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Asian Men as Targets of Sexual Racism in the Gay Community

Steven Bader
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It is clear that racism and discrimination are still prevalent in the United States. This country has seen countless acts of racism, sexism, and homophobia—both in the past and present. These issues are far from being resolved, but significant strides are being made to create a more harmonious United States of America. As we transition into a more peaceful state, there is more room for marginalized groups to step forward and live openly in this country. However, are these marginalized groups *all* open-minded, accepting, and harmonious? The answer to that question is no. In the gay community, gay men of color get devalued for the color of their skin, the origin of their ancestry, and the physical features that coincide with their area of origin. My main reason for writing this essay is that I, a gay white man, am in a relationship with a gay Korean-American man. Through our relationship, I have heard and seen countless acts of discrimination directed towards him by other gay men, as well as towards our interracial relationship: "is he a *hot* Asian?"; "Is his penis tiny?"; "Does he even speak English?" Ignorant individuals have asked me these odd questions. However, the real issue is not the pressing questions *I* get asked, but the questions that my partner, as well as other gay Asian men, are asked by other gay men. These issues shine a light on the racism that is prevalent within the gay community—which is directed to gay men of Asian descent. Through this essay, I will explore racism, sexual racism, "preference" in sexual partners, online discrimination, stereotypes, and the effects that *all* of these atrocities have on gay Asian men using the actual voices of Asian men. My overarching question is: how does a community that represents itself with a flag made up of seven colors and prides itself in inclusivity exclude Asian men?

Can gay men be blamed for excluding gay Asian men? No. The reason for this is because historically, Asian men (and women) were treated unequally to their white neighbors. Examples of this are the Chinese Exclusion Act, the internment of Japanese-Americans in World War II, and

so on. When these unfortunate (and embarrassing) events ended in the United States, the myth of the “model minority” came into the spotlight: “the model minority image paints a portrait of Asian Americans that generally connotes real intrinsic talents and characteristics. The image is often associated with academics, for example, with Asian Americans viewed as particularly skilled in science, math, and music, as studious individuals who throw off the grading curve, or as quiet students that teachers and other school staff admire and respect”.¹ Although this appears to be a wonderful way to be stereotyped, it is not:

The historical roots of the image itself date back to the Civil Rights era when the status quo needed a successful exemplar to cast doubt on the validity of existing social disparities that were apparent between the mainstream and ethnic minorities as a whole.²

Although Asian people have not been stereotyped in a necessarily bad light, the implication that *all* Asian individuals adhere to the “model minority” myth is damaging and unrealistic. Many people may think back to their time in school and recall their Asian peers being deemed the “math expert.” However, what if an Asian person is not good at math? Are they still the model minority? American culture has decided, for Asian people, that they are the model minority, and that they must adhere to a ridiculously high standard in a society that still equates them with academics, and nothing else. Friends of mine who are of Asian descent have voiced their distaste for being labeled as exclusively an academic. My partner is a nurse, and has told me that people always ask “why are you *just* a nurse? You are Asian man!” The fact that being a male Asian nurse is seen as inferior is ludicrous. Asian males and females should be able to pursue the career path of *their*

¹ Kiang, Lisa, Melissa R. Witkow, and Taylor L. Thompson. "Model Minority Stereotyping, Perceived Discrimination, and Adjustment Among Adolescents from Asian American Backgrounds." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 45, no. 7 (2015): 1366-379.
doi:10.1007/s10964-015-0336-7.

² *Ibid.* 1369

choice, without being expected to explain their reasoning, just like white men and women do. However, what if you are Asian, as well as gay? Is the model minority myth the only stereotype placed upon gay Asian individuals? Personally, having a Korean-American partner has enabled me to examine the racism and discrimination that *all* Asian men face as a result of their ethnicity. My partner has told me countless times how he is viewed as feminine, weak, and insubordinate, all due to the perception that Asian men are inferior. The myth of the model minority has infiltrated its way into the gay community as well. Gay Asian men are seeing this myth perpetuated among the community, and are met with the effects that this tale has brought Asian individuals in America.

