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# Too Asian? The Model Minority Stereotype in a Canadian Context

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The model minority stereotype (MMS) is the dominant stereotype associated with Asian Americans. It consists of seemingly positive components that depict Asian Americans as highly intelligent and hardworking, but it is also associated with negative stereotypes about Asian Americans, such as social incompetence and self-isolation. These stereotypes persist in the media not only in the United States but also in Canada. Even the very groups targeted by these stereotypes may endorse and internalize them, which could lead to a host of social and psychological consequences. The purpose of the current article is to outline a model that represents the Asian Canadian experience with the MMS and associated negative stereotypes through 2 studies. The first study assesses real-world responses to a media depiction of these stereotypes, focusing on how media consumers react to blatant depictions of Asian Canadian stereotypes and the degree to which they endorse or reject them. The second study examines whether endorsing and internalizing the MMS and associated negative stereotypes is related to the self-esteem and well-being of Asian Canadians, using generational status as a moderating variable. These studies highlight how context, such as living in Canada or being first generation compared with second generation, can be related to how one interprets and reacts to the stereotypes applied to them.

### *What is the public significance of this article?*

This research is the first to highlight that the model minority stereotype exists in Canada and has potential implications for Asian Canadians. We found that there are generational differences in the degree to which endorsing and internalizing these stereotypes relates to Asian Canadians' psychological well-being and self-esteem.

*Keywords:* model minority stereotype, Asian Canadians, generational status, well-being, self-esteem


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Asians in Canada and the United States have historically been targets of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination (Leong & Okazaki, 2009). In the United States, a strong body of research has developed around the model minority narrative, a myth that is used to prop up Asian Americans as exemplars of their minority community, promoting their strong work ethic and perseverance toward success despite their minority status (Yoo, Burrola, & Steger,

2010). This research has focused on implications for Asian Americans not only for seemingly positive stereotypes (Kiang, Witkow, & Thompson, 2016) but also for the associated negative stereotypes, such as having poor social skills (Wong, Owen, Tran, Collins, & Higgins, 2012) or being viewed as perpetual foreigners (Lee, Ottati, Lin, & Chan, 2014). The current project focuses on the positive and negative stereotypes associated with Asian Canadians, which, to our knowledge, is the first empirical psychological study of the model minority stereotype in a Canadian context.

### **The Model Minority Myth and Asian American Stereotypes**

The model minority narrative was invented in the 1960s by those interested in promoting the social standing of Asian Americans while simultaneously denigrating African Americans (Wu, 2014). The mainstream American press presented Asian Americans as an example of how a minority group can overcome discrimination through perseverance and hard work alone. This was primarily done as a means to counter Civil Rights activists'

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arguments that systematic inequalities continued to oppress African Americans (Peterson, 1966). Today, newspapers still marvel at the “Asian advantage,” one even suggesting that Confucianism is the secret ingredient to the demographic’s success (Kristof, 2015).

An important historical component of the model minority myth, then, is the comparison of Asian Americans with other minority groups. In more contemporary usage, the model minority *stereotype* often simply refers to the positive attributes associated with Asian Americans: intelligence, ambition, strong work ethic, and excellence in fields related to math and science (Kawai, 2005). Indeed, model minority stereotype (MMS) is often used as a synonym for the “positive” stereotypes of this group (see Kiang, Huynh, Cheah, Wang, & Yoshikawa, 2017).

In addition to the MMS, researchers have also considered negative stereotypes about Asian Americans. Consistent with Fiske’s stereotype-content model, views of Asian Americans can be represented along the lines of competence, on which they are perceived highly (i.e., the MMS), and warmth, on which they are considered to be relatively low (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Thompson, Kiang, and Witkow (2016) suggested that stereotypes of Asian Americans can be split into two domains, academic and interpersonal, which would fit into the competence and warmth categories, respectively. Although the former category is essentially the domain of the MMS, the latter includes stereotypes such as having poor social skills and being generally nerdy, unfriendly, and shy (Lin, Kwan, Cheung, & Fiske, 2005; Wong et al., 2012). In addition to these poor social skills, Asian Americans are often othered, stereotyped as “perpetual foreigners” who have poor English language skills (Lee et al., 2014; Suzuki, 2002) and are otherwise not considered typical Americans (Devos & Banaji, 2005).

Although the positive and negative stereotypes associated with Asian Americans fall along two distinct axes, these are not independent of each other. In their development of an attitudes toward Asian Americans scale, Ho and Jackson (2001) found that individuals who believed in the MMS (i.e., that Asian Americans are intelligent and successful) were also likely to believe in the negative stereotypes (i.e., that they are nerdy, antisocial, and unassimilable). As such, the current study will consider both the positive and negative stereotypes due to their potential theoretical relationship.

### **Generational Status as a Moderator of the Psychological Correlates of Asian Stereotypes**

The positive stereotypes that make up the MMS have been associated with mixed outcomes for Asian Americans. On one hand, achievement-related stereotypes have been associated with higher levels of academic and psychological adjustment (Thompson & Kiang, 2010), stronger work ethic (Oyserman & Sakamoto, 1997), and greater success on stereotype relevant tasks for Asian Americans (Gibson, Losee, & Vitiello, 2014; Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady, 1999). On the other hand, achievement aspects of the MMS have also been associated with poorer academic performance (Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2000), psychological distress (Kim & Lee, 2014; McGee, Thakore, & Lablance, 2017), lower willingness to seek help (Gupta, Szymanski, & Leong, 2011), and greater perceptions of prejudice (Siy & Cheryan, 2016).

