Fall 2019

Do You Feel Important? A Comparison of White and Asian Americans' Perception of Their Social Rank

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Word Count = 7,250

ABSTRACT

Asians are often viewed as the "model minority" group for assumptions about their high income and education level. Does this necessarily translate to higher self-esteem, social desirability, and self-perceived social rank for Asians? Building upon literature examining confidence, beauty, masculinity and the "model minority" stereotype, I use the General Social Survey (2016—2018) to study the relationships between attractiveness and perceived social rank for 124 Asian Americans and 3,038 White Americans. The attractiveness data was collected by the GSS rating respondents on their physical attractiveness. Social rank helps examine a general sense of perceived ranking in society that may not be explicitly expressed by socio-economic class. I propose that a high attractiveness rating positively affects the level of self-perceived ranking for Whites but not for Asians. I also control for sex, age, family income and education. The results of the regression support my hypothesis showing a statistically significant relationship between attractiveness and social rank for the White sample but not the Asian sample. However, the strongest predictor of self-perceived social rank was the level of family income. Therefore, the more money someone makes, the higher they self-reported their social rank for both Asians and Whites. Due to the limited sample size of Asians, further research including a larger group of Asian participants should be conducted to study the relationship between attractiveness and social rank.

Do You Feel Important?

A Comparison of White and Asian Americans' Perception of Their Social Rank

     The Asian model minority stereotype has been fascinating researchers and drawing more attention to Asian Americans in recent years, a group that has been understudied in the past. How do Asian Americans' level of confidence or self-esteem compare to white people in the United States? Do any of their objective measures of social privilege truly allow them to feel equally ranked compared to White Americans? There is an existing sociological issue with the model minority myth surrounding Asians in the United States. The differing beauty standards of the East and the West also have potential to affect one's self-perception. How does constant exposure to beauty standards that allude to physical features that are completely unattainable affect one's self-esteem? If looks aren't "all that", then do people have the confidence to succeed regardless of how attractive they are? You may wonder, why should we care about attractiveness? How attractive someone is can influence how successful they are in terms of how much money they make (Frieze, Olson and Russell 1991). Success in terms of money and employment links to my interest in social rank and confidence for this study. I predict that other people's opinions on an individual's attractiveness do not always coincide with the individual's confidence. I also predict the pressures to measure up to expectations while still experiencing racism and discrimination in ways that are often invisible, can affect one's perception of their social rank.

     How someone describes their social rank can depend on several factors. If you ask a high school student, they may report feeling low on the totem pole of their social world for reasons such as: how many friends they have, how attractive they feel, if they have romantic relationships. If you ask an adult, they may report their social rank based on their socioeconomic

class and employment status. I hope to find out if data supports the idea that Asians have less confidence surrounding their rank in society and propose a way to fix that. By assessing the existing issue, I am hoping to illuminate the harmful effects of model minority expectations, poor representation in media, as well as Western beauty standards when aimed at non-White people such as Asians.

The larger issue with beauty standards and the media misrepresenting and underrepresenting an entire demographic is that it produces an inaccurate and often racist view of that group of people. This issue matters because racism can be internalized. Furthermore, racism can affect people's self-esteem and ability to form meaningful connections in their lifetime and perform at their best in various aspects of life. These issues can all contribute to a lack in general confidence for Asians. How Asians are represented in media (movies, shows, advertisements) has a negative effect on Asian Americans' ability to feel confident, especially in their appearance (Chou, Lee, and Ho 2015).

My study will target the question of how Asian men and women living in the United States compare to people who identify as White in terms of their self-reported social rank and attractiveness rating. Does attractiveness affect how successful one is in life? And does this attractiveness transfer to a higher self-perceived social rank? I hypothesize that the more attractive someone is perceived to be, the higher their self-perceived social rank will be. My second hypothesis predicts that the relationship between attractiveness rating and self-perceived social rank will be statistically significant for White people but not for Asian people in the United States.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There were five main themes that appeared continuously in the literature on Asian Americans. The idea of self-perception and self-esteem were common in several articles. This theme helps touch on the concept of self-perceived social rank. The theme of media representation was also a common part of the existing literature. Due to the existing literature suggesting Asians have been notoriously misrepresented and underrepresented in media, beauty standards and masculinity standards are closely tied to this. These studies help inform the effects that the attractiveness variable may have in this study including the notion that attractive people are more socially and economically successful. Several studies compare Asian Americans to other races, particularly White Americans. Because of this, the model minority theme was also prominent in the pool of literature.

Self-Perception and Self-Esteem

Self-perception and self-esteem related to perceived social rank has been a common theme in the literature (Woo, Wang and Takeuchi 2017; Zeng and Xie 2004) because it can serve as an accurate measure of more than just how someone views his or her physical appearance. Self-perception touches on emotional well-being, stress-level, and overall confidence. It draws in theories and ideas that objective measures of status cannot always determine, such as how good people feel about themselves and how they view themselves in a non-socioeconomic social hierarchy.