In a study conducted around four gay Korean-American men in college, the data collected was from interviews with these four people regarding the experiences they had as being gay Korean-American men in college.³ These four Korean-American men were not only subjected to the model minority myth but also discriminated against due to their ethnicity, and their sexuality—by both fellow Koreans and non-Koreans alike. In the interview, one gay Korean-American student said, regarding racism in the gay community, that:

Gay people always talk about being careful or sensitive for people, but they give more racism to me than any other people do. You'd think that they would be better since people discriminate against them too but I would say gays can be very racist to Asian men. Whenever I read a [dating] ad online "no Asians," it's usually a White guy. Or if I meet somebody and say, "Hey, I'm Korean," then he will say, "Oh shit . . . So I know you're very smart." It sounds like a nice thing, but it's not really and it makes me very mad.⁴

This student paints a depressing picture of the racism that exists within the 'inclusive' gay community. This student also alludes to the model minority myth that every Asian person is “good

³ Strayhorn, Terrell L. "Beyond the Model Minority Myth: Interrogating the Lived Experiences of Korean American Gay Men in College." *Journal of College Student Development* 55, no. 6 (September 2014): 586-94. doi:10.1353/csd.2014.0059.

⁴ *Ibid* 590.

at math.” Gay Asian men are not only emasculated for their ethnicity but also held to the ridiculously high expectation that *all Asian* people are "very smart." Beyond the “no Asians” messages on online dating, another gay Korean-American student gave their experience with physical threats, racist jokes, and other vile forms of discrimination:

I've been threatened . . . Physically, and by a gay guy from [a dorm] on campus. Contrary to what people think, there's a lot of racism within the gay community, I'd say. I've met gay people through Lambda who ask me to attend their events on campus, to march in their parades, to wear their t-shirts for Pride Day, even help them with their homework because all Asians are good at math . . . NOT . . . But they won't even try saying my name right . . . Or make racist jokes about my eyes (pulling the corners of his eyes toward his ears), oh yea, or speak very loud [sic] to me like I can't speak English—which I can—even if, I'm not fu*king deaf, I'm Asian, you know. It's so frustrating.⁵

A disheartening aspect of being gay is that people of your culture and ethnicity may discriminate against you solely by your sexuality. I have heard countless times from my Korean-American partner at how homophobic the overall Asian community can be. For these four Korean-American men in this study, three of the four said that they “had been harassed verbally by same-race peers about their sexual orientation, which threatened their sense of security on campus as well as diminished their sense of belonging within the Asian American/ Korean American campus community.”⁶ Even more disheartening is that these men expressed the “invisibility” they felt by their fellow Korean and other Asian students on their college campus.⁷ Not only do gay Asian men have to battle the model minority myth, but they also have to fight both racism, prejudice, and discrimination from their fellow gay peers, as well as their peers from their ethnic background.

How do stereotypes of all Asian men affect the way that gay Asian men are viewed in the gay community? For starters, Western society is one that places high value and preference on

⁵ *Ibid.* 590

⁶ *Ibid.* 591

⁷ *Ibid.* 591

heteronormativity, and when men do not embody heteronormativity, their masculinity and sexuality are in question:

Heterosexuality is the “necessary” communicative element for men to conform to the hegemonic masculinity (Chesebro, 2001). If a man is not heterosexual, people will repeatedly challenge his masculinity (Franklin, 1984). Some gay men are pressured to achieve their hegemonic masculine body images to compensate for the social perception of gay men as effeminate (Kimmel & Mahalik, 2005).⁸

Because Asian men are viewed as not being masculine, their sexuality and perception are deemed as gay and weak. My partner has told me before that he feels that he has to make himself more manly to compensate for being Korean-American. He has said that he needs to work twice as hard as his non-Asian gay friends to be accepted by the gay community. One of the many problems with this is that many of his friends are white, and therefore deemed as inherently masculine:

Whiteness is another normative masculine frame that dominates other ethnic groups in the U.S. In this power structure of masculinity, Asian men become emasculated in the eyes of non-Asians and get labeled "asexual" or "feminine." This racialized image about Asian men can clearly translate into the everyday experiences of gay Asian men in the West. Han (p. 20, 2008) analyzes the situation by saying that “because gay White men make an ‘investment in Whiteness,’ they eradicate whatever male privilege gay Asian men may have by relegating to the feminine position” In this view, gay Asian men are socially positioned as “feminine” in the Western heteronormative masculine power structure.⁹