One factor that might help explain these variations is generational status, that is, whether individuals immigrated to the United States themselves (first generation) or are the progeny of immigrants (second+ generation). There may be a meaningful gulf in the backgrounds and experiences of these different cohorts, which may influence their relationship to the MMS. For instance, the immigrant paradox posits that second+ generation individuals tend to fair worse in areas like health and education compared with the first generation, due in part to their adoption of unhealthy lifestyles via acculturation (Coll & Marks, 2012). Indeed, first-generation Asian Americans tend to do better than their second+ generation peers academically (Hernandez, Denton, Macartney, & Blanchard, 2012; Tran & Birman, 2010), and they derive more satisfaction from attending school than their supposedly more assimilated peers (Pong & Zeiser, 2012).

Many second-generation Asian Americans also appear to be downwardly mobile compared with their immigrant parents, but due to the United States’ hyperselective immigration policies that tend to favor highly educated and skilled professionals, an instance of downward mobility could be viewed as a regression toward the mean (Zhou & Xiong, 2005). For second-generation Asian Americans, this could result in a strong dissociation from the MMS, which is perhaps more appropriately applied to the first-generation as a result of highly selective immigration policies. As such, if the MMS is applied to an individual who is second generation or later, they may report greater psychological stress compared with the first generation.

It is also possible that the effects of negative stereotypes are shaped by generational status, but due to a different phenomenon. Second-generation Asian Americans are more familiar with stereotypes in the United States and are more sensitive about racism and their racial minority status than first-generation individuals (Zhou & Xiong, 2005). Not only are second generation more aware of discrimination, they also tend to be more negatively affected by it compared with their first-generation counterparts (Gee, Ro, Gavin, & Takeuchi, 2008; Wang, Minervino, & Cheryan, 2013; Ying, Lee, & Tsai, 2000). Taken together, past research suggests that second-generation individuals may be more adversely affected by negative stereotypes than first-generation individuals.

### **The Canadian Context**

Although the literature used to substantiate the current study has come from the United States, the study itself was conducted in Canada. As such, it is important to briefly consider the historical experiences of Asians in Canada. After Canadian confederation in 1867, an influx of Chinese laborers entered the country to help build the Canadian Pacific Railway. In 1885, however, a Chinese Head Tax was implemented, charging people of Chinese origin \$50 to enter Canada in an attempt to dampen immigration (Chinese Immigration Act, 1885). Such anti-Asian sentiment continued to build until it boiled over in the 1907 anti-Asian riots. These riots occurred along the West coast in both Canada and the United States, spurred by anti-immigration demonstrations. Like in the United States, distrust of Asians in Canada was maintained throughout the first half of the 20th century, resulting in Japanese internment camps during World War II.

Attitudes toward Asian Canadians began to shift in the 1960s and 1970s as immigration reforms were implemented that replaced racial preferences with a points system that favored education, specialized work skills, and English (or French) language abilities (Dirks, 2019). This system, which is still in place today in a similar form, allowed for cherry picking of “high status” individuals to enter universities and professional fields in Canada (Yu, 2012). But like before, there was a backlash against the new influx of Asian immigrants. This backlash was encapsulated by the media in a 1979 story called “Campus Giveaway,” which aired on a Canadian investigative news program on a major network (W5 on CTV). This broadcast was perhaps the first example of the model minority myth being expressed in the Canadian media; it depicted Asians as international students (despite many being Canadian citizens) who created unfair competition for “true” Canadians entering into medical school (Hawthorn, 2009). Very public protests against the network were led by Asian Canadians (Gilmour, Bhandar, Heer, & Ma, 2012).

Three decades after the “Campus Giveaway” controversy, another Canadian national news outlet, *Maclean’s Magazine*, published an article entitled “Too Asian” once again lamenting that Asians were invading Canadian universities, taking away spaces and changing the culture in ways that were damaging to “real” Canadians (Finlay & Kohler, 2010). As before, this piece was met with a substantial public backlash, even inspiring new academic work on the Asian Canadian experience, primarily in the humanities (Gilmour et al., 2012). These media representations of stereotypical Asian Canadians are similar to those found in the United States (see Kristoph, 2015, for an American media example). Unlike in the United States, however, in Canada there has been little empirical documentation or psychological analysis of Asian Canadians’ lived experience with the MMS.

Before describing the current study, a final important distinction between the Canadian and American contexts needs to be made concerning *who* exactly these stereotypes are applied to. In the American model minority literature, participants are often defined using the term “Asian American” with certain assumptions about which specific ethnic subgroups are included within this broad category (Chao, Chiu, Chan, Mendoza-Denton, & Kwok, 2013;

Cherng & Liu, 2017; Maddux, Galinsky, Cuddy, & Polifroni, 2008). In Canada, these categories and the meaning of common terms for Asian groups differ somewhat.