Several articles support the theories as well by contributing more supporting theories such as, group identity and ideology of intergroup behavior to help explain how a dominant group affects individuals (Stewart and Tran 2018). (2018) They discuss concepts such as social dominance theory and racism in America.

Studies such as Liang's (2008) claim its findings on stress to be consistent with previous research related to Asian men. However, despite other studies claiming strong group identification can increase self-esteem; Liang's (2008) study challenges the theory with an experiment that shows no prominent relationship between collective self-esteem and racism-related stress on self-esteem problems. Liang writes that having positive feelings towards a certain group and positive feelings about one's own membership in that identity does not shield them from racist experiences and racism-related stress caused by being in that group.

Chen, Gee and Spencer (2009) contribute a different idea that reason for immigration matters for how high or low one's self-esteem is. They found that Asian groups who migrated to the United States for the purpose of education would perceive themselves in a higher social standing than those who migrated for reasons such as employment or reunion with family. Perhaps the goal to gain a higher education is considered respectable in any case, whereas a job has a lot more complications. The hierarchy of the workforce can be extremely stressful, especially for those hardly making it at the bottom. Language barriers may also add to this stress. For many immigrants, this becomes an influencing factor in employment.

Differing Beauty Standards

When addressing beauty standards, several sources touch on the differences between White-American beauty standards and Asian beauty standards along with portrayals in media (Evans and McConnell 2003; Festinger 1954; Lemanski 2012). The point of setting up this theme is to highlight the harmful effects of a single beauty standard when aimed at people of all ethnic backgrounds. There are several theories to explain why comparisons to beauty standards can be harmful as well as ways in which media portrayal has further perpetuated these standards.

Beauty standards invite theories about self-esteem including global self-esteem, social comparison theory and self-discrepancy theory (Evans and McConnell 2003). Evans and McConnell (2003) use Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory to explain how people naturally compare themselves to others who they hold ask ideals, especially when they are not confident or certain about the qualities that they possess. This theory is used to explain how women in a study compare themselves to beauty standards in order to assess their own attractiveness. In other words, the value of one's own traits is only considered in comparison to the perceived value of others. The article also mentions self-discrepancy theory, which suggests that people who view themselves as discrepant or inconsistent/incompatible with their ideal selves, are more likely to experience low self-esteem and greater personal dissatisfaction.

The main findings in Evans and McConnell's (2003) study were that the Asian women participants were more likely to support and internalize mainstream beauty standards similarly to White women. They also reported the most desire to conform to popular western beauty standards compared to the other groups and therefore experienced the greatest dissatisfaction with their bodies among all the groups.

The article makes an interesting point that the Asian women in the study reported feeling less satisfied with their looks than both Black and White women because they internalize White beauty standards while having physical features that do not fit into that standard at all. On the other hand, it appears the Black women do not internalize the mainstream beauty standard as much as the White and Asian samples because they do not feel as connected to it. They instead form in-group comparisons (only between other Black women) and end up with better self-image than both the White and Asian women in the study. Other sources touch on beauty standards including concepts of colorism as well (Chen et al. 2018; Matthews and Johnson 2015). The

sources tell about the overarching desire across cultures to have lighter skin because it poses as a status symbol. Asian beauty standards tend towards fairer skin since it was believed to indicate wealth and the ability to avoid working laborious outdoor jobs. Pale skin indicated wealth, which led to better social treatment and ultimately, a greater quality of life.

There are several other prominent attractiveness standards placed on Asians by the media such as being docile, submissive and hypersexual (Brady et al. 2017; Chou, Lee, and Ho 2015; Lau et al. 2006). Chou et al. (2015) writes about how Asian women are eroticized in media, which contributes to fetishism. Years and years of poor representation in films and TV shows can be blamed for the spread of this "orientalist" obsession, which is racism disguised as flattery. The other studies discuss how women report the racist expectations placed on them as burdensome and stressful. In two studies, Asian women who reported higher internalization of media portrayals of beauty standards also reported higher body image dissatisfaction (Brady et al. 2017; Lau et al. 2006). Additionally, one of the studies declares that Asian American women's body dissatisfaction is rooted in their intersectional experiences of racism and sexism (Brady et al. 2017). This is because of the pressures to look a certain way in combination with the stress and fear of being Orientalized and sexualized.

Asian men also have a history of poor representation in media. They have a reputation of being portrayed in media as racial caricatures, stripped of humanity and sexual appeal. Because Asian men have been emasculated and asexualized in media, many struggle with their self-image and ability to feel confident. This leads into the next major recurring theme in the literature.

