

# Identity Salience & Asian Media Representation

## Aaron Enriquez

State University of New York College at Geneseo  
Department of Communication  
Advised by Dr. Sarah Brookes

### Background & Abstract

Asian representation in media has had recent breakthrough. Films such as Everything, Everywhere, All at Once, Fire Island, Crazy Rich Asians, and influencers such as Bretman Rock, Joel Kim Booster, Jessica Vu, Michelle Yeoh, and more influential people and forms of media have received great appraisal and attention for being pioneers of Asian representation that media consumers have longed for. This research project is a pilot study that will examine identity salience of Asian individuals through the media portrayal of Asian people. Identity salience refers to the value of identity to an individual, and this project examines how identity is affected through the representation of the Asian identity in forms of media. Participants were interviewed on their thoughts on Asian representation across a broad range of media, how media representation affected their own identity salience, and what their vision of media representation of Asian people shall entail in the future forms of media to come.

### Research Methods

#### Obtaining Data

- Limited academic research is available and published on similar topics in regards to media representation for Asian-American individuals.
- 6 individuals were directly recruited to participated in voluntary, non-compensated interviews.

#### Subject Screening

- Interview participants were:
  - at least 18 years of age
  - able to speak English
  - identified as AAPI (Asian/Asian-American, Pacific Islander)
  - able to interview in person, virtually, or both



Figure 1: Positive role models in media that interviewees felt represented by. Left to Right: Hanni Pham (NewJeans), Bretman Rock, Michelle Yeoh, Lea Salonga

### Interview Findings & Discussion

#### Finding #1: Asians seen as homogenous, lack of diversity

- East Asians are overwhelmingly represented in media.
- Rare to see representation of Southeast Asians, South Asians, and West Asians.
- "When you think of Asian people, you don't think of us [Vietnamese people]" – Interview participant

#### Finding #2: Model minority myth & stereotypical reinforcement

- Representation of Asians as a whole reinforces the model minority myth, which is "the belief that Asians are more successful than other minority groups due to strong work ethic and lack of structural barriers" (Tran & Curtin, 2017).
- Representation still reflects common stereotypes of Asians as doctors, lawyers, excellent in math, passive, docile, foreigners, etc., presents unrealistic expectations for all Asian people.
- Stereotypes being commonly represented creates a social reality where audiences see stereotypes as real.

#### Finding #3: Impact on self-esteem & beauty standards

- Overrepresentation of a certain kind of Asian (stereotypically East Asian, passive, petite) sets a beauty standard for Asians to unconsciously follow.
- Unrealistic standards detracts self-esteem and self-image and insinuates feelings of unattractiveness.

#### Finding #4: Between regulation and respect, slow progress

- Asians are just starting to be represented fairly in media, between the stages of regulation and respect.
- Clark's stages of minority portrayal in media:
  - Regulation: roles presented to protect an existing order
  - Respect: full range of roles
- "Times are changing. Media platforms are becoming more accessible, so I find value in my identity because I'm seeing myself more" – Interview participant

### Limitations, Acknowledgement, and References

#### Limitations

- Data was obtained through a convenience sample
- Pilot study research; more extensive research needs to be done
- Interview participants were <10

#### Acknowledgement

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Contact Aaron Enriquez at aaronjenriquez6@gmail.com for any inquiries.

#### References

Tran, J., & Curtin, N. (2017). Not your model minority: Own-group activism among asian americans. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 23(4), 499-507. doi:https://doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000145