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## Perceptions of Asian American Representation in Entertainment Media

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Perceptions of Asian American Representation in Entertainment Media

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## ABSTRACT

### Perceptions of Asian American Representation in Entertainment Media

Lydia Owens

The rise of Asian American representation in entertainment media has brought new questions to the current perceptions of Asian Americans in American culture. Where whitewashing of roles or stereotypes of the Model Minority were once portrayed frequently in the past, there are now more diverse stories being shown. When representational images are being shown in entertainment media, there is need for a media literacy lens to critically analyze these images. With this rise in Asian American representation, what are current perceptions of Asian Americans in American culture and American entertainment media? What are current levels of media literacy? This study aimed to answer these questions by examining how young adults currently perceive Asian Americans in American culture and entertainment media, as well as gauging their use of media literacy. Drawn on focus groups and interviews (N=17, with majority of participants identifying as Caucasian), this study suggests that Asian Americans are still perceived as the Model Minority, but there is a growing tendency to question stereotypes and welcome diverse perspectives. Regarding media literacy, many participants could recognize social issues being portrayed, but did not critically analyze the images they saw. These findings imply that diverse representation of Asian Americans is growing and welcomed but is not believed to be personally influential to an individual's perception of their reality. The current study contributes to the limited empirical literature of current perceptions of Asian American representation in entertainment media and provides a new avenue of media literacy to be explore.

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## Introduction

For the first time in 25 years since the movie *The Joy Luck Club*, a blockbuster film cast all-Asian actors in the 2018 film *Crazy Rich Asians* (Sun & Ford, 2019). In 2018 and again in 2019, Sandra Oh was the first Asian woman to be nominated for an Emmy in Best Lead Actress in a Drama Series for *Killing Eve* (Fang, 2019). Within this time frame, there also have been television shows featuring Asian actors and actresses, such as *Fresh Off the Boat* and *Masters of None*.

This is significant because the spectrum of representation in the past has consisted of the portrayals of identity in *The Joy Luck Club* and the “Model Minority” stereotype (Kang, 2018). These representations often consisted of the transnational stories of Chinese immigrants coming to America and striving to fit into another country’s culture (Han, 2018), focusing on the contrast between American society and the “foreign.” These portrayals also lumped all Asians into one homogenous group (Shah, 2003), reducing the diverse national identities and cultures of different Asian countries into one entity of “Asian culture” (p. 19).

The current efforts of entertainment media have shifted to include more Asian American writers and directors, which allows for more diverse portrayals of self-representation (Chan, 2019). The representation of the Asian American experience in entertainment media in stories such as *The Farewell* and *Fresh Off the Boat* portray the semi-autobiographical memoirs of the directors/writers (CBS Sunday Morning, 2019; IMDb, 2019). This directly contrasts how Caucasian American directors and writers have portrayed/erased Asian American characters in the recent past in films like *47 Ronan*, *Aloha*, *The Hangover*, and *Doctor Strange* (Joo, 2019; Levin, 2017; Nishime, 2017), where Asian Americans are played as side characters performing stereotypes or are completely replaced by white actors.

This minimal amount of representation has been found lacking accuracy in relation to the American population (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2015). According to the *UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report* for 2019 (Hunt, Ramón & Tran, 2019), Asian representation for cable scripted shows was 3%, showing no change from the 3% of Asian representation from network shows observed 13 years prior in the *Fall Colors 2003-2004: Prime Time Diversity Report*. This does not reflect the American population, as according to the 2017 Census Bureau, Asian Americans comprise 5.6% of the United States total population (Office of Minority Health, 2019).

In addition, the quantity of entertainment media representation does not denote the quality of its portrayal of Asian characters. In the past, the Asian American representation on screen has been limited to nerds, prostitutes, and helpless foreigners (Levin, 2017). Currently, it seems that the spectrum of represented Asian American identity in entertainment media may have shifted, but academic research has not caught up to explain how cultural perceptions might have shifted alongside of it. That is, shifting representations and perceptions have been discussed in culture articles magazines including the New York Times (Chow, 2018), TIME magazine (Chow & Li, 2019), and Huffpost (Fang, 2019); yet whether, how, and to what extent recent representations are related to changing viewer perceptions has not been defined under an academic lens of empirical research or within theory.

Furthermore, while many studies recommend media literacy regarding representation onscreen, and while there are methods of media literacy (e.g., Kellner & Share, 2007) and articles recommending teaching media literacy and diversity training (e.g., Neblett, 2019), there has not been a model of *when* to ascribe critical questions to the piece of media currently being consumed. It is difficult for audiences to understand the implications of racial representation in media if there is no easily internalized and applicable lens for them to view media—that is, if

they lack concrete tools for critical viewership and understanding of their own media interaction through narrative transportation, or the experience of getting immersed and lost in the story (Green & Clark, 2013; Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010).

To help provide context to these assertions and begin to fill massive gaps in academic research, this IRB approved research study is heavily influenced by Sun, Liberman, Butler, Young Lee and Webb's (2015) research on college students' reception of Asian American stereotypes and the exploration of comprehensive media literacy. Specifically, this research uses qualitative focus groups and in-depth interviews with college students to determine their perceptions and experiences with Asian American representation in entertainment media. Ultimately, this research aims to explore the relationships between representation in media and viewers' perception of Asian Americans, while answering Sun and colleagues' (2015) request for a comprehensive teaching of media literacy by proposing, investigating, and refining a media-literacy grounded lens to apply to Asian American representation in entertainment media. The current research may be used by future researchers as a reference of social context regarding perceptions of Asian Americans in American entertainment media, and it provides a new lens of media literacy application to guide future efforts of media literacy pedagogy.