Asian Male Masculinity

Masculinity is a running theme in the literature because for many men, masculinity is a relevant measure of how attractive and desirable they feel. Asian men possess an inferiority complex in terms of masculinity and social desirability (Chong and Kim 2016).

This idea introduces one of the main sociological theories, "Minority masculinity stress theory" (Lu and Wong 2013). Minority masculinity stress theory has been mentioned in various studies to help support the idea that Asian men experience a unique position in relation to masculinity, which results in stress. One article takes it a step further to concur that the stress results in an unhealthy mental state and depression among Asian men in the United States (Iwamoto, Liao and Liu 2010).

Lu and Wong (2013) theorize that minorities experience stereotyping that places them in a marginal position or unwanted role-identity, making it difficult to obtain a positive self-concept. This results in extra stress surrounding masculinity for Asian men compared to white men. This enlightens my interest because the article relates mostly to Asian men and their stress and mental conditions related to masculinity issues. The study uses both Asian men in American (both immigrant and U.S.-born) and their levels of stress, condition of mental health, and feelings of masculinity. Their findings indicate a strong relationship between men who are Asian and the self-reported feelings of stress surrounding situations where they are expected to be masculine. This elevated level of stress seems to be caused by experiences with racist stereotypes, especially surrounding their masculinity.

Because of Asian male's emasculation or "castration" and exploitation (Chou et al. 2015; Lu 2010), Asian men often do not get equal consideration for romantic relationships. Shiao and Tuan (2008) examine how racial discourses influence romantic preferences for Korean adoptees and how this affects their willingness to date people of a certain race. Shiao and Tuan (2008)

write about an existing belief of gendered racial stereotypes of Asian inferiority and White superiority. In this study, they found that the majority of Korean adoptees preferred White partners and regarded them as the natural option, despite one's natural assumption that people of a certain race may prefer to be with someone of the same race. In this scenario, however, the fact that the Korean adoptees were raised in White-American families may have more influence on their romantic preference and engrained ideal masculinity standard than the presence of an actual bias against Asian men.

The Model Minority Stereotype

The model minority myth is also a theme that recurs in the literature when discussing factors such as income, years of education and employment status to contribute to supposed high ranking in society (Nguyen, Carter and Carter 2019). This phenomenon sets up expectations for Asians and can influence their self-perception, stress and confidence. This theme is supported by Kim's (1999) "racial triangulation theory." The theory suggests Asians are triangulated as a race in relation to white and black people. They are labeled as the "model minority" and therefore made into outsiders because they are separated from other people of color due to their high socioeconomic status but ignored in terms of their also marginalized experiences (Kim 1999). In addition, they are often seen as foreign and "other", which draws them apart from White and Black people. This theory ties to my topic because it explains how there are multiple sides to racial stratification and although a group may be doing well in one area, they may suffer in another. This leads to a feeling of inferiority in social hierarchical rank.

The racial triangulation theory addresses race (Asian, White, Black), education, income, employment status and party affiliation. The study measures racial valorization (family commitment, work ethic, nonviolence, and wealth) and civic ostracism (participant's willingness

to live in the same neighborhood as the racial groups, marry them, and their beliefs about the racial group's patriotism). In the study, race has a strong relationship with both racial valorization and civic ostracism. Asians are ranked highly in terms of racial valorization but low in the categories measuring civic ostracism. This means high percentages of people voted "Asian low" for participants' perception of society's willingness to do things such as marry and live nearby Asians. This outcome illuminates how Asians are viewed in various outlets of society as "other" and not equally considered.

Kim's (1999) theory of racial triangulation theory is used in another article and applied to Asian Americans to explain the model minority stereotype and myth (Xu and Lee 2013). This article strengthens the theory by testing how other races such as black and white people feel about Asian people and why they have gained the alleged model minority status.

There are several other studies that encompass the theory of the model minority stereotype to add different angles to the issue (Castro, Gee, and Takeuchi 2010; Chen et al. 2009; Chou 2007; Lin et al. 2005; Twenge and Campbell 2002; Zeng and Xie 2004). The model minority stereotype can also result in people adopting a color-blind approach that prevents them from expressing the racialized nature of particular social experiences (Chou et al. 2015).

