

Minorities of a Minority: The Greater Oppression of Asian Subgroups

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Abstract

Asians in the West, particularly in the United States, have been dehumanized, stereotyped, fetishized, and ignored throughout modern history, from being labelled as disgusting, greedy enemies to being held to objectifying and ultimately harmful standards by society. In recent years, the Asian community has taken action towards and experienced strides in challenging stereotypes, gaining visibility, and seeing proper representation in the media. This has ranged to criticisms of the “model minority” myth to the recent success of the movie *Crazy Rich Asians*. However, despite any advances, Asian subgroups are continuing to suffer prejudice and injustices without any societal attention to the extremely present issues they face. In this paper, I will examine the discrimination and marginalization of brown-skinned Southeast Asians, and of multiracial Asians relative to their monoracial East Asian counterparts. Through discussion of scholarship and a personal interview with a dark-skinned Southeast Asian woman, I will explain and elaborate upon the elements of this problem, including East Asians being the default “Asian,” the lack of representation and voice given to Southeast Asians, colorism as it relates to the Asian community around the world, microaggressions and biases experienced by multiracial Asians, and feelings of isolation and inadequacy for multiracial Asians. The fact that all of these problems exist while no one is talking about them in society, media, and scholarship is abhorrent and demonstrates how current Asian activism and advancement is not enough for the whole community.

Introduction

"You don't experience real racism."

"But you're not the right kind of Asian."

"What? You have no representation? Have you watched Crazy Rich Asians?"

"Poor, dirty jungle people."

"You're the Asian one, right?"

"You're so white. Do you even care about your heritage?"

"You're so lucky, you've got both. White and Asian, you're more privileged than anyone else!"

While not all spoken verbatim or even directly to me, I have heard or read all of the above sentiments in relation to at least part of my identity—most multiple times, in fact.

I am a multiracial Filipina American. I was born in the United States and grew up here with my Italian American father and my Filipina mother, who immigrated here from her home country in the 1990s. I was raised by both of them, more so my mother once they divorced when I was twelve. As such, I've been exposed to the cultures of both my white and my Asian sides, have met non-American relatives from both, have eaten both Italian and Filipino food, know a few words in both the languages (mostly colorful curses or insults related to pigs and cabbage, admittedly), and know the basic histories of both the countries which my ancestors are from.

I've recently become aware of a myriad of new details connected to my ethnic background that I had only subconsciously perceived or had noticed and simply brushed off in the past. These details bore endless questions that have plagued me since I started college, increasingly pushing to the forefront of my attention. Why are there only Chinese, Japanese, and Korean people where Asians are included in the shows and movies we watch? Why don't we ever talk about Southeast Asian peoples when we talk about Asian-

targeted racism? Why is there such a large culture of prizing light skin in Asians to the point where some go out of their way to lighten their complexion and stay out of the sun? Why did I simultaneously hate being Asian and want to be fully *anything*, even if it were Asian, up until high school? Why have I, as a multiracial person, never felt like I belonged with anyone racially at all?

Why do people seem to think that current Asian activism and advancement in America is enough for the *whole* Asian community?

These issues, to me, seem substantially major, and yet no one is even talking about them. The problems that the Western Asian community face have historically been forgotten or overlooked as a whole, though there have been strides today in representation in the media and challenging stereotypes that will undoubtedly continue. However, what no one realizes is that there are entire subgroups within this population still being marginalized and discriminated against with no sight of improvement parallel to their counterparts. More specifically, darker-skinned Southeast Asians and multiracial Asians are still being further oppressed, ignored, and stereotyped by people within and outside of the Asian community itself. These people are suffering from overlooked injustices, disadvantages, and biases every day and throughout their lives, yet activism and research continue to ignore them substantially.

“You don’t experience real racism.”

Before I delve into the deeper injustices felt by Asian subgroups, it would be helpful to briefly discuss the real, present discrimination the whole Asian community experiences.