## **Literature Review**

To form the foundations for the research methods and objectives noted above, first it is important to define past perceptions and consequences of Asian American stereotypes, examine contemporary views on Asian American representation in the most current entertainment media as depicted in opinion pieces (due to a dearth of academic research on the topic), and to define



the characteristics of a possible media lens of critical questions regarding race representation, all of which is discussed next.

### **Past Representations, Perceptions, and Effects**

Looking at past representations and perceptions of Asian Americans is valuable because it provides a reference point for how reception of Asian Americans has shifted through time.

The next two sections will illustrate the stereotypical portrayals of Asian Americans in entertainment media and examine the effects these portrayals have had on Asian Americans' relationships and their own views of self-concept and identity.

#### *Perceptions*

There are many differing approaches to the concept of perception, including but not limited to sensory perception (Wagemans, Wichmanns, & Op de Beeck, 2005), social perception (Shapiro, 1960), and perception as defined in psychology (James, 1985). However, for this paper's purposes, perception is defined by Lopes (2003) and Hopkins (2003) as an individual seeing a depiction or representational picture and being able to recognize it as the object face-to-face, though it must be stated that the individual both recognizes it as the object and *not* the object because the individual cognitively knows they are viewing a picture and not the actual object. Hopkins (2003) asserts that this ability to recognize the picture as an object relies on conditions of past experiences with the object and thus, "It is the causal basis of the behavioural disposition" (p. 666). When individuals see pictures, they are cognitively attaching those depictions with their own past experiences, which guides their behavior toward that picture. That is, perception of an image is attached to past ideas and background knowledge of that image. This definition is apt, because the current study looks at how Asian American images are being represented in entertainment media and focuses primary research efforts on how individuals and

their opinions regarding Asian Americans are related to current representational images in media.

### *Past Representations and Perceptions of Asian Americans*

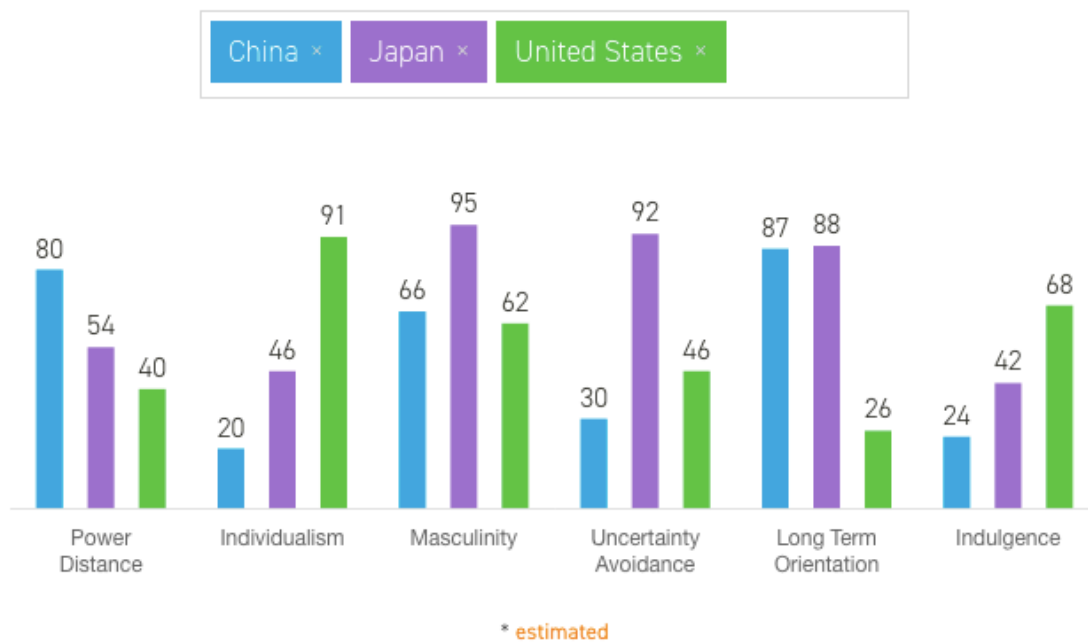
**Culture.** Although the current work is not an in-depth examination of culture, it is nonetheless important to provide a framework for understanding culture, particularly Asian and American cultures, as culture is an essential component of how individuals create a sense of belonging in a group and how they perceive other groups (Berger, 1995).

It is difficult to define Asian or American culture in concrete parameters—certainly more difficult to define the Asian American culture as it is tied to and separate from both because culture is often attached to mercurial trends and historical context. There has been defined contrast between Eastern and Western values in the past regarding a dichotomy between active and passive civilizations, with Western civilizations being considered active and Eastern civilizations being considered as passive (Jenco, 2013). Jenco asserted that, “Westerners value human action, external engagement with individuals outside the family structure, the cultivation of nationalist mentality, and struggle for victory and benefit; while Easterners value following nature, internal engagement with family members, identification with small clans, and passivity or conflict avoidance” (p. 243). The Eastern values were argued to follow ideals created by Confucius regarding benevolence, knowledge, and courage; however Jenco also argued that these ideals became homogenized over time, as post-colonialism lumped Chinese, Japanese, and Indian forms of life as one Eastern ideal (p. 246). To put it more succinctly, Western values were seen as upholding individual success and fulfilment, whereas Eastern values were seen to uphold the harmony and peace of a community as a whole. However, these ideals are

generalized homogenously and do not describe an accurate representation of the current varying cultures existing within Western and Eastern civilizations.

The statistics as seen in Figure 1 were generated from the Values Survey Module, created by Geert Hofstede in 1980 (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), and establish six different elements of values (i.e. six dimensions of culture) that every country upholds to some extent. To gauge current cultures within specificity of the United States and two Asian countries with the highest global contributions regarding gross domestic product, those countries being China and Japan, Hofstede's Insights discussed the following six dimensions of culture: power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation, and indulgence (Hofstede, 2019; Hofstede, 2019; and Hofstede, 2019).