Ultimately, there is a rich and diverse pool of existing research on Asians and their feelings of confidence and social standing in terms of social desirability, attractiveness, masculinity, and socioeconomic class. The literature I have collected provide evidence to strongly support as well as challenge my hypotheses that Asians have a lower self-perception of their social rank compared to White people regardless of their attractiveness.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My sample of Asian and White people along with my independent variable measuring attractiveness operationalize the concepts in the theories because many of them discuss the injustices in the Asian American community by juxtaposing them with white Americans. They are often compared to white people in terms of socioeconomic class and education but also unfairly compared in terms of beauty and masculinity standards. Attractiveness is explored in theories such as Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory and Evans and McConnell's (2003) self-discrepancy theory. Both theories inform my hypothesis by explaining self-esteem in terms of the value of attractiveness. How people perceive other people's attractiveness informs how desirable that person is. There is a standard that people compare themselves to and depending on how far they are from that standard will determine their confidence or self-esteem, especially if they consider the opinion of others. Strictly comparing oneself to a standard that it realistically unattainable can lead to a largely compromised self-perception and blow to one's level of self-esteem.

Why is attractiveness so important? Attractiveness is often a measure of how beautiful or handsome people view others and themselves. For many women, attractiveness is measured by beauty and for many men, masculinity. Lu and Wong's (2013) Minority Masculinity Stress Theory touches on this issue of masculinity for Asian men and how they face elevated levels of stress surrounding their masculinity. This overall attractiveness can correlate with how confident people feel about their own place and performance in society.

My dependent variable measuring self-perceived social rank is a good operationalization of the effects of race and attractiveness and how it is treated in America because at least to some degree, race influences how people feel about themselves. Race gives people experiences they may not otherwise have. Measuring people's perceived social ranking is ambiguous enough that

it can include confidence regarding financial stability, beauty, masculinity, intelligence and just overall importance, or self-esteem. The theories found in the literature include those elements.

One sociological theory involved in self-perception is the theory of group self-esteem and personal self-esteem (Porter and Washington 1993). These theories explain how individuals of a certain ethnic background feel about their group membership versus their individual self. Porter and Washington's (1993) study includes Asians and Hispanics and the level of "group identification" the participants feel with their ethnicity. Studies such as Porter and Washington's (1993) and Gartner, Kiang, and Supple's (2014) demonstrate relationships that the higher level of group identification, the more positive self-esteem for people surrounding their identity, which can create a sense of pride to go along with that community. This ultimately helps increase positive self-esteem for ethnic minorities.

On the other hand, Liang (2008) aims to challenge the theory of collective or group self-esteem. The study discovers that "racism-related stress was found to be positively associated with self-esteem problems, interpersonal problems, and career problems" (Liang 2008:25).

Theories including Kim's (1999) Racial Triangulation Theory and Stewart and Tran's (2018) Social Dominance Theory inform my predictions regarding social rank. Kim's (1999) Racial triangulation theory theorizes that Asians have a unique experience with racial stratification compared to Black and White people because they are labeled as the "model minority" despite having members of the group doing well in one area and suffering significantly in another. They discuss the unique position that Asians in America hold in terms of racial identity and their social rank. A major part of the literature has referenced the model minority stereotype and theories such as this address that issue and deconstruct it by explaining the misrepresentations.

My overall theoretical approach includes the theories explored in my literature review to address the abstract question of how Asian Americans view their own social standing in a social hierarchy.

METHODS

The General Social Survey (GSS) dataset was used in this study. The GSS includes 18+, non-institutionalized and English or Spanish-speaking individuals. The data was pooled from the years 2016 and 2018 in order to have a large enough sample size of Asian Americans. For 2016, the response rate was 4,327 and for 2018 the response rate was 3,585. I analyzed separate samples for Asian Americans and White people in order to test each group's relationship to the variables. After creating two subsets for those two years, there were 3,038 White and 124 Asian participants. For more information on this data, visit the General Social Survey data explorer website for an in-depth analysis of the variables I used for this research (http://gss.norc.org).

My unit of analysis is individuals. Since the data is from the GSS, it was collected through a survey method. My two samples consist of Asian Americans and White people in the United States. I derived this sample using a race variable that asks the respondent to self-report their race by asking the question, "What is your race? Indicate one or more races that you consider yourself to be." The survey then provides respondents with the options of Black, White and an extensive list of countries including various Asian counties. In order to get my samples, I added together all the Asian ethnicities: Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean. Vietnamese and "Oher Asian." I excluded everybody else who did not identify with these ethnicities or identify as White.

My independent variable is ordinal and measures how attractive the interviewer considers the respondent to be. Attractiveness is operationalized by asking the respondent, "How physically attractive is the respondent?" and provides an attractiveness scale with five options ranging from one meaning, "Very unattractive" to five meaning, "Very attractive." I am excluding cases with the responses "Don't know" and "No answer." Attractiveness will be measured by a physical attractiveness variable. This concept of attractiveness is relevant because it is largely linked to self-esteem, social desirability and confidence.