Many people, white individuals and non-Asian people of color alike, tend to think that Asians don’t feel discrimination because they’re the minority the dominant white

people like, the good minority, the *model minority*. To name some examples, white people I've interacted with, adults and youth, have made countless remarks about Asians not "causing any problems," Asians being good at everything, and the age-old stereotype that all Asians are good at math and science. Similarly, a friend of mine, an immensely intelligent African American woman who graduated valedictorian of our class in high school and who herself is, of course, extremely aware of the suffering of minorities in this country, often gave off the sentiment directly to me that no one could possibly be racist towards Asians, while at the same time commenting on my eyes, math skills, and resemblance to every single slightly-Asian-looking girl she saw. Regardless of race, it is quite evident that non-Asians like to believe that we aren't really hurt by any sort of real prejudice. In fact, any stereotypes that exist would seem to boost us, presumably. It shouldn't hurt our community to have everyone think we're polite, peaceful, skilled, and smart, logically. Right?

Unfortunately, this is not the case, and even if it were, it does not negate other prejudices that cannot be explained away so easily. On university campuses in the United States alone, for instance, Asian students endure microaggressions and racism so frequently and consistently that the types of prejudices they encounter can be divided into clear, detailed categories. These include, but may not be limited to: "racial hostility," "vicarious racism," "racial isolation and marginalization," "pressure to racially segregate," "pressure to racially assimilate," "racial silencing," "the forever foreigner myth," "the model minority myth," and "the inferior minority myth" (Museus and Park). Automatic assumptions of being a foreigner, simultaneously feeling like I must find other people who look like me and also like I have to figure out how to "fit in" with monoracial white people, and unfairly being held to a higher standard simply because Asians are supposedly naturally intelligent are all specifics of these categories I and my friends have

tolerated throughout our lives, especially during high school and perhaps even more now at a strikingly white university. Likewise, the 46 students interviewed in the study that outlines nine categories of racism describe at length their experiences on college campuses. Perhaps the most startling example is one that few people, including other Asian Americans, think about in connection with Asians in America:

Me and three other guys were pulled over because the officer said there was a car behind us. And, evidently, there was no car behind us. She just pulled us over ... [f]or jaywalking. I mean everyone does it, not just us. [...]
Another time, there was a gun pointed at us because someone reported that some guy was walking around who started a fire. [...] And I felt like I was violated ... as a human being. (Museus and Park 557)

While this is presumably one of the more uncommon examples (though perhaps not considering this person earlier notes that they have been pulled over by white police for no reason multiple times), it demonstrates the magnitude of racism Asians can face in the West, particularly in the United States. This is incredibly far from the presumed immunity to prejudice for Asians much of our society tends to believe. With this in mind, it is important to reiterate that the above discussion applies to the Asian community in white-dominated countries as a whole; when we discuss the subgroups of brown Southeast Asians and multiracial Asians, we notice additional and/or worsened biases, discriminatory beliefs, and more.

“But you’re not the right kind of Asian.”

Evidently, East Asians seem to be propped up as the known picture of the entire Asian community. During my first semester of college, I joined our Asian American Student Union in an attempt to find a group I could identify with and feel welcome in. The first meeting was for giving a general overview of what the months ahead will look like, eating food and drinking milk tea, and, most importantly, making friends. While introducing myself to various people, I noticed that the room was overwhelmingly East Asian. I only met two other Southeast Asians that night, and one was only half, with his other half being Chinese, and I met no other multiracial people like myself. I brushed the odd feeling off, thinking that maybe our Asian population is just very East Asian. However, the feeling returned when I was asked “So are you mainland China? Taiwan?” to which I had to reply, “No, I, uh... I’m Filipina. Half.” It was then that I remembered a dilemma I had during the day leading up to this first meeting. Should I go at all? Will I, someone whose Asian heritage isn’t based in China, Japan, or Korea, and isn’t even pure, fit in? There was a club just for Filipinos a year ago, and another separate one for South Asians, so does that mean this one will be predominantly East Asian despite its general title of “Asian American Student Union”? It turned out that subsequent meetings I attended didn’t help with my issue. I increasingly felt more and more out-of-place as a Filipina and as a multiracial Asian with people of my own race, and further within my now ex-friend group I had made during that first meeting.