*Figure 1.* Graph Comparing the Six Different Dimensions of Culture of China, Japan, and the United States as defined by Hofstede Insights.



Note: Image reproduced from Hofstede Insights (2019)

**Power distance** is described as the, “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (para. 3). Societies with higher rankings of power distance view inequalities between individuals as acceptable, and societies with lower rankings of power distance view inequalities between individuals as unacceptable (para. 4). According to Figure 1, China ranks highest with power distance at 80, followed by Japan with 54, and the United States is lowest at 40. These statistics provide evidence that societies within China tend to accept subordinate/superior power roles, societies within Japan have hierarchies with power structures (though less than China), and the United States tend to rebel against inequalities and strive for democracy of powers.

**Individualism** is defined as “the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members” (para. 5). Individualistic societies consist of individuals who are focused on the success of self and immediate family, whereas collectivist societies focus on belonging within and taking care of a group at the cost of unquestioning loyalty. The United States values individualism the most at 91, Japan following with 46, and China is lowest at 20. These statistics show evidence that the United States highly values individualism, desiring equal opportunity for all individuals within American society, while Japan focuses more on harmony within groups above individuals, and China prioritizes family and in-groups much more than outsiders or out-groups.

**Masculinity** is defined as “what motivates people, wanting to be the best (Masculine) or liking what you do (Feminine)” (para. 7). Though all three countries score high in masculinity, Japan comes highest at 95, then China at 66 with the United States following closely at 62. Though there is high competition that comes with wanting to be the best at what you do, Japan focuses on the competition between groups, rather than competition between individuals. They

value material production and service quality, as well as presentation, and they value the work diligence that creates this quality. In China, the work ethic is also highly valued, with many people sacrificing personal and family time in order to strive for work and academic excellence. America also highly values work ethic; however, the drive to be the best is more individually demonstrative and success is tied to material possessions and elevated lifestyles.

**Uncertainty avoidance** involves “the way that a society deals with the fact that the future can never be known” or “the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations and have created beliefs and institutions that try to avoid these” (para. 8). Japan scores highest in uncertainty avoidance at 92, then the United States at 46, and China is the lowest at 30. Japan faces many natural hazards, like tsunamis, earthquakes, typhoons, and volcano eruptions, so they have many protocols in place for a variety of predicted and unpredicted situations. Because they will often try to plan for every and any outcome, they are slow when it comes to making new business decisions or ventures. The United States are open to a lot of new business ideas and personal experiences, as well as open to sharing a lot of differing opinions and self-expression. However, the government often tries to monitor everyone through security organizations. China scores very low, valuing ambiguity, adaptability, and pragmatic decision making according to the situation. They are very entrepreneur-oriented and value new and growing business ideas.

**Long term orientation** is defined as “how every society has to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the present and future” (para. 10). Societies that score low in this dimension—normative societies—prefer time-honored traditions and do not like to veer from societal norms, and societies that score high in this dimension prefer pragmatic change and shifts in modern education to prepare for the future. Japan scores highest

at 88, followed closely by China at 87, with the United States scoring very low at 26. These statistics provide evidence that Japan and China both value pragmatism and adaptability in tradition in order to last in the ever-changing future. Though the United States has a practical and “can-do” attitude, it also has very strong and long-lasting opinions on issues regarding morality and government versus citizen power.

**Indulgence**, the final dimension, is considered to be “the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses, based on the way they were raised” (para. 12). Cultures with relatively strong control over their desires and impulses are considered Restrained, and cultures with relatively weak control over desires and impulses are considered Indulgent. The United States scores highest at 68, followed by Japan at 42, with China coming in lowest at 24. These statistics give evidence that shows Japan and China as Restrained cultures, often considered to have a tendency toward cynicism or pessimism, and to not tend to value leisure time or indulging their impulses and desires. The United States is considered an Indulgent culture; however it is a normative score, thus showing that this Indulgent culture both values time for work and play.

While these dimensions are helpful in solidifying the parameters of two generalized Asian cultures and one generalized American culture, they provide illustration that Asian Americans may have difficulty fitting into any of those cultures. Immigrants and first-generation Asian Americans are often taught to share their parents’ Eastern ideals and languages (Yip & Fuligni, 2002), and are thus “othered” by American onlookers who do not consider them to be “true Americans” regardless of citizenship or other shared ideals. Even for second-generation Asian Americans who have grown up with American ideals, they are still lumped into an “Asian sameness” (Kibria, 2000, p. 84), where their country of origin is misidentified. In effort to

correct the misidentification, they often both reaffirm their Asian origins and distance themselves from whatever event or situation they were engaging in.

Kibria also discussed the “foreignness” that many Asian Americans feel, which is perpetually ignited by Caucasian Americans assuming they were not American because “one of the first things we notice about people when we first meet them (along with their sex) is their race. We utilize race to provide clues about who a person is” (Omi & Winant, 1986, p. 62, as quoted in Kibria, 2000, p. 78). Asian American culture is shiftless between origins of Eastern ideal and growth within Western ideal. Ultimately, no matter the Asian American’s internal values, to the external American view they are still considered to be inauthentically American.

**Asian American Stereotypes.** Two stereotypes defined Asian Americans in the past: the yellow peril and the Model Minority (Kawai, 2005). Kawai described the yellow peril as “foreigner foreigners” who do not follow American norms, compete against Americans within the economy, and thus are threats to the White nation. Then in the 1960s due to social and political movement, the term Asian American and the Model Minority stereotype were formed (Wu, 2018), which held Asian Americans above other minorities and celebrated this minority group’s strong work ethic and economic similarities to Caucasian Americans.