In the U.S. literature on the MMS, the term *Asian American* includes individuals from East (e.g., China), Southeast (e.g., Viet Nam), and South (e.g., India) Asia, as well as the distinct category of Filipino/Pacific Islander (Atkin, Yoo, Jager, & Yeh, 2018; Thompson et al., 2016). In Canada, people of Asian origin are categorized according to the 2016 Canadian Census Profile as (a) West Central Asian and Middle Eastern, (b) South Asian, and (c) East and Southeast Asian (Statistics Canada, 2017). Notably, people of Southeast Asian origin (including Filipino) are often grouped together with East Asians. This grouping is familiar to Canadians and often the term *East Asian* is sufficient to represent the whole group rather than East/Southeast Asian as is recorded in the census. The primary distinction that is often drawn in Canada is between South Asians and East Asians. In fact, the term *Asian Canadian* colloquially refers to people of East Asian heritage (i.e., East, Southeast, Filipino/Pacific Islander) and not to people of other Asian ethnic groups, specifically South Asians (Heer, 2012). Because of these differences in classifications of “Asian American” versus “Asian Canadian,” the current research focuses primarily on East Asian Canadians as defined earlier.

### Overview of the Current Research

The present research investigates the MMS and associated negative stereotypes in a Canadian context. To capture the unique experience of those targeted by the MMS, we provide a conceptual model that addresses the context, processes, and potential moderators of this experience (see Figure 1). Based on this model, we expect that the sociocultural context, such as media representations, inform the content of the stereotypes and that merely perceiving these representations may inform certain psychological phenomena in targets (e.g., East Asian Canadians). The model also holds that the negative and positive stereotypes are distinct yet interrelated parts of a whole that should be studied in conjunction (Siy & Cheryan, 2016). Finally, generational status is included as

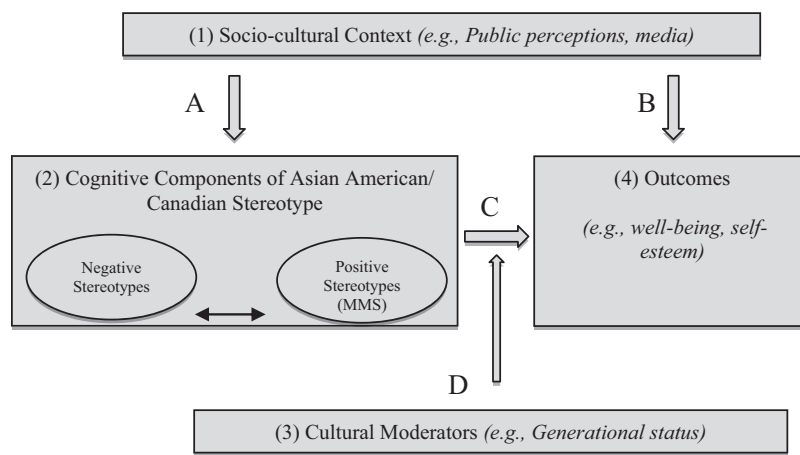


Figure 1. Working model for sociocognitive implications of the model minority stereotype on Asians living in the West.

a specific moderator in an attempt to account for previous inconsistent findings.

Using multiple methods, we examined how Canadians (Asian<sup>1</sup> and non-Asian) reacted to stereotypic media representations of Asian Canadians (Study 1) and Asian Canadians' personal experiences with these stereotypes (Study 2). Study 1 was exploratory and reflected the sociocultural aspect of our model (Paths A and B). The source material was the national news magazine article "Too Asian?" mentioned earlier (Finlay & Kohler, 2010). The story endorsed both the MMS and the associated negative stereotypes. The backlash against the article allowed us to investigate the public's unsolicited perspectives on these stereotypes by analyzing the comments they posted on the magazine's website. Study 2 was a survey of East Asian Canadian students that focused on the cognitive components of the MMS and their relation to well-being and self-esteem. We predicted that the negative stereotypes would be related to lower well-being and self-esteem due to their blatantly negative depictions. Further, we expected the negative stereotypes to show especially poor relationships for second-generation compared with first-generation Asian Canadians due to their heightened awareness of stereotypes and discrimination. For the positive stereotypes, the overall relationship with psychological variables was unclear due to previous mixed findings (Thompson et al., 2016 compared with Kim & Lee, 2014). Based on evidence of the immigrant paradox (Hernandez et al., 2012), however, we predicted that generational status would again act as a moderator, whereby first-generation participants would have a more positive relationship with the MMS than second-generation participants.

### Study 1

The data for this study consisted of reader responses to a Canadian news magazine article entitled "Too Asian?", later renamed "The Enrollment Controversy" (Finlay & Kohler, 2010). This article perpetuated the MMS and negative stereotypes about Asian Canadians, depicting them as intelligent, hardworking, and ambitious, but so focused on academics that they failed to engage with the more social aspects of undergraduate education, only socializing with members of their ethnic group. We examined how readers responded in terms of their general affective responses and their endorsement of the different stereotypes depicted (e.g., competence, unsociability) and importantly, whether these responses differed between self-identified Asians and non-Asians.

### Method

The original data set included 579 anonymous comments, downloaded from the magazine website 1 week after the article was published.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the comments, the relative number of "likes/dislikes" to comments were also recorded. Two of the authors read through the comments to establish a coding system, and 30 comments were removed during this stage because they were irrelevant (e.g., provided links to external websites with no other content). During the coding process, a further 167 comments were removed because they were unrelated to either the content of the article or to the focus of the research study. In both situations, the comments would have received a not applicable (N/A) or 0 in all of the categories being coded. The final set that was coded and analyzed consisted of 382 unique reader responses.