Not many people realize this as it’s so ingrained into society’s so carefully, lovingly, *sensically* crafted ideas of racial categories, but when people think of what it means to be or look “Asian,” the picture that comes to mind generally will be the likeness of an East Asian person, someone with monolids, soft light skin, silky black hair, and perhaps dainty or delicate features. Rarely is the first thing they think of a Southeast Asian person, someone with tan or brown skin, hair that could be frizzy or wavy, and a wider nose or

even bigger lips; and hardly ever is the picture of an Asian one who may also be half black, half white, or of some other multiracial identity. There is an underlying ideal Western society and even the Asian community itself tends to hold the picture of an Asian person that ultimately speaks to the fetishization of Asians and the value placed on their appearance and/or cultural aesthetic above all else.

As research on this particular issue, like many to be discussed in this paper, is extremely scarce to nonexistent, most support for this notion comes from my own experience, the experiences of those I've interacted with, and logical implications of my research. In terms of my own experience, aside from the opening anecdote to this section, I have no shortage of accounts of people viewing Southeast Asians and multiracial as "not real Asians." One such experience that actually conveys both sentiments occurred in a class about privilege and inequality, of all things, where on a particular day we were discussing undocumented immigrants using the example of a Filipino man named Jose Antonio Vargas. A peer of mine, a non-Asian, mentioned how Filipinos are "basically Hispanic" and "look more Mexican than Asian," therefore they're not truly Asian. A few other students in the class agreed with her. Whatever their idea of "Asian" was, somehow both a Filipino man and myself (they pointed out that I look "more Mexican than Asian" as well) did not fit that picture. When I objected, I was told something along the lines of "You aren't even full Filipino, you shouldn't speak for everyone like you're a real Asian," something I've been told on numerous separate occasions.

Even with members of the Asian community, Southeast Asians and multiracial Asians are routinely seen as "not Asian" and "wrong" or "fake." In a personal interview, a brown-skinned Filipina woman recounted to me one of several similar encounters she's had in school: "I have personally been told that I'm not a 'real Asian.'" This was told to me by a Korean peer, and I merely joked along because it's easier to go with it than debate.

[...] [O]ftentimes that is a subject of questioning—if I’m really “Asian.” My skin color has been compared more to that of Hispanic/Latinx people” (Castro). It is important to note that the problem here is not being compared to those of another race or ethnic group for the reason of the other group somehow being lesser. Rather, the concern lies in the fact that darker-skinned Southeast Asians’ and, in other similar cases, multiracial Asians’ identities, their Asianness, is questioned and delegitimized solely based on their appearance and how it deviates from some perceived norm. This is an incredibly significant issue, not only because it harms the social and emotional health of those impacted, but also because it leads to disadvantages in innumerable other aspects of life.

“Have you watched Crazy Rich Asians?”

As the image of the apparently-ideal Asian person does tend to be someone of East Asian descent, most Asian representation in Western media—if you can find it in its non-whitewashed, non-horrifically-stereotypical form—corresponds to people of East Asian descent. The television show *Fresh Off the Boat* is a major example that comes to mind, and... Quite frankly, there aren’t many others. Still, what *exists* largely caters to those with East Asian heritage. I’ve complained about the lack of Asian representation in entertainment before, and more recently what I’ve gotten in response is something akin to “Sure, but have you watched *Crazy Rich Asians*? It’s a breakthrough in Asian representation!” I want to scream when I hear this. This movie is intensely frustrating. One group of Asian friends I have on campus loved the movie and want more like it, because it made them feel seen and valid. Here were characters on the big screen whose culture they could relate to, whose problems they felt, and whose personas they could project themselves upon, even despite the fact that most of the characters were wealthy.