Asian Americans became part of a racial hierarchy (Kim, 2014), and their economic success became a tool to discipline other minorities (people of Black, Latino, and Native American descent) because the culture of poverty thesis “has been used to argue that persistent poverty in particular communities or countries is best explained through cultural forms that mitigate against such economic and social progress. Thus, if one culture possesses ‘superior’ attributes it stands to reason that another culture can be deemed ‘inferior’” (p. 109). Essentially, Asian Americans were held up as the standard of a “good” minority and their cultural values

regarding hard work and high education were lauded as the reason for their success. Despite those positive characterizations of work and knowledge, the Model Minority stereotype nonetheless holds Asian Americans to higher standards than the average American, regards them to be below the white majority, and creates feelings of competition between minorities (Zhou, 2004). The Model Minority upholds white supremacy and perpetuates the idea of Asian Americans being foreign and a token commodity for white imperialism (Liou, 2018).

**Entertainment media representation of stereotypes.** Tokenism can be seen in past media representations regarding the roles in which Asian actors were cast. For women, they were cast as either the nasty, conniving dragon lady or the submissive, fragile butterfly (Wang, 2013). Among those portrayed stereotypes, there was also the White Savior narrative, where White men swooped to the helpless, “Oriental lotus blossom” woman’s aid and save the day (Yang, 2014). And on the opposite end, Asian men have been cast as either the effeminate, asexual nerd or the karate master (Nishime, 2017; Shah, 2003). In some films, such as *Ghost in the Shell*, *Aloha*, and *Doctor Strange*, Asian characters have been completely replaced by white actors (Nishime, 2017). These stereotypes and erasure of Asian men and women stimulate the image of subordination to the superior Caucasian ideal. Chang, Wong, Liu and Tran’s research (2017) suggested Asian women’s subordination to male dominance is perpetuated in Asian family dynamics and not necessarily solely by a racial standard, yet the Model Minority stereotype is still felt by Asian men and women alike.

#### *Effects of Asian American Stereotypes on Asian Americans’ Self Image*

Though Sun, Liberman, Butler, Young Lee and Webb (2015) stated that media stereotypes do not have direct, causal connections to attitudes and behaviors regarding race, Tukachinsky (2015) argued that media representation of race can directly influence intergroup



relationships and the marginalized group members' self-concept—meaning for this study's purposes their diminished psychological wellbeing regarding higher self-consciousness and lower self-esteem. For example, Wong-Padoongpatt, Zane, Sumie Okazaki and Saw (2017) found lower self-esteem and higher stress in Asian Americans due to microaggressions.

**Microaggressions.** Derald Wing Sue (2010), cited by Ha and McEwen (2011), defined microaggressions as “brief, commonplace, everyday indignities or slights that (a) can be verbal, behavioral, or environmental and that (b) have physical, emotional, and mental effects for those targeted by them. What makes these aggressions ‘micro’ is not their power to harm, but the fact that privileged members of the community regard them as trivial, if they notice them at all” (p. 277). Practical examples of microaggressions are phrases used in day-to-day interactions, such as “No, where are you *really* from?” or “Can you see as much as white people? You know, because of your eyes...?” (Nigatu, 2013, p. 1 & 21). These seemingly benign questions are not intentionally harmful, but they create feelings of “otherness” in people of color, perpetuate the idea that Asian Americans are “forever foreign” (Zhou, 2004), and create guilt for the feelings of resentment those phrases can cause (Derald Wing Sue, Capodilupo, Nadal & Torino, 2008). Trivializations of microaggressions cause harm because “European Americans have historically had the power to impose their own reality and define the reality of those with lesser power” (Derald et al., 2008, p. 277-279).

**Relationships between ethnic groups.** A Caucasian-defined reality can cause feelings of inferiority and may affect the interaction between and among those with different ethnicities. This relationship can be seen in qualitative interview research conducted with 30 Asian Americans of different pan-Asian descent regarding interracial relationships (e.g., Chong, 2016). That is, Chong found that interracial relationships (meaning relationships between people of

different races) shifted to interethnic relationships (meaning relationships between people of different Asian countries) for various reasons, including: marrying a person of Asian descent was something their parents preferred, feeling more comfortable in Asian communities, and a sense of inferiority compared to Caucasian standards. Asian American individuals, both male and female, felt inadequate compared to Caucasian standards of beauty. Unlike other minorities (specifically Black women), Asian American women and men adhere more strictly to white beauty standards and feel stronger dissatisfaction regarding their bodies and self-image (Sun, 2002; Chin Evans & McConnell, 2003).

For Asian American men, relationship desirability has a double standard. In a study conducted by Balistreri, Joyner and Kao (2015), surveys discovered that “less than 10% of Asian men would not consider dating Asian women, yet approximately 40% of Asian women would rule out dating Asian men” and “more than 90% of women of all different racial groups who expressed a racial preference excluded Asian American men” (para. 15). This is because media portrayals of Asian American men have been emasculating, effeminate, and removed any acknowledgment of Asian American men’s sexual agency (Proasianteam, 2019). Though current movies like *Crazy Rich Asians* may be making effort to change this perception, long-held stereotypes are slow to diminish. That said, many portrayals of Asian Americans in media are changing to something more complex, yet that complexity as of yet is undefined in academic literature. Further, even given expanded representations, it does not necessarily follow that mass society is changing their perceptions along with the media.