My dependent variable also operationalizes confidence with a social hierarchy rank variable. This ranking is ordinal and measures where the respondent feels they rank in a social hierarchy. The question associated with this variable asks, "In our society there are groups which tend to be towards the top and those that are towards the bottom. Here we have a scale that runs from top to bottom…where would you put yourself on this scale?" This variable would address their level of confidence since one's self-esteem is influenced by where they feel they stand in a social hierarchy. The higher one's confidence or self-esteem, the higher one will self-perceive his/her rank. The rank variable shows respondents a picture of a scale. The respondents are asked to mark (by hand with a pencil) on the scale where they believe they fall in society. I reverse coded the variable to make the number 1 at the bottom and 10 at the top of the scale.

I will control for age, sex, education level and income. The GSS variable for age provides the options to select anywhere from 18 years old to 89 or older. The sex variable provides the options between male and female, which I made into a dummy variable between men (coded as 0) and women (coded as 1). My income variable measures respondent's family income as of year 2016, since income level has changed over the years. I recoded it as a continuous variable and used the midpoints of the original ranges. Education level is measured by asking the highest

year of school completed. This allows the respondent to select any years between zero and twenty years of education.

My strategy for testing my hypothesis using the dataset and variables above will include separate samples for White and Asian people in the GSS. I will first look at the attractiveness ratings for both races and then the self-perceived social rank variable in relation to both races. I will then determine if the relationships are statistically significant for both Whites and Asians. If the relationship between rated attractiveness and perceived social rank is significant for White people but not Asians, then my hypothesis will be supported.

FINDINGS

Univariate Results

After creating my subsets of only Whites and Asians and eliminating all the missing data, a univariate analysis was conducted. For the independent variable race, the results showed that 96 percent was White, and 4 percent was Asian. This meant that of the 3162 people in my sample, 3038 were White and 124 were Asian. This shows an overwhelming domination of Whites compared to the Asian sample.

Figure 1 shows the independent variable of attractiveness and the breakdown of five varying degrees of attractiveness that participants could be rated. Table 1 shows that for both Asians and Whites, the average response is 3. The number 3 corresponds to average attractiveness on the scale, which means most of the participants were rated with "About Average" attractiveness. The Asian sample has a mean of 3.40 for attractiveness rating, only slightly higher than the White sample mean of 3.32. The standard deviation for the White sample is .077 and for the Asian sample it is .076. The difference in mean and standard deviation is negligible on the univariate level.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Insert Table 1 about here

Figure 2, illustrating the findings for the dependent variable, social rank, shows that most people self-perceived their social rank as middle-to-high. One interesting finding revealed in the figure is that a higher percentage of the total White sample ranked themselves as a 9 or 10 than did the Asian sample. The question provided a range from 1 to 10 with 1 being at the bottom and 10 being at the top. The table shows that for both Whites and Asians, the average response to self-perceived social rank is a six. The White sample has a mean of 6.27 for social rank and the Asian sample mean is 6.28. Similar to the results for attractiveness, Asians have a slightly higher average. The standard deviation for the White sample is 1.72 and for the Asian sample it is 1.63.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6 show the control variables: sex, age income and education. Figure 4 shows the frequencies demonstrating the age ranges spike at around 30 to 40 years old and then again at 55 to 60 years old. In Figure 5, the chart shows the large difference in income between the White and Asian samples. There was a higher percentage of the total sample of Asians who reported the highest possible income level compared to the White sample. Figure 6 demonstrates that the most frequent response for the White sample was 12 years of education and for the Asian sample, 16 years. This four-year difference is interesting considering Table 1 shows the difference in mean education for the two samples was about one year. Just like in Figure 3, Table 1 shows the variable sex including more females than males for both the White and Asian sample. This is because there are more women in the GSS than there are men. An interesting finding in the results shows that the average ages for the two samples were considerably

different. For the White sample, the mean age is 50 and for the Asian sample it is 42. The results

from the measure of family income shows that the mean family income for

Whites is 67,994.08 and the mean for the Asian sample it is 77,483.87. Something noteworthy

is I did not account for how many family members there were, which can influence how much

this amount of money affects quality of life. The findings from the last control variable,

education level show that the average years of education or formal schooling completed for

Whites is 13.98 years and for Asians it is 15.03 years. This most likely means high school and

some college.

Insert Figure 3 about here

Insert Figure 4 about here

Insert Figure 5 about here

Insert Figure 6 about here

Bivariate Results

Table 2 shows the bivariate level correlations between all the variables for the White and

Asian samples. Since the *N* for Whites was 3038, I used a *p*-value of .01 and since the *N* for

Asians is 124, I used a *p*-value of .05.

Table 2 about here

The results showed a statistically significant, weak and positive relationship between

being attractive and perceiving social rank as high for the White sample but not for the Asian

sample. This supports my hypothesis.

There were several other fascinating relationships in the bivariate results. Sex was

also significant in the relationship with social rank for Whites but not Asians.