Yes, I've seen *Crazy Rich Asians*. And, yes, I can genuinely say that I fully enjoyed it, laughed, cried, and am now anticipating the sequel. Regardless, it does nothing for anyone who isn't East Asian. In a *Huffington Post* piece about this movie, Rachel Ramirez puts into words exactly what poses a major problem in Asian representation:

While I spotted a few brown Asians in the film, they unfortunately play service roles such as guards and maids for the affluent family that accounts for most of the main characters. The movie leaves out the marginalized Asians in Singapore such as Malays and Indians and migrant workers from the Philippines and Bangladesh and thus feeds into the dominant yet misguided view that East Asians account for the entire continent, disregarding that brown Asians are a substantial part of the Asian population.

This movie that society is praising as progressive still places disproportionate value on the lighter-skinned people of Asia, while not only leaving out any significant portrayals of darker Southeast Asians, but also actively placing the ones who do exist in the movie in "service roles." This shows that the writers, producers, and casting directors at the very least indeed acknowledge the existence of brown Asians, but feel that it is only necessary to include them to serve the wealthy light-skinned family in the movie. This is nothing but harmful, working to portray Asia as a continent of rich light-skinned East Asians and their darker-skinned workers who don't matter enough to take even one significant role in a movie attempting to break barriers in representation.

"But what about that one actress? The one who played the princess?" It is true that there was a *Chinese-Filipina* actress who played a princess during the wedding scene. However, this description alone should elicit an understanding of, again, how this movie works against darker-skinned Southeast Asians. The actress, Kris Aquino, is very light-

skinned for a Filipina woman (even lighter than the Chinese main character, Rachel), likely in part due to her Chinese background. When I watched the movie the first time, I didn't even register her as not fully Chinese. This is nowhere near actual representation if the identity meant to be represented is almost unrecognizable. "Okay, what about that other guy? He was very clearly not Chinese." Nico Santos, a Filipino actor, played Oliver, a cousin of the male lead, Nick. Against all of the lighter-skinned actors, he is the only striking representation for darker-skinned Asian people. His inclusion to many is enough, especially considering the central family is otherwise light-skinned. However, the representation he offers is not substantive at all. Aside from being the only brown-skinned family member of the lighter Young family, a *token* brown person, Oliver's value as a supporting character is all in the help he offers to Rachel, and his comic relief. The one potentially-promising piece of representation for dark Southeast Asians is someone who, like the others, serves a main character, and whose only other value is in his comic relief. None of this is true representation that respects the identity of the marginalized group in this situation.

If *Crazy Rich Asians*, a movie that, as mentioned, has been lauded for its Asian representation and the doors it opens for more media like it, then there is a tremendous problem. There may be some other representation for brown Asians, though it clearly is given little attention and/or may be equally insufficient; I personally can only think of the Water Tribe peoples in the cartoon *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, and other Southeast Asian individuals I've personally spoken to can only additionally come up with a minor character in the cartoon *Steven Universe* and a comedic relief character in the movie *The Internship* (Filippone; Castro). Where Asian representation exists, it largely ignores any Asian who is not light-skinned and of East Asian descent, and when the media does bother to include those overlooked groups, the representation is incredibly unsubstantial or

simply serves to create or further stereotypes. What needs to happen is true, genuine, humanized portrayals of marginalized peoples, and the inclusion of these groups in conversations about discrimination and lack of visibility.

“Poor, dirty jungle people.”

The roots of discrimination and marginalization of brown Southeast Asian peoples are deep and long-standing, not only connecting to white supremacy but also to classism in Asia itself, which both feed into the concept of colorism globally within the Asian community. Due to this institutionalized origin, racial/ethnic injustices faced by Southeast Asians still run strong. I don't remember where or why, but when I was younger, I remember someone, a white man, calling Filipinos “monkey people.” Being very young, I only knew it was bad because my mother was upset by it, but in my mind at the time, there was nothing wrong. Monkeys were cool and lived in the jungle, which was also cool. Maybe Filipinos were called that because there are lots of jungles in the Philippines. Flawless logic, I know. Of course, as I got older, I understood that this was not the case; people call us that because we supposedly all live in the middle of the jungle, tend to be small and brown, and apparently have facial features that resemble monkeys to many mindless and racist people. Southeast Asians tend to be viewed as somehow subordinate and less important than their East Asian counterparts; they're poorer, dirtier, less civilized, and live in the jungle. It should go without saying that this is incredibly problematic and harmful to the people it targets, both on a personal level and on a systematic level, with these negative stereotypes impacting them emotionally, socially, and financially.