Gay Asian men are feminized and seen as less attractive by their fellow gay men because being feminine in the gay community is seen as being a woman, which is a negative trait in the gay community. The obsession with masculinity that gay men have is likely due to the constant struggles gay men face as a result of being gay in a heterosexist society. Because of the heterosexist society in which gay men live, there is often internalized homophobia as a result:

Gay men also internalize homophobia, since they live in a heteronormative society. Ross and Simon Rosser (1996) define internalized homophobia as “dissatisfaction with being

⁸ Eguchi, Shinsuke. "Negotiating Sissyphobia: A Critical/Interpretive Analysis of One "Femme" Gay Asian Body in the Heteronormative World." *The Journal of Men's Studies* 19, no. 1 (2011): 37-56. doi:10.3149/jms.1901.37.

⁹ *Ibid.* 38

(gay) and as being associated with low self-esteem and self-hatred” (p. 15). Internalized homophobia is a source of conflict for gay men in negotiating their sexual identities.¹⁰

As a gay white man living in the West, I have been able to see how it is to be gay here, as well as how it is to be gay in the East. When I traveled to Taiwan, I had no urge to express masculinity or to perform as a masculine man. In the West, however, I feel as if I have to act as masculine (or neutral) for survival. My partner agrees with this feeling, as he has traveled throughout Asia and has felt that his masculinity is not questioned, nor deemed necessary for survival. My partner believes that the West forces him to exude masculinity in order to be taken seriously and treated with respect—particularly since he is a Korean-American man. The reason why there is such a vast difference between the East and West, as told by Eguchi, is:

My intercultural transition to Southern California in 2001 to attend a university put me in an environment that is framed by the White normative masculinity. Since then, I have strongly been aware of how others perceive my performative presentations of gender as “feminine” in cities I lived in (i.e., New York; Orange County, CA; San Francisco; and Washington, D.C.). For example, my Asian racialized body image puts me into the social location in which my performative presentations of gender are perceived as “feminine.”¹¹

As Eguchi moved from Tokyo, Japan to southern California, he was able to see the different views of his gender performance in both locations. In the East, being feminine is not a recipe for disaster as it is in the West. Because of these differences, the stereotypes that surround gay men in the West are instantly tacked on to gay Asian men:

Interacting with other gay and bisexual men, I have learned that gay Asian American men are stereotyped as “being smooth,” “subservient,” “passive,” and “exotic.” For example, Chong-suk Han (2006) asserts the following: Because gay Asian men are racialized and gendered, their predicted role performance involves becoming “feminine” counterpart to the “masculine” gay White male. Much like the way that women are rewarded for playing the female role, gay Asian men are “rewarded” by the dominant gay community for performing their prescribed gender roles. (p. 17)¹²

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 40

¹¹ *Ibid.* 44

¹² *Ibid.* 46

These stereotypes are damaging, false, and ludicrous. Being in an interracial relationship with an Asian man has shown me how often these stereotypes are used, and how much they affect gay Asian men. For example, I am often intrusively asked about my sex life with my partner. People blatantly ask about my partners' sexual position in our relationship. These inappropriate questions have been asked multiple times by other gay (and straight) friends of mine. Many people that I know expect my partner to be the "woman" in our relationship due to me being white, and him being Asian.

Beyond blatant racism and feminization that are directed towards gay Asian men, there is another form of discrimination that is just as problematic: exotification. My partner has told me about the countless times he has been asked on a date by someone who wants to date him solely because he is Asian. Other gay Asian friends of mine have told me about the men who chase after them due to their "exotic" features and "subservient" role in a relationship. I even know a gay white man who *only* dates Korean men who look like K-pop stars. This exotification of Asian men is also racist because it lumps all gay Asian men together and makes them seem disposable and interchangeable. The gay men who exotify gay Asian men can be of any ethnicity. However, they all have the same title of "rice queen." A rice queen is typically a gay man who *only* dates Asian men. Rice queens usually do not care if the Asian men are Japanese, Chinese, Korean, etc. As long as the man is Asian, the rice queen chases after them. For gay Asian men, this is problematic because rice queens are usually not interested in their personality or other characteristics, but instead the interest is based solely on their "exotic" look, "smooth" body, and "subservient" role:

In his essay, "China doll," Tony Ayers discusses feeling outside of the gay mainstream due to his Chinese ethnicity. In addition to discussing the overt forms of racism, such as gay classified ads that specifically state, "no fats, femmes or Asians," and being told by other gay men that they are "not into Asians," Ayers describes the more subtle forms of racism,

that of the "rice queens" who desire Asian men purely for the purpose of exoticizing and eroticizing them. According to Ayers, "rice queens" may want Asian men, but the cause of the affection is based on the eroticized notion of the Asian "other." Rice queens are often attracted to Asian men based on idealized notions of a passive, docile, and submissive lover, eager to please any white man.¹³

Although disturbing, these relationships are incredibly popular in the West. I have seen several real-life relationships that adhere to the rice queen agenda. My question has always been "why?" Why would a gay Asian man want to be in a relationship with a man who is in a relationship solely because of his Asian esthetic? "Why" is answered by an obsession with masculinity in the West, with Caucasian men being considered the "most" masculine men in the gay community:

Gay Asian Americans, particularly gay Asian men, they have also bought into the gay western notion of what is desirable. Ayers explains, "The sexually marginalized Asian man who has grown up in the West or is Western in his thinking is often invisible in his own fantasies. [Their] sexual daydreams are populated by handsome Caucasian men with lean, hard Caucasian bodies." Mirroring this sentiment, a survey of gay Asian men in San Francisco found that nearly 70 percent of gay Asian men indicate a preference for white men.¹⁴

Gay Asian men are constantly bombarded by what masculinity "is" in the West: Caucasian, strong, muscular, etc. These images make it seem like white men are the only desirable partner in the gay community, therefore leading gay Asian men to believe that white men are the ideal lovers. Because of these images, gay Asian men are left to feel inadequate due to the Eurocentric beauty standards that are popular in the West,

"According to some gay Asian activists, the most damaging aspect of this seems to be that gay Asian men seem to be competing for the attention of a limited number of "rice queens." This competition hinders the formation of a unified gay Asian community and further acts to splinter those who should be seen as natural allies."¹⁵

¹³ Han, Chong-suk. 2001. "There's something about being Gay and Asian...that's Special." *International Examiner*, Oct 16, 12.

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/367695474?accountid=15006>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 1

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 2

For the gay Asian men who fall into the rice queen trap, it is not their fault. The notion that Eurocentric beauty standards are superior have left gay Asian men to feel out of place, inadequate, and longing for acceptance. These men may feel that they do not belong in the gay community due to the notion that gay white men are "better." Because of this, settling for a rice queen may be the only way some gay Asian men feel they can be a part of the gay community. However, some gay Asian men refuse to fall into the rice queen trap. To combat this, many gay Asian men label themselves as "sticky rice." In places like San Francisco, which "is seen as a Mecca for "sticky rice," Asian men who prefer to date other Asian men"¹⁶, the majority of gay Asian men choose white men as their partners over other Asian men. I have asked my partner, as well as several Asian friends, about these two labels. Many believe that these labels are negative but somewhat accurate. As a white man, I have been asked numerous times if I am a "rice queen" because my partner is Asian. When asked this question, my initial thought is "am I?" But my answer is always "no." I choose partners based on characteristics that are not related to ethnicity.

Tying in with rice queens are the labels "top" and "bottom" that are placed upon gay men. These tags, though private, have become an obsession of gay men: who is a bottom, and who is a top? As a gay man, I have been asked this question countless times. However, being in an interracial relationship with an Asian man, I get asked about *his* sexual position within our relationship. Although I keep this information private, many gay friends of mine are always interested in the dynamics of my relationship. This interest is a result of tops seen as white men, and bottoms perceived as Asian men. Because gay men are already stereotyped as being feminine, gay men of other ethnicities view them as exclusively bottoms. In an interview including 55 gay Asian American men from San Diego and Seattle, these gay Asian men were asked about their

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 2

experiences with being an Asian man in the gay community. The whole 55 men who were surveyed “understood that the cause of gay racial stigma toward them was rooted in their supposedly feminine characteristics.”¹⁷ Interestingly, to disguise the feminine characteristics that are placed upon these men, they attempted to either pass as non-Asian, or masculine, or distance themselves from other gay Asian men and instead exclusively hang out with gay white men.¹⁸ The reason why these gay Asian men did this is that:

You’re not looked upon much... If you are Asian in San Diego, it’s hard to find someone because you get overlooked because you are not white. It is a thing a lot of my friends see. Some places, we completely avoid. You just know that in some bars, it’s just white guys with white guys. It could become such a huge problem.¹⁹

Other participants in the study stated that they felt that gay white men saw them as "submissive," "wanting to please." And "that we have smaller dicks so we're more likely to be bottoms."²⁰ Gay men favor masculinity, and nothing says “masculinity” more than the size of a man’s penis. In the gay community, penis size is commonly discussed and stereotyped. As stated earlier, gay Asian men are stereotyped as possessing a small penis, which therefore makes them feminine. In comparing how gay white and Asian men are viewed in the gay community based on penis size, commonly held stereotypes are that:

Asian gay and bisexual men are stereotyped as sexually submissive and therefore bottoms, with below average penises, and with limited power in sexual negotiation (Han 2008; Lang 2014; Wilson and Yoshikawa 2004). Of note, White gay and bisexual men are typically not racially stereotyped in ways that have negative implications on their sexuality. White gay and bisexual men are frequently seen as the norm outside or above the racial hierarchy within the larger gay and bisexual communities (Wilson et al. 2009). Thus, they enjoy privilege and are

¹⁷ Han, Chong-Suk, Kristopher Proctor, and Kyung-Hee Choi. "I Know a Lot of Gay Asian Men Who Are Actually Tops: Managing and Negotiating Gay Racial Stigma." *Sexuality & Culture* 18, no. 2 (2013): 219-34. doi:10.1007/s12119-013-9183-4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 223

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 224

²⁰ *Ibid.* 224

stereotypically thought to be the most desirable race of sexual partners among gay and bisexual men (Han 2007; Plummer 2007).²¹

What is most damaging about these stereotypes is that they put *all* gay Asian men into one box that is near impossible to break away from. As one participant said “I know a lot of gay Asian men who are actually tops. They want to be the man in the relationship.”²² Gay men are just as likely to be the “man” or “woman” in a relationship as any white man is. In my circle of friends, I have never seen or heard a gay Asian friend of mine voice that they are feminine or submissive in a relationship.

Stereotypes, due to their unfortunate popularity, have infiltrated themselves into the ways people choose potential partners. Most humans have a preference: food, drinks, clothes, etc. Humans also tend to have preferences when it comes to a partner. However, can having a preference on what ethnicity your partner is make you racist? Yes, and no. The answer is "yes" if and when the person's preference exudes their preference in a negative light. The answer is “no” when the preference is rooted in non-discriminatory actions. In a sample conducted in San Francisco among 1,145 gay men found:

Evidence of sexual preferences by race/ethnicity, with White and Hispanic, non-Latino men regarded as more sexually desirable relative to Asian and Black men. Other research has shown that gay men of color are particularly aware of this hierarchy of sexual attractiveness within the gay male community (Han, 2008; Poon & Ho, 2008; Wilson & Yoshikawa, 2004).²³

²¹ Grov, Christian, Lena D. Saleh, Jonathan M. Lassiter, and Jeffrey T. Parsons. "Challenging Race-Based Stereotypes about Gay and Bisexual Men's Sexual Behavior and Perceived Penis Size and Size Satisfaction." *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 12, no. 3 (2015): 224-35. doi:10.1007/s13178-015-0190-0.

²² Han, Chong-Suk, Kristopher Proctor, and Kyung-Hee Choi. "I Know a Lot of Gay Asian Men who Are Actually Tops: Managing and Negotiating Gay Racial Stigma." *Sexuality & Culture* 18, no. 2 (2013): 225. doi:10.1007/s12119-013-9183-4.

This evidence shines a light on the horrific "hierarchy" that is in place within the gay community. This hierarchy places white men on top, Latinos in the center, and Asian and black men on the bottom due to the social dominance orientation (SDO). What is shocking about this hierarchy is that:

One's preferences for social hierarchy and dominance should also explain why, for example, some API gay men would likely accept negative views about certain racial groups—including their own—while other API gay men would reject those views. Individuals who are dominance oriented will tend to favor hierarchy-enhancing beliefs, such as prevailing negative views about certain racial groups, while those lower on SDO will tend to favor egalitarianism and beliefs that attenuate social hierarchy (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).²⁴

Asian Pacific Islander (API) gay men are placed at the bottom of this hierarchy, which normalizes the notion that these men are effeminate, and less attractive than their non-Asian gay counterparts. I have asked my partner and friends about this hierarchy, and it appears that it is unfortunately true within the gay community. My partner, who is Korean-American, even said that there is a hierarchy among gay Asian men of different Asian origins. For example, he said that Korean and Japanese men are on the top of the hierarchy, and Vietnamese and other South Asian men are on the bottom of the hierarchy. This hierarchy is a social construct that is illegitimate, damaging, and one that perpetuates discrimination based off of something that cannot and should not be changed, race.