The relationship was negative and weak stating that White respondents who were

women reported their self-perceived social rank as lower than men. Age was also among the variables significant for the White sample but not for the Asian sample. For the White sample, the older respondents rated their self-perceived social rank higher.

According to the table, there was a statistically significant, weak, negative relationship between age and attractiveness ranking for the White sample only. Therefore, the older the participant, the less attractive they were rated by the interviewer. However, by looking at Table 1, one could predict this to be partially explained by the fact that the average age for the Asian sample was nearly 10 years younger than that of the White sample.

Income and Age were both significant influencers on all the relationships involving them for both the White and Asian samples. As one might expect, there were weak to moderate, positive relationships between income and education. There were also statistically significant positive relationships between income and attractiveness and education and attractiveness.

Multivariate Findings

The results of the regression are shown in Table 3. The R^2 value indicates that 15 percent of the White sample's variation in social rank can be explained by all the independent variables while about 16 percent of the Asian sample's variation for social rank can be explained by all the independent variables. The regression equations for both samples are statistically significant with F-values of 107 and four.

Table 3 about here

The regression coefficients for the White sample show that all the independent variables: attractiveness, gender, age, income, and education were statistically significant predictors of perceived social rank. As shown by the standardized correlation coefficients in Table 3, the

strongest predictor for perceived social rank is income (.241), followed by age (.170), education (.158), gender (-.055), and attractiveness (.051).

The regression coefficients for the Asian sample show that income and education were the only statistically significant predictors of perceived social rank. As shown by the standardized correlation coefficients in Table 3, the strongest predictor for perceived social rank is income (.302) and then education (.183). The other standardized correlation coefficients for attractiveness, gender, and age were all insignificant.

The results of the regression confirm my hypothesis predicting that the relationship between attractiveness and social rank would be statistically significant for the White sample but not for the Asian sample.

DISCUSSION

The univariate results demonstrate that the White and Asian samples' attractiveness rating and self-reported perceived social rank were comparable. Contrary to literature on self-esteem and beauty standards, the White sample on average was not rated with higher attractiveness than the Asian sample even though beauty standards support White people's natural physical characteristics more. The White participants on average also did not perceive their social rank higher than Asians. The mean score for the social rank variable ranging from 1 to 10 was about a 6 for both samples. These findings challenge literature discussing Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory and Evans and McConnell's (2003) self-discrepancy theory, which suggests that self-esteem is linked to attractiveness and the degree one feels they deviate from their own ideal standard. If Asians deviate more from the beauty standards, one would think their self-esteem after comparison would be lower than White's self-esteem. However, their self-perceived social rank does not reflect a low self-esteem compared to White people.

Perhaps the samples did not have attractiveness in mind when reporting social rank. It is also possible the Asian sample did not place as much values on attractiveness as they did other factors in their social rank.

In an American society with White-centric beauty standards, the chance to appreciate and value Caucasian features seems more likely than non-White features. It is possible that the Asian and White sample's comparable attractiveness can be somewhat accredited to the average age difference in the samples. It is considerable that an eight-year difference is relevant in the attractiveness ratings since attractiveness and youth can often go hand in hand. Perhaps of the participants were all the same age; their rated attractiveness would differ. Average income also seemed to be different between the racial groups.

The bivariate results revealed that for the Asian sample, income and education were the only two variables that had a statistically significant correlation with social rank, which can be backed up by literature regarding the model minority stereotype. At a glance, the model minority stereotype seems to be demonstrated here by both the income and education levels for the Asian sample being higher than the White sample. However, it is possible that this difference is more of a reflection of allowances for immigration than of a true representation of the average Asian in America. Chen, Gee and Spencer's (2009) study on Asian immigrant groups in the United States found that those who migrated for purposed such as education would perceive themselves in a higher social standing than those who immigrated for purposes such as joining family members.

Ultimately, the multivariate results were consistent with the bivariate results. Table 3 shows that income and education were the only statistically significant predictors of social rank for the Asian sample on the multivariate level. On the other hand, all independent variables were

statistically significant predictors of social rank for the White sample. This suggests that White people may naturally understand social rank in America better to the point that they consider factors such as attractiveness, gender, age, income and education in their social rank. The results of the independent variables' influence on social rank for both samples suggest an element of modesty for the Asian sample as they actually had a younger, more educated, higher income and slightly higher-rated attractiveness than the White sample and still ended up with the same average social rank. Even with those objective measures of privilege, as several model minority-themed studies have shown, the Asian sample may not necessarily feel they have high social rank unless they excel educationally and financially.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study illuminated the themes and theories discussed in the existing literature surround Asian Americans. Since Asian and White Americans are often compared in terms of social status, this study aimed to challenge that model minority stereotype. The factor of social rank and all the influencers of it for Asian and White Americans addresses self-perception and self-esteem. The pressure of beauty and masculinity standards for Asian Americans is also an imperative factor in the results of the attractiveness ratings and gives guidance to interpreting the results. Ultimately, the results provided support for my hypothesis predicting that White Americans with a high attractiveness rating would also self-report their social rank as high and that this would not be true for Asian Americans.