Perceived differences and the biases that accompany them surround the idea of colorism, discrimination due to skin color that may occur within a racial category. This

concept is most widely known in relation to the black community on an international scale, as there is very little research, scholarship, and general conversation regarding its application to Asians. The technicalities and implications of colorism as tied to the more familiar black community are demonstrated in a study conducted by Robert L. Reece, which examines the perception of attractiveness based on whether or not a black person possesses “white traits” in terms of skin, hair, and eye color. Reece found in his analysis of data that “the mixed [race] variable was positive and significant, suggesting that black people who identify as multiracial [white and black] are perceived as more attractive...” He further finds that his model “not only confirms that lighter skin tone among blacks leads to higher perceived attractiveness but also that mixed race and skin tone, though related, are independent factors in determining perceived attractiveness.” These findings show that the “white” traits, especially light skin tone, alone affect how attractive a person of color is perceived to be. This idea of lighter skin being more attractive translates to the Asian community, where the ideal similarly comes from the desirability of appearing more white resulting from European imperialist influence, but also from institutional values within Asian culture independent of the West. To avoid being placed into the “poor, dirty jungle person” category, amongst other harmful biases, having light skin (and, to a slightly lesser yet nonetheless significant extent, other “East Asian” or “white” features) as an Asian has been historically and is in the modern age advantageous.

While standards for fair skin amongst Asian populations do indeed predate colonialism and Western conquest, European impacts still do exist. Naturally, with white dominance and power, “light skin shades are privileged as a result of the legacy of colonialism, when white skin and associated features [historically] were accorded high status and dominance” (Phoenix 101). This is especially true in countries like Vietnam and the Philippines who were colonized by white-majority Western countries, like France

and Spain and the United States respectively for those specific examples. The established pretense that white, European-descended individuals are superior in essentially every regard that has been injected into societies around the world by the very people such a contention benefits is a considerable reason why people of color find it more socially and financially convenient to change their appearance to be whiter. As a result of colonialism, those with lighter skin and whiter traits have been favored both by white people and people of color (Canotal 15-16). However, again, white dominance is not the only nor even the originating cause for the idea those with lighter skin are superior.

In Asia, particularly East Asia, light skin has been valued culturally throughout history. Viewing lighter skin as more “beautiful” stems from the centuries-old sentiment that “lighter skin implie[s] freedom from outdoor agricultural labor and thus increased a woman’s wealth and social status, whereas tanned skin was associated with the lower classes: manual laborers, farmers, and peasants” (Hsin-Yu et al. 256), which was believed everywhere in Asia from India to China to Japan to Korea (Canotal 16). The idea that one is more advanced and sophisticated if they have paler skin is, then, something that has been drilled into Asian society by dominant social institutions in historically powerful and domineering countries like China, which then spread or solidified cultural values across the continent and even across oceans.

The ideals emphasized by systems of authority and control have grown and persisted through history across Asia and the West. Skin-whitening and taking measures to keep skin light are still prevalent today. In a study on the leisure behaviors of Asian women, Euro-American women, and Asian American women, it was found that “People’s attitudes toward skin color manifest themselves in daily behaviors, such as sun-seeking, sun-avoidance, and sun-protection behaviors” (Hsin-Yu et al. 257). For women from Asia or more closely-tied to traditional Asian culture, the latter two behaviors are most