#### *Current Perceptions of Asian Americans in Entertainment Media*

One of the past challenges regarding alternative images of Asian Americans outside of the Model Minority stereotype was that audiences could not even begin to picture different

portrayals of Asian Americans (Sun, Liberman, Butler, Lee & Webb, 2015). However, in recent years there has been a new rise in Asian American representation and demand for Asian American stories in Hollywood. Breakout actor and rapper Awkwafina explained her understanding of this sudden cry for representation as, “You don’t understand how important representation is until you see it and realize you’ve been missing it your whole life” (Chow & Li, 2019, para. 12).

The increase in representation has skyrocketed. After the release of movies like *Searching* and *Crazy Rich Asians*, the all-Asian casted film *The Farewell* gained box office popularity and new Asian-led films like *Crazy Rich Asians*’ sequel *China Rich Girlfriend*, Disney’s live-action *Mulan*, and Marvel’s *Shang-Chi* are currently being produced (Berkowitz, 2018). Netflix original movies like *Always Be My Maybe* and *To All the Boys I’ve Loved Before* have also gained popularity (Cook, 2019). Aside from film, television shows like *Fresh Off the Boat*, *Killing Eve* and *Kim’s Convenience* have also become popular (Whitney, 2018). Each of these stories shows different portrayals of the Asian American identity, but the current author has found no published academic research examining what these new and more frequent portrayals are communicating to viewers.

**Asian and American identity vs. Asian American identity.** It must be addressed that there is a dichotomy between the Asian and American identity and how it is received by non-Asian American audiences. For example, regarding perceptions of Asian men and masculinity, there are different standards for Asian men and Asian American men. Song and Velding’s (2019) research findings discovered that survey participants differentiated Korean pop-bands’ (such as BTS, SHINEE, and BEAST) and the Western ideal of masculinity based on cultural gender norms. Participants acknowledged that gender representation is different according to

country. However, representations of Asian American men still consist of more stereotypical images (Proasianteam, 2019).

To provide context for the representation in the stories onscreen, the movies that show conflict between the Asian and American identity versus the Asian American experience need to be explained. *Crazy Rich Asians* illustrated the story of Rachel Chu, an Asian American woman who was born in the United States and visited her boyfriend Nick Young's wealthy family in Singapore (Lawson, 2018; Rooney, 2019; and Sims, 2018). Rachel found conflict with Nick's mother, Eleanor, because Rachel came from a poor, American background and thus had different values than the Young's background in old money and Chinese values regarding family and sacrifice. Though eventually proven wrong when Rachel sacrificed her relationship with Nick to provide him a peaceful life, Eleanor thought Rachel portrayed too much of the American ideal regarding selfish individualism and pursuit of happiness over sense of familial duty.

*The Farewell* illustrated the story of Billi Wang who had to come to terms with her grandmother Nai Nai's lung cancer, and her family's resistance in telling Nai Nai of her terminal illness (Debruge, 2019; Ide, 2019; Kaufman, 2019; and Lu, 2019). The Wang family all met in China to spend time with Nai Nai under the false pretense that Billi's cousin was getting married, and Billi found it difficult to hide her grief while her grandmother was blissfully oblivious. Billi was a Chinese-American woman who moved to the United States when she was a young girl and struggled with her family's decision to keep her grandmother in the dark about her condition. Though all of the family members' roots of origin stemmed from China, many of the family members had moved to different countries and cultures, specifically the United States and Japan. There was a clash of individualism versus collectivism, and though the United States and Japan valued individualism more than China, the family members ultimately had Chinese values of

protecting the family, even at the expense of their own feelings. Billi struggled with these contrasting values and also had to address her feelings of loss stemming from her immigration as a child—the confusion she felt growing up in a new country as a foreigner, and the disconnect she felt with her home country as an American.

Both of these movies discuss a different aspect of the Asian American experience, showing conflict between Asian traditions and culture and American ideals and individualism. There is a direct address of the dichotomy between the Asian and American identity (Chow & Li, 2019). Director of *The Farewell* Lulu Wang explained, “The first question people would ask was, ‘Is this a Chinese film or an American film?’” (para. 9). For both movies, the main characters are told that, despite their Chinese heritage, they are Americans, which makes them different. For the television shows *Fresh Off the Boat* and *Kim’s Convenience*, the characters are told that, though they are Americans (or in *Kim’s Convenience’s* case, Canadian), they are Asian, which makes them different. They are perpetually foreign, no matter where they call home. Though this tension of having to choose between two identities has been critiqued by many opinion writers, bloggers, and content creators (e.g., Joo, 2019; Fan, 2018; Fung Bros, 2019), there has been little to no academic literature to redefine the current general American perception of Asian Americans as likely influenced by entertainment media depictions.

**Opinions of current representation.** Many such writers are hopeful about the range of different portrayals currently shown, yet many also addressed their fears that this current fad of Asian American representation will result in another *Joy Luck Club* identity freeze—that these current pieces of media will be the only portrayals to represent the entire complexity of the Asian American identity. Though *Crazy Rich Asians* showed portrayals of handsome, desirable Asian men, and portrayals of Asian characters with socio-economic power in Singapore, it is just one

movie. It cannot hold the entirety of the Asian American experience on its shoulders.

Makalintal (2019) expressed concern that the new influx of Asian American representation would box the Asian American experience into one watered down phase, stating that “at best, it's proof that progress is slow” and “at worst, however, it reinforces boundaries around whose representation matters, and alienates people who are already cast aside within the ‘Asian’ category” (para. 6). The Fung Bros (2019) also pointed out in their video *10 PROBLEMS ASIANS ARE FACING RIGHT NOW in 2019!* (emphasis in original) that there remains a lack of diversity regarding the different ethnicities under the umbrella term of Asian American (with the automatic assumption that the term Asian American means Chinese American), and there is still a misrepresentation of Asian American men shown onscreen.