The six coding categories were (a) Writer ethnicity (Asian, Non-Asian, Not specified), (b) Attitude toward the article (Positive, Negative, Mixed, Unclear), (c) Perception of the article as racist (Racist, Not Racist, N/A),<sup>3</sup> (d) Competence stereotype endorsement (Agrees, Disagrees, N/A), (e) Unsociable stereotype endorsement (Agrees, Disagrees, N/A), and (f) Poor English proficiency stereotype endorsement (Agrees, Disagrees, N/A).

The aforementioned coding was designed not only to address the primary research question (i.e., how do readers respond to representations of Asian Canadian stereotypes in the media) but also to reflect the comments themselves. In other words, the research question guided the creation of categories to be coded, but this was supplemented by common themes that arose organically from the comments.

For example, the most highly rated comment (566 likes) exemplifies a shared critical attitude that many readers had of the article:

As a Caucasian grad student in engineering at U of T I say Big F@#king deal. Every one of those students worked extremely hard to get where they are, largely because their parents valued the OPPORTUNITY Canada gave them.

Clearly, this reader had a negative response to the article, coded as negative in the attitude category, yet they also endorse the competence stereotype. Another popular commenter (471 likes) similarly held a negative attitude toward the piece but further pointed to racism underlying the article: "Isn't this just racism? I'm Asian, and I was born in Canada. Hence, I am Canadian."

Alternatively, some commenters held a positive view of the article, at times agreeing with problems associated with having "too many Asians" on campus. Such comments, however, were often unpopular. The following received 133 dislikes:

I was originally considering going to Waterloo University but was advised not to do so because it was "full of Asians," and also that the courses and workload at UW was extremely tough. [ . . . ] is the fact that we may be underachieving compared to our "Asian" counterparts a bad thing?? [ . . . ] Having a social life is also extremely important, not to mention having school spirit adds to the university experience as a whole.

This reader clearly agreed with the unsociable negative stereotype of Asian students and feared it would harm their overall university experience. The idea that people of Asian heritage are perpetual foreigners is also reflected through mentions of poor English skills. One commenter wrote (with, ironically, poor grammar): "I attend UBC and sometimes I swear to god I am in a different country [ . . . ] The disappointing part is very few are 'Canadian' sure some may have the papers put they are new can barely speak English."

<sup>1</sup> The data from Study 1 make it difficult to differentiate the specific ethnicities of Asian responders, so we will use the broad terms *Asians* and *non-Asians* in Study 1.

<sup>2</sup> These reader responses were published in the public domain, and analyzing them constitutes a combination of naturalistic observation and archival research where the risk to those being observed is minimal. As such, according to the American Psychological Association, use of these comments does not require informed consent (see <https://www.apa.org/monitor/jan03/principles>).

<sup>3</sup> Although many commenters explicitly called the article racist, if a commenter simply argued that the article unfairly targeted or represented Asians, this would have been coded as perceiving the article as racist.

Reader responses were independently coded by one author and one undergraduate research assistant. The  $\kappa$ s assessing interrater reliability for each of the six categories were .75 (Ethnicity), .69 (Attitude), .69 (Racism), .64 (Competence), .69 (Unsociable), and .80 (English Proficiency), suggesting moderate to strong agreement between coders. After coding was complete, the coders discussed their discrepancies and came to a consensus on final codes.

## Results

**Descriptive statistics.** With regard to ethnicity, 87 commenters (23%) explicitly self-identified as Asian and 73 (19%) as not Asian; the majority did not reveal their ethnicity ( $n = 222$ ; 58%). In terms of readers' general attitude toward the article, the majority ( $n = 251$ ; 65%) had a negative response compared with those expressing a favorable view ( $n = 32$ ; 8%), a mixed response ( $n = 23$ ; 6%), or no clear attitude ( $n = 76$ ; 20%). Similarly, a majority ( $n = 198$  commenters; 52%) perceived the article to be racist, 26 (7%) did not, and 158 (41%) made no comment regarding racism.

In terms of stereotype endorsement, 148 commenters (39%) agreed with the competence stereotype, whereas 32 (8%) disagreed with it. Commenters were fairly evenly split on their agreement ( $n = 63$ ; 16%) and disagreement ( $n = 60$ ; 16%) with the unsociable stereotype. Finally, although it was infrequently raised, 26 (7%) commenters explicitly agreed with the poor English proficiency stereotype, whereas six (2%) explicitly disagreed with it.

**Ethnicity and explicit stereotype endorsement.** To address the research question comparing self-identified Asians versus non-Asians in their responses to the article,  $\chi^2$  analyses were conducted for each category, using Ethnicity as a categorical factor. To simplify interpretation, only those who indicated their ethnicity ( $n = 160$ ) were included in these analyses. There was a significant difference in perceiving racism by ethnic group,  $\chi^2(2) = 11.201$ ,  $p = .004$  ( $V = .27$ ): More Asians (67%) than non-Asians (33%) indicated that they perceived the article to be racist (Figure S1 in the online supplemental materials).<sup>4</sup> Similarly, of those who explicitly perceived the article to *not* be racist, more were non-Asian (77%) than Asian (23%). There was also a significant difference in attitudes by ethnic group,  $\chi^2(3) = 13.260$ ,  $p = .004$  ( $V = .29$ ): Almost twice as many Asians (66%) compared with non-Asians (34%) had a negative attitude toward the article (Figure S2 in the online supplemental materials).