prevalent. The researchers here note that “[D]uring an interview, a Chinese girl talked about the idea [of having light skin] repeatedly. She said, ‘My ideal is, of course, to have even, white [fair], luminous and smooth silk, like the egg white of a boiled egg’” (256). This line of thinking has led to the marketing of skin-lightening products, the use of umbrellas when walking outside in order to prevent tanning, and more. Light skin is not only an ideal in East Asia, furthermore, as from my own experience I’ve noticed that most actors in Filipino television shows or movies are lighter, and often multiethnic with Chinese heritage. In Southeast Asian countries like the Philippines, the light-skinned dominance reaches and influences many aspects of daily life, including everyday television advertisements (Castro). For the West, in the United Kingdom, demand for illegal and dangerous skin-lightening products is so great that authorities have trouble containing their market. In fact, on a wider scale, this market continues to grow by the billions over the span of only a few years globally (Phoenix 100). Additionally to chemical and even surgical changes to appear lighter and whiter, less permanent actions to make darker individuals appear lighter are perhaps even more apparent, especially in the West. Magazines and other popular media are major culprits namely in digitally editing the skin color of people who appear in their publications; *Vanity Fair* has been noted to do this with Kenyan-Mexican actress Lupita Nyong’o, as well as *X Factor* with contestants of color in promotional content (Phoenix 99). The reasoning behind choices like all of the above is an unfortunate reality. People are more likely to be perceived as capable and/or attractive, and magazines, television shows, and other media are more likely to be consumed by a broader audience if those in question are as pale as possible. While not all of these examples are particularized to the Asian community, the trends here can easily be extrapolated to this group considering the overall theme of white supremacy, and further, this supremacy extends past just trends and media.

Darker Southeast Asians experience many disadvantages not seen by their lighter Asian counterparts. While these are extensive enough to be covered alone in an entirely separate essay, one of the most striking aspects of life in which prejudice is observed that I will examine here is education. In the earlier-referenced study of Asian American students and their encounters with racism on college campuses, many of the Southeast Asian American students interviewed reported some unique experiences compared to the East Asian American students. For instance, there are feelings of isolation and being alone even with a decently-sized Asian student population, being negatively stereotyped and as “poor” and “ghetto,” assumptions that they don’t care about education or that they’re less intelligent, and the experience of being held both to “model minority” standards at the same time as “inferior minority” standards (Museus and Park 557, 564). Being outcast and singled out in these ways understandably would impede on the social lives and the self-esteem of Southeast Asian individuals with brown skin. Lighter-skinned East Asians do not experience the problems noted above, at least not nearly to the extent as those darker than them, thus demonstrating the issue of heightened discrimination of a subgroup of Asians. In addition to social and emotional impacts, Southeast Asians often find disadvantages in their levels of education entirely. A detailed study on the educational attainment of East Asian American versus Southeast Asian American students shows that, overall, light-skinned Asians are more likely to obtain greater education, specifically a college degree, than darker-skinned Asians (Ryabov). These findings are not due to some inherent inferiority, careless attitudes towards education, or the like, but rather deeply-ingrained institutional biases and injustices. As Ryabov puts it, “The most feasible explanation of the main finding that skin tone exerts a powerful effect on educational attainment of Asian Americans seem to be related to the direct and indirect effects of the pervasive institutional discrimination based on skin color” (321).

In other words, people of color with darker skin, Southeast Asians here, have throughout history been systematically pushed down and marginalized, leading to disadvantages in attaining the same opportunities as those more privileged than them, East Asians here. This can be observed in many other respects, ultimately demonstrating that, in the simplest terms, the combined colorism effects of attractiveness standards, stereotypes, and perceived inferiority leave brown Asians with more difficulties than lighter Asians.

“You’re the Asian one, right?” but also “Do you even care about your heritage?”

Similarly to darker Asians, multiracial Asians face further prejudice compared to the rest of the Asian community, often with negative experiences unique to their multiracial identity. Throughout my life I’ve noticed two trends. Non-Asian people, particularly white people, only see me for my Asian-ness, branding me as the Asian token who represents all Asians in a setting otherwise devoid of Asian people. I still distinctly remember one day in elementary school when a group of classmates and I were pretending to be characters from the cartoon *Codename: Kids Next Door*, and I was told I had to be the character Number 3 simply because I was “the only Asian” there. They, of course, didn’t listen to my protests that she was one of my least favorites and is Japanese while I’m Filipina. I was *the Asian one*, so of course I just *had* to be the Asian character despite no other attention being paid to keeping physical appearance consistent when deciding who would be the other varying white characters and even the black character. Concurrently, other Asian people see my whiteness and immediately assume I’m “too white,” which entails filling all the “basic white girl” stereotypes (though, sure, I do love a nice Starbucks iced Passion Tango™ tea every now and then), liking bland food, and being ignorant to all non-white cultures, apparently including my own. Because of this idea, my Filipino friend group frequently outcasts me and typically leaves me and my sister out of