Joo (2019) critiqued Asian Americans for their lack of racial consciousness, asking “If we are to be something more, and not some hodgepodge of fictitious racist caricatures in the popular imagination — which is already rigged against us via centuries of deliberate erasure and dehumanizing stereotypes — who’s gonna ‘rep’ us but us?” (para. 3). Joo offered political movement and legislation as the solution. Asian Americans have done well in politics (Visalvanich, 2016), and the number of Asian American voters is rapidly rising (Ong, Ong & Ong, 2015); however, there is still need for more involvement to balance legislative representation and power. And though Asian American median income is higher than white median income (Martin & Nezelek 2014), Asian Americans are still perceived as having lower economic power than the Caucasian majority.

Though there are many Asian American opinions regarding their perception and representation, there have not been many outside perspectives from members of different ethnic groups, particularly scholarly research-based perspectives, regarding how Asians in new

entertainment media are currently being received, nor if the Asian American stereotype has shifted at all outside of their own specific descriptions of self-representation. In order to accurately receive and analyze how the representational images of entertainment media are being perceived, a method of media literacy is needed.

### **Past and Proposed Methods of Media Literacy**

Examining past methods of media literacy is vital to providing the original framework of critical media consumption. Past models can directly shape a newly proposed lens for applying media literacy to Asian American representation in entertainment media. Thus the following two sections will examine past conceptions of media literacy and define the parameters of the proposed theory-grounded lens for applying media literacy regarding Asian American representation in entertainment media.

#### *Past Methods of Media Literacy*

Media literacy is defined as “is the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create messages across a variety of contexts” (Livingstone, 2004, p.3). For this research proposal’s purposes, media literacy is considered specifically in regard to addressing representation in entertainment media such as film and television, because other media (individual accounts on YouTube, advertising, social media and individual representation in the news) do not share the same construction process of representing ideas and images as scripted films or shows (Kellner & Share, 2007). Another defining reason to focus on entertainment media representation is because entertainment media persuades and affects its audience through immersion in storylines, as described and predicted by narrative transportation theory (Green & Clark, 2013; Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010).

**Impact of Entertainment Media.** Narrative transportation theory as defined by Moyer-Gusé and Nabi “refers to the process by which an individual becomes immersed into a story, losing track of the real world as he or she experiences the unfolding events in the story” (p. 29). They explain this process through three factors: the individual identifies with a specific character in the story and loses self-awareness, they perceive similarities between themselves and the character’s attributes and values, and they experience parasocial interaction—meaning they have created a strong bond with the favorite character. Because narrative transportation creates such intense bonds between the audience and the show they are watching, entertainment has power to “change individuals’ beliefs about information conveyed implicitly or explicitly within the story” (Green & Clark, 2013, p. 478). Green and Clark also align social cognitive theory as defined by Bandura (1994) as a complementary persuasive tool of narrative transportation, because social cognitive theory asserts that audiences vicariously learn social behavior and consequences through watching others.

Individuals who consume a lot of television will believe televised reality is an accurate representation of the world (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986). When individuals get deeply involved with the story and characters in entertainment, they do not argue with or react to the narrative’s ideology or persuasive points as much as they would to an advertisement or other perceived direct attempt at persuasion (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010). They assume the media’s message is to entertain rather than persuade, and thus their perceptions of and reactions to the message’s intentions are less critical—their guards are down.

A reoccurring theme in the many critiques regarding Asian American representation is the call for teaching media literacy (e.g., Sun, Liberman, Butler, Lee & Webb, 2015). Though it is deemed crucial to develop an informed consumption of media, the current solution of teaching



media literacy is vague and too complex to succinctly utilize. Kellner and Share (2007) stated that media literacy needed to start in an “ideology critique and analyzing the politics of representation of crucial dimensions of gender, race, class, and sexuality” (p. 8). While that is a good overarching approach to consuming media, it does not offer specific examples as to what kind of representation would constitute further reflection. Further, introduction and exposure to this solution is ill-accessible to mass audiences.

**Media Literacy Methods.** To be comprehensively consuming media, Kellner and Share (2007) suggested these principles:

1. recognition of the construction of media and communication as a social process as opposed to accepting texts as isolated neutral or transparent conveyors of information;
2. some type of semiotic textual analysis that explores the languages, genres, codes, and conventions of the text;
3. an exploration of the role audiences play in actively negotiating meanings;
4. problematizing the process of representation to uncover and engage issues of ideology, power, and pleasure;
5. examination of the production and institutions that motivate and structure the media industries as corporate profit seeking businesses (p. 12).

While utilizing all of Kellner and Share’s media literacy principles would be ideal when interacting with race representation in media, teaching such a list to more than a handful of individuals is impractical. Rodesiler (2010) proposed a simpler method, utilizing the U.S. Army National Guard’s code of MAPS (mode, audience, purpose, and situation). While this method is shorter and remains comprehensive, its criteria are nonspecific, it requires the audience to already have an understanding of the MAPS code, and it does not provide a guide on how to apply this method successfully to the specific media content the audience is consuming. It also

does not provide specific examples or contextual moments in media that illustrate when media literacy should be applied.

*Proposed Lens for Media Literacy*

Specific examples that call for an application of a media literacy model can be defined in three proposed factors: assessing the situation (Mellor et al., 2001; Reece, 2019), the speaker (Turco, 2010; Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995), and the solution (Holloway, 2015).