Endorsement of the three stereotypes is presented in Figure S3 in the online supplemental materials. Although there was no significant difference in responses for the competency stereotype between groups,  $\chi^2(2) = 0.774$ ,  $p = .679$ , there was a group difference for the unsociable stereotype,  $\chi^2(2) = 13.387$ ,  $p = .001$  ( $V = .29$ ), with just over three quarters of those disagreeing with the stereotype being Asian. Similarly, of those who agreed with the unsociable stereotype, almost twice as many were non-Asian (64%) compared with Asian (36%). Finally, there was a significant difference in responses about the English proficiency stereotype between groups,  $\chi^2(2) = 6.601$ ,  $p = .037$  ( $V = .20$ ), with more non-Asians (71%) agreeing than Asians (29%).

## Discussion

In general, the responses to this Canadian media article were overwhelmingly negative, and many readers found its content to be

explicitly racist. These response patterns were stronger for Asians than non-Asians. In terms of endorsing specific stereotypes, both groups tended to agree with the competence stereotype but differed in their endorsement of the unsociability and English proficiency stereotypes. Study 1 has shown that the MMS and related negative stereotypes are alive and well in the Canadian consciousness, yet its representation elicited a mixed response from the public. By using unsolicited real-world data, we provided some evidence of the broader public perception of the MMS and associated negative stereotypes. Such data, however, come with limitations. For instance, we have no information about responders besides what they themselves freely provided in their comments and these data only reflect individuals who felt compelled to respond publicly to the article.

## Study 2

Study 2 examined the psychological variables associated with endorsing and internalizing positive and negative stereotypes with two primary research questions: (a) Are the stereotypes related to well-being and self-esteem for East Asian Canadians (Path C in Figure 1) and (b) Is this relationship moderated by generational status (Path D)? We hypothesized that endorsing and internalizing negative stereotypes associated with Asian Canadians would predict lower well-being and self-esteem for all participants, but this pattern would be stronger for second- compared with first generation. Given previous mixed findings, there was no clear hypothesis for how the positive stereotypes would relate to well-being and self-esteem; however, we predicted that the relationship would be more positive for first- compared with second generation.

## Method

**Participants.** Participants ( $N = 195$ ; 121 women) with a mean age of 19.30 ( $SD = 1.87$ ; range 18–26) were recruited through a university participant pool. All identified as East Asian, but they were ethnically diverse<sup>5</sup>: 49% of the participants were Chinese ( $n = 96$ ), 17% were Vietnamese ( $n = 34$ ), 11% were Filipino ( $n = 21$ ), and 11% were Korean ( $n = 21$ ). The remaining 12% ( $n = 23$ ) were from other East/Southeast Asian countries of origin or a combination of East/Southeast Asian origins (e.g., Chinese/Vietnamese). Fifty-nine participants were first generation,<sup>6</sup> and 136 were second generation in Canada. Among first generation, the mean age of arrival in Canada was 9.54 ( $SD = 4.67$ ) and ranged from 1 to 19 years. Most were citizens ( $n = 178$ ); the remainder were permanent residents ( $n = 17$ ).

**Procedure and measures.** Participants completed an online questionnaire that included demographic questions and the mea-

<sup>4</sup> All analyses were run in SPSS except for the moderation analyses in Study 2 which were run in R. All figures mentioned in the results section can be found in the online supplementary materials.

<sup>5</sup> An inclusion criterion for this study was that all participants consider themselves to be part of the East Asian cultural group regardless of their specific ethnicity. Three participants were removed from the analysis for indicating they did not consider this category to represent them.

<sup>6</sup> Ten international students also completed the study but were not included in any of the analyses, as it was determined they neither constitute first- nor second generation but can rather be considered "sojourners." They were, however, included in an alternative robustness analysis (Table S2 in the online supplemental materials).

asures described in the following text. Imbedded in the questionnaire were three items from the Conscientious Responders Scale (Marjanovic, Struthers, Cribbie, & Greenglass, 2014); respondents who answered more than one item incorrectly ( $n = 31$ ) were not included in the final sample. This study received ethics review and approval by the University's Ethics Review Board, Human Participants Review Subcommittee.

**Endorsement of East Asian stereotypes (Scale of Anti-Asian American Stereotypes).** A modified version of Lin et al.'s (2005) 25-item scale assessed endorsement of stereotypes about East Asian Canadians in general. The measure has two subscales: Competence (12 items;  $\alpha = .84$ ; e.g., "In order to get ahead of others, East Asian Canadians can be overly competitive") and Unsociability (13 items;  $\alpha = .84$ ; e.g., "East Asian Canadians commit less time to socializing than others do"). A high score on the Unsociability scale indicates endorsement of the negative stereotype that East Asian Canadians are unsociable. A high score on the Competence subscale indicates endorsement of the stereotype that East Asian Canadians are too competent. It is worth noting that this subscale is a little ambiguous, as it addresses a positive stereotype associated with East Asian Canadians (high competence), but the wording of the items presents the construct in a negative light, as though the competence is a threat to non-Asian Canadians. Both were measured on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