Gay Asian men *are* discriminated against within the gay community for the sole reason of being Asian. So, is this racism? Yes. However, this is a different form of racism: sexual racism.

²³ Tan, Judy Y., Felicia Pratto, Don Operario, and Shari L. Dworkin. "Sexual Positioning and Race-Based Attraction by Preferences for Social Dominance among Gay Asian/Pacific Islander Men in the United States." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 42, no. 7 (2013): 1233-239. Doi: 10.1007/s10508-013-0088-y.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 1234

Sexual racism is as it sounds, using racism as a mechanism when selecting sexual partners. In the gay community, we have seen how Asian men are discriminated against for being Asian and placed on the bottom of a ridiculous hierarchy as a result. Asian men are emasculated and feminized. Sexual racism can be used through language to say “not attracted to Asians.”²⁵ Interestingly, if you went up to an African American and said "I do not like black people," that would be racist. SO, there is absolutely no difference between sexual racism and traditional racism. Telling an individual that you do not like them based on their ethnicity *is* racism. Some people hold a belief that there is a substantial difference between being sexually attracted to someone and racism:

Just because someone isn't sexually attracted to someone of Asian origin does not mean they wouldn't want to work, live next to, or socialize with him or her, or that they believe they are somehow naturally superior to them. (Watts, 2012)²⁶

Although this is true, to blatantly state “I am not attracted to Asians” is cruel and discriminatory. What are the reasons for not being attracted to someone that is Asian? I do believe that everyone is entitled to their own sexual freedom, but to outwardly state that you do not like an entire ethnicity based off of just that, then there is an issue that, in my mind, is racism. One cannot exclude an entire ethnic group without having some resentment, dislike, or belief in false stereotypes that have influenced a person to take such a firm stance against a whole group of individuals.

As we are now in the technological age, online dating has become increasingly popular in the past few years. With that, people have been able to find partners based on specific search criteria like race, age, and sexual orientation. As a member of the gay community, I have spent

²⁵ Callander, Denton, Christy E. Newman, and Martin Holt. "Is Sexual Racism Really Racism? Distinguishing Attitudes Toward Sexual Racism and Generic Racism among Gay and Bisexual Men." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 44, no. 7 (2015): 1991-2000. Doi: 10.1007/s10508-015-0487-3.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 1993

countless hours looking at profiles to find racist comments, statements, and "preferences." I have come across "no fats," "no femmes," and "no Asians" more times than I would like to have. For this paper, I even went back to look on mobile phone apps such as Grindr, and Jack'd, to see if gay men still use this language to perpetuate their preferences. They do, unfortunately. The internet and mobile phones have provided everyone with a platform to divulge their thought, opinions, and preferences, with little to no repercussions. It is now easy to search for any ethnicity that one desires exclusively. With this ease, it has become apparent to many Asian men that they are not wanted by many gay men who utilize these internet sites. In a study conducted among gay Asian men in an interview setting, these men were able to express their findings on gay dating sites/apps:

However, when I'm online it's a constant reminder in terms of . . . The details of the ad and the specifics. You know, if they say "Asian only" or more frequently, "no Asians," then I say oh, yeah, that's right. That's me. . . . In the online world, it's all about the specifics, so it's either, you know, "looking for Asian" or "no Asians, please." So it's kind of like, it's hard not to, you know, it's hard to ignore it. It's constantly in your face. (Japanese, 43 years old)²⁷

For gay Asian men, it appears that they are either liked, or not liked. Gay Asian men are not afforded the privilege of being seen as neutral within the gay community. They fall victim to both extremes: extreme dislike, or exotification. Going back to the hierarchy, some Asian men feel as if they do not even belong to the realm of the hierarchy at all:

I just almost think that in terms of the hierarchy that you [other focus group member] were talking about, it's like White and then anything else. But even more so sometimes, like I almost feel like the Asian is not even on the hierarchy at all, because I just see that a lot. "No Asian." But you don't see a lot of like "No Black" and "No Latinos," so they're somewhere like below the Whites, but then Asians are nowhere on this map. It's just we talk a lot about being ignored and stuff like that, and I think that's very apparent. (Chinese, 31 years old)²⁸

²⁷ Paul, Jay P., George Ayala, and Kyung-Hee Choi. "Internet Sex Ads for MSM and Partner Selection Criteria: The Potency of Race/Ethnicity Online." *Journal of Sex Research* 47, no. 6 (2010): 528-38. doi:10.1080/00224490903244575.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 534

Online dating and preference have led Asian men to see the blatant discrimination that is online. For these men, it leaves them feeling as if they do not belong in the gay community as this Chinese man stated.

Personal preference is popularly found online. As stated earlier “No Asians” can be found commonly on online dating sites. In another study that examines online interactions between gay men in the United States online, we can see further how gay Asian men are discriminated against:

“Racially, it’s generally white. Body type is usually athletic or muscular. Age range is between 25 and 35. . . . And that’s it—that I can think of,” exclaimed Koby, a 27-year-old Asian massage therapist when describing his sexual preferences on Adam4Adam. Com.²⁹

Koby has seen first-hand how gay white men, especially those that are young and fit, benefit in the gay community. Race influences interactions between gay men on a multitude of online platforms. Gay men of color, especially those that are Asian, experience the brunt of the racism that ensues on these sites. An interesting way to see how Asian men are viewed on online dating sites is to compare them to other gay men of color:

As previous research has shown, black and Asian men typically are subjected to the lowest realms of erotic racial preferences—black individuals for being seen as hypersexual and Asian men for being seen as asexual.³⁰

Here we can see how other gay men are perceived online. Asian men are still at the bottom of the hierarchy, and black men are seen as severely "hypersexual." Gay men of color appear to be viewed primarily on their sexual stereotypes, as an entire race, rather than their individualistic qualities and characteristics.

²⁹ Robinson, Brandon Andrew. “Personal Preference” as the New Racism." *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1, no. 2 (2015): 317-30. doi:10.1177/2332649214546870.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 323

To be gay *and* Asian makes that individual a double minority—especially within the United States. Because of this status, gay Asian men face a multitude of problems that can manifest into psychological distress, depression, and self-esteem issues. My partner has mentioned before that he has felt depressed as a result of being a gay Asian man in American society. It is heartbreaking to know that so many individuals not only have to deal with one factor of their identity being scrutinized, but others as well. In a study of 139 gay Asian men, researchers looked to see how being a double-minority effected gay Asian men's' overall well-being:

Asian American gay men face a unique challenge in managing stressors associated with dual minority status arising from both their ethnicity/race and their sexual orientation. Prejudicial events associated with their dual minority status, such as homophobia, racism, anti-immigrant expression, and discrimination based on stereotypes of passivity and submission across a variety of social contexts, generate vulnerability to the adverse consequences of discrimination and put them at high risk for stress and poor psychological well-being.³¹

The discrimination that gay Asian men face leads to much more than a challenge in the dating sphere because it impacts their overall health and livelihood. The vulnerable position that gay Asian men are forced to be in due to the heterosexist and racist society in which they live has fostered stress and psychological distress as a result. In relation to this study, a different study was conducted that involved gay African-American, Latino, and Asian Pacific Islander (API) men. This study found that out of all three groups that “racism within the mainstream gay community appeared to have negative psychological consequences in our sample only for API men who have sex with men.”³² These negative psychological results that affect gay API men are a result of the

³¹ Yung-Chi Chen and Georgiana Shick Tryon. "Dual Minority Stress And Asian American Gay Men's Psychological Distress." *Journal of Community Psychology* 40, no. 5 (2012): 539-54. doi:10.1002/jcop.21481.

³² Choi, Kyung-Hee, Jay Paul, George Ayala, Ross Boylan, and Steven E. Gregorich. *Experiences of Discrimination and Their Impact on the Mental Health Among African*

gay hierarchy and the constant discrimination gay Asian face due to their ethnicity and the stereotypes that surround being a gay Asian man.

