Preface

The model minority stereotype of Asians/Asian Americans is a topic that has garnered a significant amount of attention from academics. *The Model Minority Stereotype Project*, a Website I created in 2013, attests to this: it catalogs 499 writings on the stereotype. The list grows longer each and every day; there have already been 8 writings on the stereotype in 2014 alone (see Hartlep, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c; Ibaraki, Hall, & Sabin, 2014; Nopper, 2014; Strayhorn, 2014; Yoo, Miller, & Yip, 2014; Xiang, 2014). Yet, despite the incredible amount of literature being written on and about the stereotype, it does not appear to be going away.

**WHAT IS THE MODEL MINORITY STEREOTYPE?**

Intriguingly, a large number of people do not know about (or have never heard of) the model minority stereotype (e.g., see Ung, Tendulkar, & Chu, in press). One key reason I believe that stereotypes of Asians are not going away—and why people do not know about the model minority stereotype—is because anti-Asian hostility is more hidden from view than in times past. The stereotype is not recognized by many individuals because it is concealed behind veneers of meritocracy, ahistoricism, and racial colorblindness (Hartlep, 2013, 2014c). While individuals may not have heard the term “model minority,” surely they have come across stereotypes of Asians/Asian Americans in the media.

Literature suggests that the model minority stereotype is racist and a “social problem” because it oppresses people of color by pointing out excessive numbers of Asian American success stories. Frequent and repetitive reporting on Asian/Asian American success reinforces, codifies, and legitimates the idea that the United States is a land of meritocratic opportunity. The outcome is that institutionalized and other modern forms of racism are rendered imperceptible (Hayes & Hartlep, 2013).

Although academics have revealed legitimate counterstories that invalidate the model minority stereotype’s assertions (e.g., Hartlep & Porfilio, in press), one challenge is getting these stories read by those who would benefit the most from reading
them. This volume intends to add to this meaningful and critical work—such as Kim and Sakamoto’s (2014) research, which found that Asian American men who drop out of high school earn substantially less than comparable whites—by addressing the model minority stereotype from a variety of perspectives and disciplines. I sought to include chapters that addressed different aspects of the model minority stereotype, ranging from methodological considerations to conceptual arguments, and also related psychological research.

*Modern Societal Impacts of the Model Minority Stereotype* explores the impact of the stereotype on society. The book’s target audience is professionals and researchers working in the field of education and various disciplines (e.g., Asian/Ethnic Studies, Asian American Studies, Sociology, Educational Foundations, Curriculum Studies, and Cultural Studies).

*Modern Societal Impacts* provides unique insights and can be used to support practicing in-service teachers as well as pre-service teacher education students who are concerned with issues of social, ethical, and moral justice (Blum, 2004). As Blum (2004) points out, “If we think of Asian-Americans through the stereotype of the ‘model minority’—hard-working, academically achieving, responsible—we forget that Asian-Americans like to relax, to party, to go to movies, that they fall in love, have sexual desires, care about their friendships, sometimes flout standards of propriety, and so on” (p. 274). The model minority stereotype places limits on Asians/Asian Americans; it’s just not fair or helpful to do this.

*Modern Societal Impacts* provides relevant theoretical frameworks and the latest empirical research findings on the psychology and sociology of the model minority stereotype. This volume was edited for professionals and educationalists who wish to improve their understanding of the implications and impacts this stereotype has on society. This comprehensive and timely publication is an essential reference source, building on the available literature in the fields of education and psychology, and also provides for further research opportunities related to the sociology of the model minority stereotype.

In Chapter 1, Chau-Sa T. Dang and Susan L. Kline report their study of 128 Asian American college students and the influence of their social networks on the endorsement of positive Asian stereotypes. Dang and Kline measured students’ subjective social support, person-centered support messages, family satisfaction, and parental perfectionism on coping and on the endorsement of positive Asian stereotypes (with regards to their own self and to Asians as a group). Results indicate that while family satisfaction was related to both group- and self-endorsement of positive Asian stereotypes, only social support was related to self-endorsed positive Asian stereotypes. Family satisfaction and social support predicted Asian students’
coping ability. Dang and Kline discuss the role of social support and family in shaping perceptions of the self and the Asian ethnicity and how this may relate to coping capabilities for Asian American college students.