**Situation.** Focusing on the situation in entertainment media means assessing the context of the story's message and/or environment. Mellor et al. (2001) asserted that representations of race in entertainment media have become ambiguous and vague because racial expressions are becoming socially unacceptable. However, individuals are still able to gauge whether a situation or story has racist overtones because of their situational and general knowledge of social behavior. Critical race theory asserts that racism and racial inequality is so ingrained into the structure of society (Reece, 2019), that it is difficult to conceptualize specific forms of racial inequality. To help audiences discern whether a story's message was racist in a less specific but still educational way, Essed (1991) created the following list of questions regarding discrimination of Black people: "Is this behavior acceptable; if this behavior is unacceptable, are there any acceptable excuses; if there are no acceptable excuses, did this behavior occur because you are Black; if the behavior occurred because you are Black, is this specific event excusable; if this event occurred because you are Black, and is not excusable, is it socially significant?" (Mellor et al., 2001, p. 476). If yes, the event was racist, and further evaluation of the racist behavior in the event would need to be analyzed. A similar set of reflective questions could be useful in the context of this study regarding Asian American represented situations in entertainment media.

**Speaker.** Analyzing the role of the speaker in entertainment media means assessing the context in which a character of color is being portrayed. In the past, many characters of color were put onscreen, the lone person of color among a sea of white characters, to meet diversity quotas—a practice known as tokenism (Wood, 2000). Tokenism as described by Kantor (1977) is “defining a token as a member of a small numeric minority (typically 15 percent or smaller) in an environment with a homogenous dominant group... any extreme minority will face this same situation” (Turco, 2010, p. 896). Essentially, a sole person of a minority group will be held up as the face of the entire group, expected to serve as an expert on all the nuances of the minority group’s experiences (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995). Tran (2015) playfully explained tokenism as a “Why Are You Here Syndrome” [video file], elucidating that, if a minority group member were lucky enough to be a side character instead of a background character, their existence onscreen would have to be justified in some racial stereotype (e.g. “Her parents own the local Thai restaurant”). Reflective questions regarding the speaker’s purpose might be as follows: is this character the only minority present; if this character is the only minority present, do they have a significant role; if their role is significant, does their role’s purpose seem to revolve around their ethnicity/ethnic background; if their purpose revolves their ethnicity/ethnic background, is this portrayal acceptable?

**Solution.** Assessing the solution in entertainment media essentially means analyzing the overarching purpose/ideology of story’s message (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010). Narrative transportation theory explains that audiences are sometimes unable to be critical about a story’s persuasive ideologies because they are too invested in individual storylines/characters to counterargue with points in the story that contradict their personal beliefs or values. Goossens, Beyers, Emmen, and van Aken, (2002) also stated that “the perception of invulnerability refers to

a belief that one is uniquely immune to negative consequences, regardless of risky behavior” (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010, p. 33). Individuals believe they are not vulnerable to persuasion, and thus do not recognize how a piece of entertainment media may affect them and do not question the main purpose of the story they are interacting with. For many cases of tokenism in entertainment media, the messages of movies or television episodes that feature token characters/tokenism themes of representation—called Very Special Episodes (Holloway, 2015)—the purpose of those stories is to educate. However, only one character is perceived as being the expert voice of the entire minority group’s experience, and thus the education of the specific social issue will not be able to capture all the nuances of the issue and the resulting misinformation may be accepted by viewers (Green & Clark, 2013). Reflective questions regarding the story’s purpose or message may be as follows: what was the defining lesson this story was trying to teach me; does this message align with my previously held beliefs/values (if so, am I questioning it, and if not, am I giving it unbiased consideration); and how is this piece of media affecting my beliefs (Owusu, 2010)?

These proposed examples of assessing the solution, the speaker, and the solution that require media literacy are simple and provide context to what examples may need to be analyzed. For the purposes of this research, this lens is specific to Asian American representation in entertainment media, but it is broad enough to potentially be applied in multiple settings. Essentially, they illuminate moments when individuals should critically analyze their interaction with a piece of entertainment media. Alison Bechdel created a test in 1985 that became popular in feminist critiques of film regarding interactions between women (Selisker, 2015). There were three simple criteria to meet her requirements: 1. it has to have at least two women in it, who 2. who talk to each other, about 3. something besides a man. While the Bechdel test has been

critiqued and more in-depth analysis has been suggested, it still remains an easily understood framework highlighting how male-dominant media depictions are. To partially replicate the simplicity and accessibility of the Bechdel test, the lens to critically consume media with Asian American representation may present questions that promote internal reflection addressing the story's situation, the speaker, and the solution.

## **Research Questions**

Given the above discussions of past perceptions of Asian Americans in American culture and its ties to past representation of Asian Americans in entertainment media, as well as limited knowledge of current media literacy levels in entertainment media, it is important to understand the current interaction with entertainment media and how it affects audience perceptions of Asian Americans. Thus, particularly influenced by Sun, Liberman, Butler, Lee and Webb's (2015) research and the proposed media literacy lens offered above:

RQ1a: How do young adults currently perceive Asian Americans in American culture?

RQ1b: How do young adults currently perceive Asian Americans in American entertainment media?

RQ2: How, if at all, are perceptions of depictions of Asian Americans in entertainment media related to perceptions of Asian Americans in American Culture?

RQ3: How, if at all, do young adults critically analyze the entertainment media they consume?

## Methods

The above literature review of Asian American representation offers that, while past entertainment media portrayals of Asian characters have been one-dimensional stereotypes of women being either fragile lotus blossoms or dragon ladies and men being either effeminate nerds or Kung Fu masters, the current portrayals of Asian characters are shifting to more contemporary images of the Asian American experience.

Considering the new influx of varied Asian American representation in entertainment media, how, if at all, is this shift of representations related to people's perceptions of Asian Americans? According to cultivation theory (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986), people tend to believe televised reality is similar, if not synonymous, to their world reality. That may influence how they perceive race and their own racial identity. Before detailing the specific way in which qualitative, empirical research methods will be employed to shed light on these ideas and answer the above research questions, it should first be addressed that this study has been heavily influenced by Sun's doctoral thesis in 2002 and Sun, Liberman, Butler, Lee, and Webb's extension of that research in 2015. Like the past studies, this research does not follow traditional media effects protocols in gauging attitudes before and after specific media exposure, because the change would have happened through past exposure to specific media (Sun, 2002). Instead, it focuses on exploring the currently held perceptions of its research participants regarding Asian American representation and the relationship between individuals and media influence.