Although it is true that the hypotheses appear to be supported, some important limitations to this study may have an impact on the results. The sample size for the Asian group is 124, significantly smaller than the White sample of 3,038. Because of this, the results of the Asian group may be more accurately accredited to the small sample size and its inability to

reach statistical significance than an actual representation of all the independent variables' relationships to social rank. Another limitation of the study that comes along with the limited sample size is the limited diversity of representation in the Asian sample. Although there were several different countries of origin that made up the Asian sample, there were very few in general from each country and they were ultimately lumped together under the category, "Asian" for the purpose of this study.

Future research must be conducted to more accurately examine the comparison of White and Asian Americans' perceived social rank. Perhaps in future studies, an equal sample size of Asians to Whites would better demonstrate the differences and similarities between Asian and White Americans. Samples with more representation of the nuances among groups that account for multiracialism, generation and differences between the types of Asians would better represent the demographics. Perhaps studying these groups in more depth would help illuminate the possibility that objective measures of social status do not necessarily reflect the overall well being and self-perceived social rank of an individual.

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Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Variables (*N* = 3162)

| | White (*N* = 3038) | | Asian (*N* = 124) | |
Variable	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Attractiveness	3.32	0.77	3.40	0.76
Rank	6.27	1.72	6.28	1.63
Women	0.54	0.50	0.53	0.50
Age	50.47	17.83	42.78	17.18
Family Income	67994.08	48985.86	77483.87	54430.86
Years of Education	13.98	2.84	15.03	3.10

Table 2. Bivariate Correlations (*r*) between White (*N* = 3038) and Asian (*N* = 124) Samples

| | Attractiveness | | Women | | Age | | Income | | Education | |
Variable	W	A	W	A	W	A	W	A	W	A
Rank	.076**	.027	-.067**	.083	.159**	-.057	.315**	.341**	.253**	.240**
Attractiveness			.076**	.105	-.180**	-.169	.164**	.103	.129**	.180*
Women					.014	.132	-.073**	.012	.001	-.027
Age							.007	-.047	-.020	-.040
Income									.380**	.222*

W = White

A = Asian

*p < .05; **p < .01

Table 3. Regression of Social Rank on All Variables for White and Asian Samples

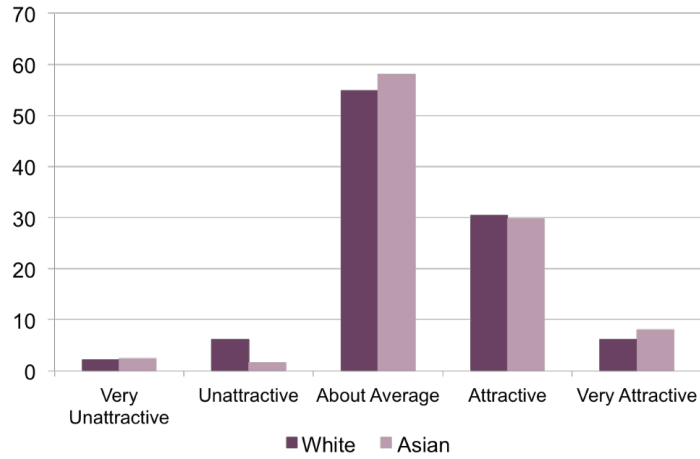| | White | Asian |
Variable	*β*	*β*
Attractiveness	.051**	-.057
Women	-.055**	.098
Age	.170**	-.058
Income	.241**	.302*
Education	.158**	.183*
R^2	.150	.157*
df	(5,3032)	(5,118)
F	107.25**	4.36*
N	3038	124

*p < .05; **p < .01

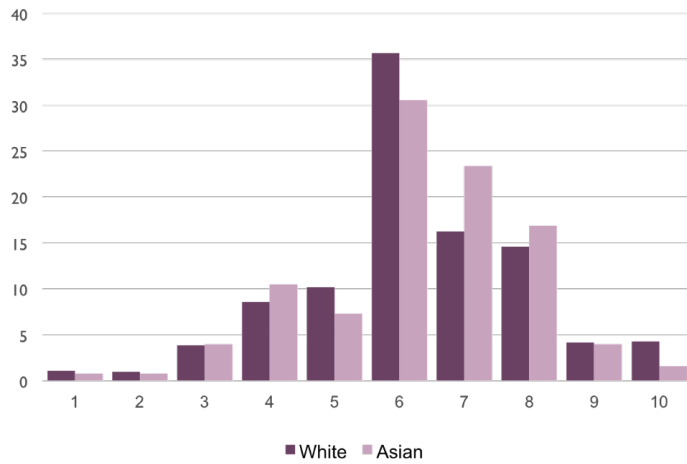Figure 1. Bar Chart of Attractiveness Ratings for Whites and Asians