In Chapter 2, Sanjukta Ghosh writes about spelling bees and how Indian Americans are racialized as being superior spellers. Ghosh analyzes the discursive construction of Indian Americans as racial emblems in media reports and online message boards. Using Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s notion of “color-blind racism” and Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism, her chapter discusses how these children have become exemplars of racial assimilation even as they are indelibly marked as “forever foreign,” and why Indian-Americans feel the compulsion to attempt to conquer “the master’s tools.”

In Chapter 3, Teresa Mok and David Chih analyze how the model minority myth intersected with athletics by investigating the worldwide phenomenon of “Linsanity,” referring to the 2012 ascendancy of Jeremy Lin in the NBA. Lin transfixed viewers with the seemingly positive message of being an underdog who triumphed over significant odds. This chapter delineates the racism that pervaded the popular media coverage of “Linsanity” and places his story in the historical context of other Asian and Asian American athletes. Despite sports often being touted as a meritocracy, the authors argue that race—in this case, being an Asian body on the largely Black and White playing court of professional basketball—rendered Lin invisible and was a substantial part of the discourse that permeated the media coverage of him.

In Chapter 4, Tanya Velasquez recounts her experience teaching college students about the model minority stereotype and its relationship to Orientalism. Velasquez describes the interdisciplinary lesson plans she uses, which include integrating social media discourse and the arts that feature Asians who publicly oppose the stereotype. Using a feminist perspective and critical theories of race, Velasquez teaches her students to analyze and appreciate a sophisticated counter-hegemonic narrative that deconstructs the model minority stereotype without reinforcing complex and intersecting systems of oppression that entangle race, class, and gender. Her chapter includes a story of personal transformation for a Cambodian student whose new sociological understanding of the model minority stereotype and its negative impact on his life frees him of individual shame and inspires a career pathway rooted in social justice.

Using autoethnography as methodology, Chapter 5 describes how the first author, Rong Chang, has experienced stereotyping as a Chinese female immigrant and doctoral student in America. The authors recount four different personal encounters to illustrate the harmful impact of stereotyping, and discuss ways of bringing awareness to society in order to prevent this type of discrimination in the future.
In Chapter 6, Eunyoung Kim and Katherine Aquino provide a critical review of research on Asian international students’ educational experiences in American higher education. The chapter highlights key findings and identifies trends and dominant narratives that account for adjustment struggles, issues, stresses, and other challenges. Kim and Aquino argue that Asian international students face a number of difficulties. They are expected to perform at higher levels than are average Americans and other international students, and must negotiate stereotypes that not only hold them to high academic standards but also perpetuate their status as foreign students (temporary migrants). The authors present the Transitory Accommodation Model (TAM), a new conceptual framework that addresses challenges Asian international students face, such as the model minority stereotype threat and problems associated with language ability and perceived social connectedness.

In Chapter 7, Hyun-Sook Kang presents a qualitative study of a group of eight second-generation Korean American college students who appeared to fit the model minority stereotype: high academic achievers who had adjusted to their host country at the expense of their heritage language and culture. Contrary to what the model minority stereotype suggests about Asian Americans’ assimilation into mainstream society, these college students chose to take Korean language classes in an attempt to relearn the language they were exposed to while growing up in Korean immigrant households. Rather than being passive recipients of language instruction, these Korean American students brought their hybrid, transnational life experiences to language classroom interactions. Kang’s findings regarding the Korean-American students’ development and maintenance of their heritage language while achieving academic success challenge the prevalent model minority stereotype and suggest a promise of bilingualism and multiculturalism in a multiethnic society such as the United States.

In Chapter 8, Sophia Rodriguez examines the ways in which female youth resist the model minority stereotype. Drawing on ethnographic data, the author reports findings on the tenuous identity struggles of these females who are raced as the “smart Chinese girls,” gendered as “the Chinese sorority sitting in the back of the room,” and classed as “low-income kids at a ghetto school on the south side of Chicago.” The identity formation process for the female youth here provides insight into the ways that teacher-student relationships impact identity formation of youth and their sense of belonging in school as well as how female youth express a desire for cultural identities that are free from racist discourses perpetuated through “racial epithets” such as the minority stereotype (Embrick & Henricks, 2013). Re-conceptualizing the model minority stereotype as a “racial epithet” challenges education researchers and
policymakers to understand immigrant youth experiences in schools beyond racialized discourse that limits their identity formation. This chapter ultimately exposes the ways that the model minority stereotype sustains racial antagonism in schools.

