systems of oppression, as the women in our study shared the harmful, cumulative effects of these messages across contexts on their psychological well-being. Our results point to how racism and sexism are maintained and perpetuated by microsystems (family, peers) and exosystems (mass media), and our study demonstrates the resilience of these women in dealing with persistent oppression (Santos & Toomey, 2018). As seen in our findings, families, peers, and the media are all affected by systems of White supremacy and patriarchy.

Given that the scope of our study focused on three contexts by which these messages are being sent, future scholarship may benefit from other socialization agents such as schools (Ahn & Keum, in press; Byrd, 2019). In addition, although our study touched upon representational intersectional experiences for these women, future research should investigate other structural, systemic inequalities that are linked to power (Cho et al., 2013; Grzanka et al., 2017).
Researchers might consider quantitatively examining the effects of gendered racial socialization on psychological outcomes with Asian American women. Our findings also have implications for therapists and mental health practitioners. First, we suggest that given the unique lived experiences, it is critical to increase the number of therapists who are also Asian American women. In 2019, only 4% of psychologists identified as Asian (American Psychological Association, 2020), demonstrating a need for greater representation in the mental health field. This is troubling given that Asian American women suffer from depression and suicidal behaviors but underutilize mental health services due to community stigma and the lack of therapists who understand the dual-culture experience (Augusberger et al., 2015). When Asian American women do utilize therapy, it is imperative for mental health practitioners to be equipped to process these painful experiences regarding gendered racial socialization. Therapists may help Asian American women externalize these oppressive forces by being able to name them and to create space for discussing survival (Adames et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2018). Psychologists must also be aware of not recreating an oppressive system by telling these women how to be and pathologizing them (Keum, Brady, et al., 2018). They might also offer support groups and healing spaces specifically designed for Asian American women.

Finally, our results have implications for social justice and advocacy. We are all victims of a White supremacist, patriarchal society. Regardless of the intentions, parents, peers, and mass media all perpetuate these systems of oppression, and the onus should be on the people in power to dismantle systemic racism and sexism. Our results indicate that psychologists must acknowledge, name, and validate painful experiences of violence toward Asian American women. In addition to individual interventions, psychologists should consider how to transform knowledge into action (Grzanka, 2020). Recent programming has focused on empowering Asian American women with histories of trauma (Hahm et al., 2020; Rivera et al., 2019). Psychologists can also collaborate with Asian American families and develop community-specific interventions (e.g., workshops) to also help support parents in unpacking their own internalized racism and sexism, provide psychoeducation about the histories and negative effects of White supremacy and patriarchy, and suggest possible ways to mitigate the negative effects of oppression.

The majority of research on racial socialization centers around parents’ role in protecting their children against racism (Priest et al., 2014), but our findings also reveal the need to develop interventions at all ecological systems and to not place all the burden on parents. Communitarian values suggest that “it takes a village” to raise a child (Berkel et al., 2009), and thus we point to a need for prevention and intervention programs to aid parents, peers, and inform media creators. It is important for all those with power (e.g., parents, White peers, mass media) to also become proactive in fighting against oppression to protect these women. There needs to be a push for interventions and for psychologists to engage in social justice, advocacy, and activism extending beyond the therapeutic space (Grzanka, 2020). Psychologists should consider writing op-eds, speaking with journalists, being guests on podcasts, and becoming consultants to media programs to shed light on the problematic, denigrating images toward Asian American women. Psychologists could also partner with schools and workplaces to promote increased discussions about systemic racism and sexism to prevent gendered racism. In addition, psychologists should both engage and promote bystander intervention training to learn how to intervene to stop hate and violence toward Asian American women. They may also educate the public by demonstrating what affirming and empowering messages look like.

For too long, Asian American women have been largely invisible or portrayed through harmful, mass-mediated stereotypes. The rise of anti-Asian racism since the COVID-19 pandemic and the murders of six Asian women in Atlanta, Georgia on March 16, 2021 demonstrate that these harmful, stereotypical messages, and portrayals of Asian American women may place these women at risk for violent acts from others. Rather than allowing Asian American women to define who they are, they are exploited and dehumanized by society pushing them into these narrow, harmful depictions. Even after the killings in March 2021, the media continued to perpetuate dominant White supremacist narratives by avoiding the term “gendered racism” and instead naming the reason for the murders as “sex addiction.” This is also seen in institutions, where in some STEM fields in universities, Asian Americans are no longer considered “minorities” even though they continue to face discrimination. Our findings, however, reveal that racism and sexism are alive and well, and we must work together to stop and prevent these messages. As Cathy Park Hong (2020) stated, Asian Americans are not the next in line to become White, they are the next to disappear. Psychologists must shift these dominant narratives such as the model minority myth and instead work to make the stories of Asian American women more visible. We must all work to give space and empower Asian American women to be the creators of their own lives and narratives and not the ones developed for them. Finally, we want to highlight that despite being victims of oppression, these women demonstrate resistance and strength through sharing their stories.

References


Appendix

Semistructured Interview Questions

Below are some questions that I may ask to guide us throughout the interview.

1. Brief developmental background/demographics

2. What messages did you or did you not hear about being an Asian American woman/man growing up from your parents? Peers? Other family members? Media?

3. What expectations, family norms, and standards did your parents have of you as an Asian American woman?

4. What was your role in the family as an Asian American woman?

5. Did your parents talk to you about how to deal with discrimination against Asian American women? If so, how?

6. Did your parents share with you about their experiences with discrimination as an Asian American woman?

7. Did your parents talk to you about how to interact with people of other race/ethnicities?

8. Did your parents talk to you about your dating prospects as an Asian American woman?
   ○ Did your parents explore dating people of other races? Your own race/ethnicity?
   ○ Did your parents talk to you about marriage and your role in marriage?

9. Talk to us about what your parents/peers/other family members/media told you about your skin color, hair, ...
body shape, facial features, and physical appearance in the Asian community.

10. Tell us about what your parents/peers/other family members/media told you about your intelligence.

11. How do you think these gendered racial messages have impacted you?

12. Is there anything else we should have asked you?

Received October 2, 2020
Revision received May 26, 2021
Accepted May 27, 2021