gatherings, parties, and vacations. No matter who I'm with, bias shows itself everywhere, and I simply am not seen as enough.

Multiracial individuals have experienced prejudice and microaggressions based on their identity. According to the Pew Research Center, more than half of all multiracial adults in the United States are subject to racial slurs or jokes. For white-Asian Americans specifically, 60% have been subject to slurs or jokes, and 25% have received poor service in businesses like restaurants (Parker et al.). These statistics for non-white multiracial Asian Americans logically would be even higher due to the colorism and white supremacy discussed earlier in this paper. While these experiences are primarily based on interactions with non-Asians, particularly white individuals, there are further prejudices that come from both non-Asians and Asians. Like the broader racism towards the Asian community as a whole noted towards the beginning of this paper, there are several themes in microaggressions seen by multiracial individuals: "exclusion and isolation" where one is outcast from one or both/all of their identities, "exoticification and objectification" where one is dehumanized and recurrently asked *what* they are, "assumptions of monoracial identity" where one is perceived as only one race based on how they may look and thus are subject to biases from people who they would otherwise partly identify with, "denial of multiraciality" where one is designated by others to be part of only one race ("You're not Asian enough" or "You're just Asian," for example), and "pathologizing of identity and experiences" where one is seen as "different" and "abnormal" or even "wrong" (Miller 29-30). While Asian groups in the West are already so isolated in mostly-non-Asian environments like most, if not all, college campuses in the United States, multiracial Asians, like dark Southeast Asians, experience this to an even greater degree as they are not only negatively set apart from and discriminated against by non-Asians, but also by the greater Asian community itself. There's a universal

underlying attitude that multiracial Asians can't actively engage with their monoracial peers, don't fit in with any of their individual racial groups, and can't keep up with more than one identity at once. Such discriminations and prejudices leave multiracial individuals alone and often insecure in an in-between racial limbo.

"You're so lucky, you've got both."

Alongside and typically as a result of biases and microaggressions, multiracial Asians experience feelings of isolation, not being "enough" for any of their identities, being fake, and being out-of-place. I've both read and have been told about how lucky I am to be multiracial. I've got the best of both worlds, so to say, being white and Asian. While I do acknowledge that I certainly benefit from some white privilege, I never quite enjoyed being multiracial up until mid-high school. I felt wrong, like I didn't belong anywhere. Even this past Christmas I convinced my father to take my sister and I home from the party we were at with our Italian cousins because the both of us felt so uncomfortable not being like everyone else there. As a child, I constantly wished to be monoracial, flipping back and forth from wanting to be just white and wanting to be just Asian. I'd go from one extreme of trying to keep my skin light and wanting to dye my hair a lighter brown, to trying to learn my mother's native dialect and trying to force myself to eat Filipino foods that never appealed to me before. I never felt like a white person, and never felt like I ever should've been with the Filipino friend group I once was close with. I wasn't anywhere. I was in between, alone. I still am, and surely the feeling is even greater for those who don't benefit from some form of white privilege like I can.

Contrary to my experiences, Pew Research Center statistics assert that being multiracial is viewed as beneficial and positive more than not by multiracial individuals: 60% are proud of their background, 59% feel more open to other cultures, a majority feel

a bond with other multiracial individuals, and they tend to view their identity as more of an advantage than a disadvantage (though a majority view it to make no difference in either direction) (Parker et al.). These statistics are certainly true overall; I, my sister, and many other multiracial people I have come into contact with are quite proud of their mixed background, have been exposed to multiple cultures rather than one, find commonality and solidarity with other people like us, and may gain some advantages or be treated no differently in some settings. However, these statistics seem to portray that there are no major downsides to being multiracial, that it does more good than anything. The study very briefly in one figure acknowledges that many multiracial individuals, white-Asian Americans included, experience racism and negative biases, although it largely fails to examine the detailed extent or the effects of disadvantages.