One result of the psychological effects that being a double-minority has on gay Asian men is the likelihood of engaging in unsafe sex. Because gay Asian men have a hard time finding partners due to the stereotypes that surround their ethnicity, gay Asian men are put in a vulnerable position within the gay community—leading to choices that they may not have made had the dual discrimination not been prevalent:

What are often ignored when examining unsafe sexual behavior among gay API men and API MSM are the structural conditions and contextual norms in which sexual behavior for some members of this group occur, including the racial marginalization of gay API men and the expected sexual roles for gay API men within the larger gay community.³³

Researchers believe that the reason why gay Asian men are more susceptible to HIV infection is because of the partners whom they attract. Because white men are less likely to seek out gay Asian partners, some gay Asian men feel that they need to do more in order to connect with gay white men, regardless of the dangers:

I know about safe sex, I've seen the ads, read the books, went to meetings... But he said he wouldn't do it unless it was bareback [anal sex without a condom]. He told me he wasn't really into Asians anyway so it would be no big loss for him, but I thought that if I did what he wanted me to do, he would see me again, who knows? I mean, how often does a guy like that actually want to have sex with someone like me? (Participant 2)³⁴

This participant is put in a vulnerable position by a gay white man who does not care either about his health or his well-being.

American, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Latino Men Who Have Sex With Men. "American Journal of Public Health 103, no. 5 (2013): 868-74. doi:10.2105/ajph.2012.301052.

³³ Han, Chong-Suk. "A Qualitative Exploration of the Relationship between Racism and Unsafe Sex among Asian Pacific Islander Gay Men." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 37, no. 5 (2008): 827-37. Doi: 10.1007/s10508-007-9308-7.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 833

Gay Asian men are faced with racism, discrimination, and psychological distress. All of these ailments are due to the way gay white men treat them. Because of this, gay white men need to realize what they are perpetuating and get themselves educated on the damaging effects their actions have on gay Asian men. As a gay white man myself, I constantly think of what I can do to help make things better in the gay community. Education, in my opinion, is key to making other gay men understand what they are doing is wrong and damaging to other people in our community:

The construction of "whiteness" in the United States is complicit in the historical persecution and continued political, economic, and cultural domination of people of color. We contend that the way to eradicate racism is to dismantle White supremacist political, economic, and cultural power structures. Understanding that racism is institutional, we also acknowledge that racism is reinforced and perpetuated by multiple systemic oppressions, including classism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, anti-Semitism, and ageism. Achieving social justice requires simultaneous struggle against all oppressions and examination of how they perpetuate and reinforce each other.³⁵

Besides becoming educated on the construction of whiteness, and its history, gay [white] men have a duty to remove the "no Asians" tags from their online dating profiles, and begin to realize that having a preference does not equate with tearing down another person based on their ethnicity. Perpetuating discrimination, racism, and anti-feminine attitudes in an already marginalized community is counterproductive to the gay community as a whole. Gay white men must do better to not only include gay Asian men into the community, but others that are affected by the heterosexism, racism, and discrimination that our community produces.

Gay Asian men should have the same respect, acknowledgement, and opportunities that gay white men do. Their ethnicity should not subject them to negative stereotypes, racism, or discrimination of any sort. Gay Asian men have been faced with hateful remarks on online profiles,

³⁵ Lanzerotti, Rachel, Michael Mayer, Wendy Ormiston, and Laura Podwoski. 2002. "RACISM IN QUEER COMMUNITIES: WHAT CAN WHITE PEOPLE DO?" *Race, Gender & Class* 9 (1): 55. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/218807789?accountid=15006>.

struggles with finding eligible partners, and the other extreme of being exoticized for their ethnicity. The topic of this essay also closely relates to the way women of all ethnicities are subjected to sexism and other forms of discrimination based on femininity. This sexism and discrimination carries over to the gay community because American society has an unhealthy obsession with masculinity which is toxic and hurtful to those individuals who do not fit into this masculine agenda. As a gay white man in a relationship with a gay Asian man, I know how false and ludicrous the stereotypes that are made about gay Asian men are. If I could go on to educate other gay men to be like me, I think the gay community, and society, would be a more more cohesive and peaceful place for *all* people—regardless of color and both gay, straight, and anything else in-between.

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