In Chapter 9, Bita Zakeri provides a critical examination of the effects of the model minority stereotype on Asian immigrants, with particular focus on Iranian Americans. Using Said's concept of Orientalism, this chapter provides a theoretical analysis of the objectives behind implementing racial categorization and stereotyping in the U.S. and argues that the notion of Asian “model minority” serves as a continual comparison of East and West in the U.S. context, where the Western European culture remains dominant and serves to promote racial supremacy of some groups over others without regard for sociocultural and economic contexts. By outlining the problematic categorization of a multitude of ethnicities from Asia as a homogenous “Asian” race, Zakeri sheds light on the fallacies of data on which such comparisons of performances are based, revealing the politics behind the creation of the model minority myth.

In Chapter 10, Karen Sy de Jesus disrupts the notion of Asian Americans as the model minority by examining the myth of their exceptionality and/or their exemplariness. In analyzing the role played by Foucault’s concept of the norm in the dynamic between Asian Americans and other Americans, this chapter demonstrates how the model minority myth functions to perpetuate and to reinforce discrimination and alienation. The norm structures relations between individuals and groups of individuals by determining the distribution of their vulnerabilities. By examining the relations shaped by the distribution of vulnerabilities, this chapter reveals how the model minority myth impacts our society.

In Chapter 11, Trish Morita-Mullaney and Michelle C. S. Greene examine the narratives of three Asian/American teachers in their respective public school settings, located in the Midwestern United States. Narrative analyses of these case studies are instructive in better understanding individual and collective racial identity development, as well as the cultural formation of emerging definitions of what it means to be an Asian/American professional in U.S. Midwestern public schools.

In Chapter 12, Guy Lowe provides a meta-analysis of the evidence against the model minority stereotype, and highlights the sociopolitical problems associated with its perpetuation. He also uses the idea of identity as flexible and discursive in outlining how the model minority stereotype shapes how Asian Americans see themselves and, in turn, how they are treated in society as a result of its widespread belief.
CONCLUSION

Asians/Asian Americans were cast as model minorities by the media in the United States beginning in 1966 (see Petersen, 1966). However, the reality is that this has been more rhetorical than real. Asians in America were juxtaposed to Blacks during the 1960s (Hamamoto, 1994). Asians were cast as model citizens who valued family while Blacks were cast in the opposite light. Approximately 20 years later, during the mid-1980s, the media drew national attention to Asian American high school students who were receiving prestigious science talent awards like the Westinghouse Talent Search Award (see, e.g., Butterfield, 1986; Graubard, 1988; Lord & Linnon, 1988; Michaels, 1985; Quindlen, 1987). The mid-1980s marks the apex of the model minority stereotyping of Asians because only a few years later, during the 1990s, attitudes toward Asians/Asian Americans shifted radically, becoming more and more negative.

A Modern Societal Impact: The Creation of a New Yellow Peril

Paradoxically, while Petersen’s (1966) New York Times Magazine article served as the genesis of the model minority stereotype, during the 1990s—less than 30 years later—“Japan bashing” had become the rule of the land (Iino, 1994). This shows how readily the model minority construction of Asians/Asian Americans can metastasize into “yellow peril.” It is possible the media gravitated toward reporting on Asian American science awards during the mid-1980s because the stories were convenient and provided headlines that would sell. However, while I don’t have empirical evidence, I think it is also possible that the media drew attention to successful Asian Americans because the stories fed the current propaganda for why Asian Americans are to be feared. If there is one thing that American journalism has long been proficient at, it is stoking fear.

It is interesting to note that, according to a study by Terzian and Rury (2014) published in Teachers College Record, the majority of Westinghouse Science Talent Search Award recipients from 1942-1958 were white, affluent, and male. Immigration laws changed in the United States in the 1960s, allowing for the immigration of highly educated Asians, which served the nation well. Conversely, though, is it also feasible that, with the influx of these highly educated foreign “others,” white attitudes shifted toward resentment and fear?

Parallels can perhaps be seen today. Certainly, it can be argued that Asian Americans are more and more being seen as threats to the status quo. Research has found that whites’ attitudes toward Asian Americans are influenced by their own material position (Hartlep & Lowinger, 2014). For instance, if Asian Americans are deemed as threats, it is very likely whites will have less positive attitudes toward them. This
partially explains why some white families move and relocate their schoolchildren if there seem to be too many Asian Americans in their schools—the white families do not want to compete with Asian Americans for scholarships and college admissions (Hwang, 2005). The biggest modern societal impact of the model minority stereotype is that it can easily lead to fear and hostility—a new yellow peril.

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REFERENCES