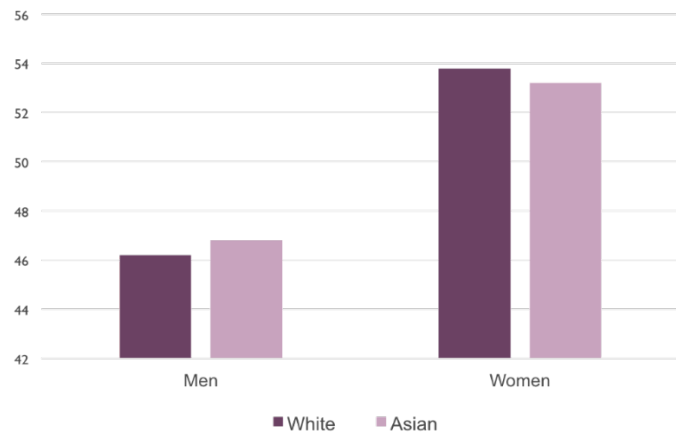Figure 2. Bar Chart of Social Rank for Whites and Asians

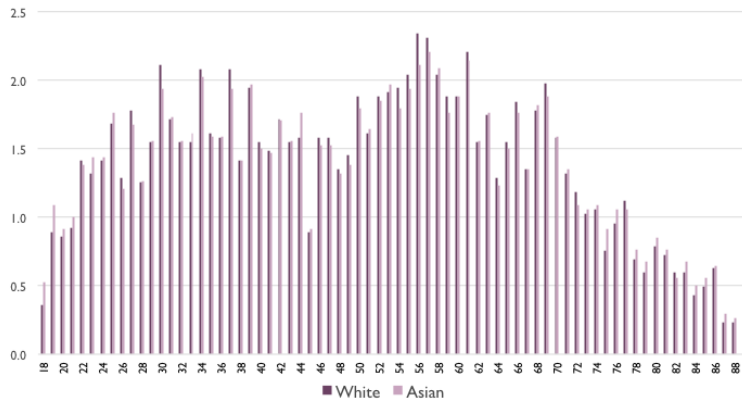Figure 3. Bar Chart of Gender for Whites and Asians

Figure 4. Bar Chart of Age for Whites and Asians
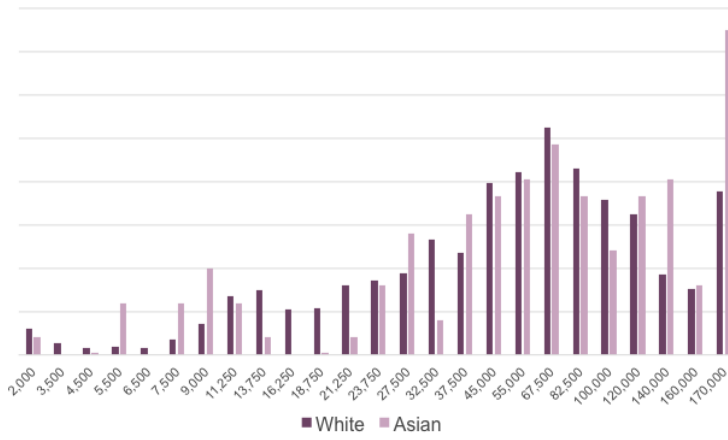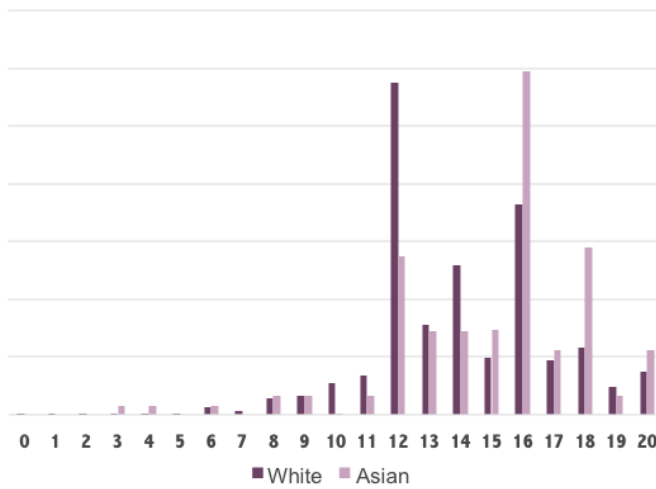

Figure 5. Bar Chart of Income for Whites and Asians

Figure 6. Bar Chart of Education for Whites and Asians