**Internalization of East Asian minority stereotypes (Internalization of Asian American Stereotypes Scale).** Shen, Wang, and Swanson's (2011) 23-item scale assessed the degree to which participants internalized both negative and positive stereotypes. The positive attributes were expectations of academic success (five items;  $\alpha = .73$ ; e.g., "As an East Asian Canadian, I am expected by others to be academically successful") and pursuit of prestigious careers (five items;  $\alpha = .80$ ; e.g., "Prestige is one of the most important determining factors when choosing a career"). The negative attributes involved emotional reservation (five items;  $\alpha = .77$ ; e.g., "I am not comfortable showing my emotions in public") and difficulties with English language communication (eight items;  $\alpha = .77$ ; e.g., "As an East Asian Canadian, I would choose

a major that requires minimal reading, writing, and verbal communication in English"). A high score on each scale indicated internalization of the given stereotype. A 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*) was used.

**Psychological well-being.** The items from Ryff and Keyes's (1995) 18-item scale ( $\alpha = .84$ ) were used to measure psychological well-being (autonomy, self-acceptance, positive relations, environmental mastery, personal growth, and purpose in life). All items were averaged into a single index of well-being. A higher score indicated a stronger sense of well-being. Each item was rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*).

**Self-esteem.** Rosenberg's (1965) 10-item Self-Esteem Scale was used to measure trait self-esteem ( $\alpha = .83$ ). A higher score indicated higher trait self-esteem. Responses were assessed on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*).

## Results

**Preliminary analyses.** Reliability coefficients as well as the overall means and means divided by generational status can be found in Table 1. Independent  $t$  tests found no generational status differences on any of the measures,  $t_s < 1.62$ ,  $p_s > .11$ ,  $d_s < .23$ . In general, endorsement and internalization of the MMS (positive stereotypes) were higher than for the negative stereotypes, and this pattern held across generational status.

**Correlations between stereotypes and outcome measures.** Our first hypothesis was that negative stereotypes would be negatively related to psychological variables (well-being and self-esteem), and the predicted relationship with the MMS was unclear. The correlations (see Table S1 in the online supplemental materials) indicated that all three subscales presenting the negative stereotypes (unsociability, emotional reservation, and English difficulties) were negatively associated with both well-being and self-esteem ( $r = -.17$  to  $-.44$ ). None of the scales reflecting the MMS (competence, academic success, and pursuit of prestigious

Table 1  
Descriptive Statistics of Stereotypes, Well-Being, and Self-Esteem Measures

Measure	$\alpha$	All participants $M$ ( $SD$ )	First generation $M$ ( $SD$ )	Second generation $M$ ( $SD$ )
<i>N</i>		195	59	136
SAAAS				
Competence (+/-)	.84	3.11 (0.71)	3.15 (0.73)	3.09 (0.71)
Sociability (-)	.84	2.28 (0.66)	2.36 (0.62)	2.24 (0.68)
IAASS				
Academic success (+)	.73	4.05 (1)	3.95 (1)	4.09 (1)
Prestigious career (+)	.80	3.54 (1.01)	3.49 (1.05)	3.55 (0.99)
Emotional reservation (-)	.77	3.35 (1.08)	3.28 (1.12)	3.39 (1.06)
English difficulties (-)	.77	3.09 (0.98)	3.21 (1.11)	3.04 (0.91)
Well-being	.84	4.67 (0.67)	4.60 (0.63)	4.69 (0.70)
Self-esteem	.83	2.78 (0.42)	2.70 (0.45)	2.81 (.040)

*Note.* SAAAS = Scale of Anti-Asian American Stereotypes (Lin et al., 2005); IAASS = Internalization of Asian American Stereotypes Scale (Shen et al., 2011); (+) = positive stereotype (model minority stereotype); (-) = negative stereotype. There were no significant generational differences on any of the above variables,  $t$  values ranged from 0.252 to 1.89,  $p$  values ranged from .090 to .905, and effect sizes (Cohen's  $d$ ) ranged from .04 to .27.

careers), however, were associated with well-being or self-esteem ( $r = -.05$  to  $.02$ ).

**The moderating role of generational status.** To test the second hypothesis that the relation between stereotypes and psychological phenomena would be moderated by generational status, we ran a hierarchical regression for each stereotype, with stereotype endorsement/internalization and generational status added in Step 1 and the interaction added in Step 2. If the interaction term was significant, simple slopes were also analyzed. The results of each analysis can be found in Table 2, and graphs indicating the interaction results can be found in the Figures S4a–S9b in the online supplemental materials.<sup>7</sup>

English language difficulty was the only negative stereotype that showed a significant interaction with generational status. The interaction was significant for both well-being ( $b = -0.34$ ,  $t = -3.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and self-esteem ( $b = -0.12$ ,  $t = -1.96$ ,  $p = .05$ ). Simple slopes analyses revealed that internalizing the English language difficulties stereotype significantly predicted lower well-being and self-esteem for second-generation participants (well-being:  $b = -0.33$ ,  $t = -5.64$ ,  $p < .001$ ; self-esteem:  $b = -0.13$ ,  $t = -3.34$ ,  $p < .001$ ) but not for first-generation participants (well-being:  $b = 0.01$ ,  $t = 0.10$ ,  $p = .89$ ; self-esteem:  $b = -0.01$ ,  $t = -0.17$ ,  $p = .87$ ; see Figures S6a and S6b in the online supplemental materials).