The most notable impact of frequently-ignored microaggressions and marginalization on multiracial peoples across the board and multiracial Asians specifically is a phenomenon called “racial impostor syndrome.” This term refers to an emotionally- and mentally-corrosive sensation, felt by multiracial people, that they are “fake” and don’t belong in one or more parts of their racial background (Donnella). This is a feeling discussed at length by NPR *Code Switch* listeners who wrote in with their experiences of feeling out-of-place in their own different identities as multiracial individuals: “[L]istener Kristina Ogilvie wrote in to tell [NPR] that ‘living at the intersection of different identities and cultures’ was like ‘stumbling around in a forest in the dark.’” Other listeners go on to explain to the NPR podcast that other more “pure” members of one or more of their racial identities feel they have a more valid claim to the identity than someone who is multiracial, believe they can tell mixed people that they are not enough to belong in certain groups, or have the need to question multiracial identities either out of ignorance or perceived superiority (Donnella). Having multiple racial

identities makes one feel disoriented and overwhelmed when attempting to validate themselves on all of their identities to others—they may doubt themselves and feel wrong, allowing the discriminating beliefs of others to harm their sense of security and self-esteem.

The resulting decline in self-confidence, self-worth, and overall happiness often leads to worse consequences than general low self-esteem and loneliness. Substance abuse is one of these major after-effects. In a study on ethnic identity and its relation to self-esteem and substance abuse, it was found that “the higher the ethnic identity, the less substances adolescents reported using. [...] [E]thnic identity is an important part of development that is related to positive health outcomes among adolescents” (Fisher et al.). In other words, if an individual feels strong, secure ties to their identity or identities, they are likely to have higher self-esteem, and in turn are less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol. Unfortunately, it’s rather evident that multiracial individuals commonly and regularly do not feel secure in their different identities, and therefore, consistent with this study’s findings, they are much more likely to abuse substances than monoracial people. While spoken broadly, this phenomenon obviously extends to multiracial Asians for the purpose of this essay’s analysis. Of course, it is entirely possible for people like me or the *Code Switch* listeners discussed above to grow more comfortable in multiple identities, thus leveling or even reversing the effects of low self-esteem on serious issues like substance abuse; however, as the matter currently stands, multiracial people are still at an incredible disadvantage.

Conclusion

In such a progressive era of marches, rallies, moving voices, and greater representation, it is common to assume that the Asian community as a whole is

experiencing societal advancement as many other oppressed groups are. However, this does not paint a full picture, for the only members of this community who benefit from movements are monoracial, light-skinned Asians. Subgroups, most notably brown-skinned Southeast Asians and multiracial Asians, are still suffering from negative biases and injustices around the world in both the Asian content itself and, perhaps more glaringly, in the West. These peoples endure invalidation, isolation, underrepresentation, and social and mental/emotional harm while the world ignores them. These groups and their plight are so incredibly sidelined that even the research and scholarship realms lack substantial publications on the issue; in gathering information for this paper, I had immense difficulty finding sources that specifically centralize themselves on Asian experiences, which is the biggest reason why I've had to rely so heavily on my own and others' personal, less coldly factual accounts and perspectives. The fact that great groups of people are suffering in their daily lives like this and are yet being overlooked to the point where extensive research can hardly yield a significant list of substantive sources is completely unacceptable. Society cannot simply support the more privileged and "favorable" or "ideal" members of a minority group and call that progressive advancement while countless others are persistently stepped on. For oppressed communities, Asian and otherwise, to truly be propped up and receive the justice they deserve, the *whole* bodies of those groups must be given proper attention. Otherwise, these subgroups will continue to be the minorities of a minority—the oppressed of the oppressed.

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