The ambiguous competence stereotype also showed a significant interaction with generational status, but only for well-being ( $b = -0.31$ ,  $t = -2.11$ ,  $p = .04$ ) and not for self-esteem ( $b = -0.13$ ,  $t = -1.43$ ,  $p = .15$ ). Simple slope analyses revealed that endorsing the stereotype that Asians are too competent marginally predicted lower well-being for second-generation participants ( $b = -.014$ ,  $t = -1.76$ ,  $p = .08$ ), whereas there was a trend predicting higher well-being for first-generation participants ( $b = 0.16$ ,  $t = 1.35$ ,  $p = .18$ ). Although the interaction for self-esteem was not significant, Figures S4a and S4b in the online supplemental materials show a similar pattern of results for both outcomes, whereby greater endorsement of the competence stereotype is associated with lower self-esteem and well-being for second generation compared with first generation, who showed an opposite pattern.

Finally, the interaction between the positive prestigious career stereotype and generational status was significant for self-esteem ( $b = -0.15$ ,  $t = -2.38$ ,  $p = .02$ ), but not for well-being ( $b = 0.06$ ,  $t = 0.58$ ,  $p = .56$ ). Simple slopes indicated that although second generation showed no significant relationship ( $b = -.04$ ,  $t = -1.19$ ,  $p = .23$ ), first generation who internalized the prestigious career stereotype did have higher self-esteem ( $b = 0.11$ ,  $t = 2.07$ ,  $p = .04$ ; see Figures S7a and S7b in the online supplemental materials).

## Discussion

Consistent with part of our hypotheses, stronger endorsement and internalization of the negative stereotypes was related to lower levels of well-being and self-esteem regardless of generational status. Although there were no generational status differences for unsociability (Figures S5a and S5b in the online supplemental materials) and emotional reservation (Figures S8a and S8b in the online supplemental materials), differences did emerge for stereotypes about English difficulties (Figures S6a and S6b in the online

supplemental materials): There were negative associations for second- but not first-generation respondents. This distinction may be accounted for by the fact that having English language difficulties speaks more to the perpetual foreigner stereotype, whereas unsociability and emotional reservation are both more indicative of the interpersonal/warmth components.

For the positive stereotypes, examination of the baseline correlations appears to indicate no relationships with the psychological variables. Yet, when generational status was incorporated as a moderator, some relationships emerged. For the first-generation cohort, a positive relationship was found between internalizing the prestigious career stereotype and self-esteem, whereas the opposite trend was found for the second generation. We found a similar pattern for endorsing the competence stereotype (Figure S4a and S4b in the online supplemental materials); a positive trend with well-being was found for first-generation participants, but there was a negative association for the second-generation participants.

## General Discussion

This article highlighted the presence of the MMS and associated negative stereotypes within the Canadian context at multiple levels: socioculturally through the Canadian public consciousness and individually by looking at the direct relationship between stereotypes and psychological variables. In both studies, a distinction was drawn between the positive and negative stereotypes associated with Asian Canadians. In Study 1, we found Asian Canadians were less likely to endorse the negative stereotypes than the positive ones. They were also less likely than non-Asian Canadians to endorse the negative stereotypes. A similar push-back against negative stereotypes has also been found in African American youth who contest the negative stereotypes that are applied to them (Rowley, Kurtz-Costes, Mistry, & Feagans, 2007).

In Study 2, our findings related to the negative stereotypes showed a similar pattern. We found that both first- and second-generation participants showed negative relationships between the negative interpersonal stereotypes (i.e., unsociability and emotional reservation) and the psychological variables of well-being and self-esteem. This is counter to our hypothesis that second generation would show a stronger negative association with being negatively stereotyped than first generation, a pattern that had been found in previous research (Gee et al., 2008).

Poor interpersonal skills, however, is not the only negative stereotype aimed at Asian Americans and Canadians. They are also considered perpetual foreigners (Lee et al., 2014), and our results indicated that internalizing the stereotype that they do not have good English language skills had negative psychological associations for second-generation Asian Canadians but was seemingly unrelated to well-being and self-esteem for first generation. This aligns with previous research on identity denial, which has shown that when Asian Americans have their American identity denied, they tend to have negative emotional reactions and act in ways that are intended to affirm their identity (Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Guendelman, Cheryan, & Monin, 2011; Wang et al., 2013). Being

<sup>7</sup> We also ran an alternative moderation analysis using Cohen's Z test comparisons, which included the 10 international students as a robustness analysis, producing the same pattern of results (Table S2 in the online supplemental materials).



Table 2  
*Hierarchical Regressions Predicting Well-Being and Self-Esteem From Stereotypes and Generational Status*

Variable	Competence		Sociability		English difficulty		Prestigious career		Emotional reservation		Academic success	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Well-being												
Step 1/ <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.01		0.07***		0.09***		0.00		0.20***		0.00	
Stereotype	-0.05	0.07	-0.26***	0.07	-0.20***	0.05	-0.02	0.05	-0.28***	0.04	-0.01	0.05
Gen status	0.09	0.11	0.06	0.10	0.06	0.10	0.09	0.11	0.12	0.09	0.09	0.11
Step 2/ $\Delta R^2$	0.02		0.01		0.06***		0.01		0.01		0.00	
Stereotype	0.16	0.12	-0.11	0.13	0.01	0.07	-0.06	0.08	-0.18**	0.07	-0.03	0.09
Gen status	1.04*	0.47	0.54	0.39	1.13***	0.31	-0.12	0.38	0.61*	0.30	-0.05	0.44
Interaction	-0.31*	0.14	-0.21	0.16	-0.34***	0.09	0.06	0.10	-0.15	0.09	0.04	0.11
Total <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.03		0.08***		0.15***		0.01		0.21***		0.00	
Self-esteem												
Step 1/ <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.01		0.04*		0.05**		0.01		0.17***		0.01	
Stereotype	0.01	0.04	-0.10*	0.04	-0.08**	0.03	0.01	0.03	-0.15***	0.03	0.00	0.03
Gen status	0.10	0.06	0.09	0.06	0.09	0.06	0.10	0.06	0.12	0.06	0.10	0.06
Step 2/ $\Delta R^2$	0.01		0.00		0.02*		0.03*		0.00		0.00	
Stereotype	0.09	0.07	-0.11	0.09	-0.01	0.05	0.11*	0.05	-0.13***	0.04	0.02	0.05
Gen status	0.51	0.29	0.06	0.24	0.47*	0.20	0.62*	0.23	0.25	0.19	0.20	0.27
Interaction	-0.13	0.09	0.01	0.10	-0.12*	0.06	-0.15*	0.06	-0.04	0.05	-0.02	0.07
Total <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.02		0.04*		0.07***		0.04*		0.17***		0.01	

Note. Gen = generational. Continuous predictors were centered before moderation analysis.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

accused of having poor English skills despite having been born in an English-speaking country may serve as a form of identity denial for second- but not for first-generation Canadians.

The findings from both studies showed less of a clear pattern for the positive stereotypes. In Study 1, both Asians and non-Asians tended to strongly endorse the competence stereotype to a similar degree. Study 2, however, found no meaningful zero-order correlation between any of the positive stereotypes and well-being or self-esteem for East Asian Canadians. This suggests that although there is a tendency to endorse (and perhaps internalize) components of the MMS, doing so doesn't seem to be strongly related to these psychological variables.

Yet when generational status was taken into consideration, some important relationships with the outcome variables were noted. Specifically, for the first generation, internalizing prestigious career was positively related to self-esteem and endorsing competence was positively related to well-being. For the second generation, however, there was a negative relationship between competence and well-being. This finding in particular may illuminate generational differences in interpreting the ambiguous wording of the Competence scale from the Lin et al. (2005) measure (e.g., Asian Canadians can be *too* competitive): The negative connotation of this seemingly positive attribute may have been obvious to the second generation, but not to the first generation. This would be consistent with previous research that suggests that the second-generation cohort is more attuned to the stereotypes about their group (Zhou & Xiong, 2005), making them more likely to recognize their negative implications. However, it might also be indicative of the different contexts and experiences between the two groups. If first generation tend to fair better academically on average than second generation (Tran et al., 2010), then perhaps they feel a particularly positive affinity with the MMS that isn't shared by second generation.

## Limitations and Future Directions

A key limitation for Study 1 was the time at which the data were collected. The Canadian media story that was used was published in 2010, making its content and the responses somewhat dated. More recent news articles, however, continue to reinforce the MMS (Kristof, 2015) and have also been met with negative reader backlash (Asian-Americans and Stereotypes, 2015). Such articles have also been found in French Canadian media in Québec (Barlow, 2013). Although the MMS continues to be relevant in a broad swath of North American media, the Maclean's article in particular presented a unique opportunity for analysis. Due to its public controversy, the article resulted in an especially large pool of data by Canadian standards with real voices speaking on the issue, making it a rich source from which to understand this phenomenon. Moving forward, however, it would be useful to analyze responses to more recent articles and editorials to see whether the patterns found in our study have shifted or remained stable. Further, although the history of the MMS in American media has been well analyzed (Wu, 2014), little is known about its Canadian history or even its existence in other national contexts. It would be elucidating to gain a better understanding of these stereotypes outside of the American and even North American context.

In Study 2, we limited our sample to East Asian Canadians, assuming they would be the most applicable group to whom these stereotypes would apply. However, it is possible that the stereotypes are also applicable to the other two nationally defined Asian groups within Canada (South Asians and West Central Asian/Middle Eastern). Future studies on the MMS should seek to incorporate these groups. Alternatively, it might be that our inclusion criteria were too broad rather than too narrow. Although we considered the moderating effect of generational status on Asian Canadian's relationship with the stereotypes, we didn't consider

the variation within East and Southeast Asian communities, particularly in relation to socioeconomic status. For those who come from lower income families and have less access to and support for educational attainment, the MMS may be damaging rather than encouraging (Kiang et al., 2017). Future work may consider SES as a potential moderating variable.

## Conclusion

The positive and negative stereotypes associated with the model minority myth are certainly present in the Canadian context. In particular, internalizing and endorsing both the positive and negative stereotypes associated with Asians has potential implications for the well-being of Asian Canadians, and their experiences with these stereotypes should be taken into consideration when assessing their mental health needs. This is especially notable because people typically associate Asian Canadians with positive stereotypes, so the potential consequences from being negatively stereotyped may be overlooked for this group. It is important that we consider the full picture—both the good and the bad—when investigating the model minority myth and resulting stereotypes of Asians in North America.

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