As explained in the literature review, narrative transportation theory can be used to explain the level of persuasion the story's message has on an individual (Green & Clark, 2013; Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010). The story's message influences personal experiences, emotions,

and perceptions of self and of others. Given the exploratory nature of this research, IRB-approved qualitative research was used to explore the variables of individuals' perceptions of Asian American representation in entertainment media, and the individual's consumption of entertainment media. Because the landscape of these perceptions changes quickly, there is need for exploration in personal, in-depth descriptions of individual experiences and perceptions to fully examine nuanced social and cultural phenomena, rather than a quantitative assessment of relationships between variables. To explore these elements, 17 students participated in in-depth interviews and focus groups. Based on students' self-reported identification, twelve of the students were Caucasian, two of the students were Latino, one student was Black, and two international students were from Saudi Arabia. Twelve of these students identified as male and six of these students identified as female.

### *In-depth Interviews and Focus Groups*

Marshall and Rossman (2011) explained that qualitative research is “a broad approach to the study of social phenomena. Its various genres are naturalistic, interpretive, and increasingly critical, and they typically draw on multiple methods of inquiry” (p. 3). For this study's purposes, the methods of inquiry were in-depth interviews and focus groups. The rationale for utilizing both in-depth interviews and focus groups was that people interact with one-on-one scenarios differently than they do in groups of their peers, yet both scenarios have advantages and disadvantages (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

In-depth response interviews can clarify an individual's meanings of common concepts/opinions, distinguish decisive elements of an expressed opinion, determine what influences a person to form an opinion/behavior, classify complex attitude patterns, and help the

researcher understand the interpretations that people attribute to their motivations to act (Lazarsfeld, 1944). Essentially, one-on-one in-depth respondent interviews can help determine how individuals express their views, construe their actions, and conceptualize their life world regarding Asian American representation in media.

Focus groups, unlike in-depth interviews, can utilize the “group effect” (Carey, 1994). This allows people to create a fund of shared experiences, which leads the conversation to link the topics or expressions on top of each other in an understandable and easily accessible manner. Asian American representation in media will likely affect participants differently, so homogenous sampling by race may reduce clashing opinions and experiences. Complementary interactions are ideal (Kitzinger, 1994), so participants can add their own observations, experiences and vernacular (slang, jokes, and anecdotes) and feel that they can speak freely about potentially sensitive subjects.

The rationale behind conducting in-depth interviews before and after focus groups was because these elements lead into each other, allowing time to determine if there are any clear differences between individual opinions and group opinions.

## **Focus Groups**

### *Sampling*

The participants for this study were undergraduate students at West Virginia University. In Sun’s research (2002), the participants were pulled from the University of Massachusetts in Amherst (also known as UMass Amherst) and the University of Massachusetts in Boston (also known as UMB). The Asian undergraduate student population of UMass Amherst was 10 percent (UMass, 2018), and the Asian undergraduate student population of UMB was 12.4 percent (UMB, 2019), which is significantly higher than West Virginia University’s Asian



undergraduate student population of 1.79 percent (DataUSA, 2016). This stark contrast of population offers insight to the influence the representation of Asian Americans in media may have. That is, the population's majority at West Virginia University likely formed most of their perceptions of Asian Americans from interactions with Asian American images through entertainment media, rather than through personal interaction with Asian Americans (Mellor, Bynon, Maller, Cleary, Hamilton, & Watson, 2001).

Undergraduate students in particular offered interesting perspectives because many have gained independence physically and psychology from the opinions and perspectives of their old household. Most undergraduate students were also within the age-range of Generation Z (Seymour, 2019), more diverse in ethnicity, more accepting of beliefs and lifestyles that stray from the norm and are more critical of the technology they use and the media they consume. They illustrate where the future is heading in terms of cultural societal norms. West Virginia University undergraduate students are the most accessible research subjects, but because college students are a specific group of ages and economic status, and because of the convenience and snowball sampling methods, the application and transferability of this study's potential findings to the population of WVU students, to college students in general, or to the general public will need to be critically examined.

To recruit West Virginia University undergraduate students, I reached out to five professors from Journalism, Sociology, Theatre, and Women and Gender Studies departments, asking to either recruit participants before or after class lecture, as well as providing the professors a recruitment email they could forward to their class list (a professor from the Women and Gender Studies department also sent the email to fellow colleagues, though the exact number is unclear). I was able to recruit from Sociology and Women and Gender Studies classes.

I also reached out through email to eight presidents of student organizations using the contact information from WVUEngage, asking to forward a recruitment email to the organization's list. Such organizations include the following: Mirage, HerCampus, PRSSA, Center for Black Culture and Research, WVU's National Association of Black Journalists, WVU Film Club, WVU Chinese Club, and WVU Chinese Students and Scholars Association.

Through WVUEngage (a system that lists all student organizations and provides email addresses to ensure connection), social media, and mutual friends, I sent messages to sororities and fraternities, asking to forward a recruitment email to fellow sorority/fraternity members from the following houses: Pi Beta Phi, Alpha Epsilon Pi, and Sigma Alpha Iota International Music Fraternity. In addition, I utilized social media through Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat, both posting the recruitment flyer on stories and timelines, as well as direct messaging friends with the recruitment flyer and asking them to share it on their stories and with their friends as well. I also disseminated paper copies of the flyers on bulletin boards in several buildings on campus (after receiving permission to do so) and asked several friends to spread flyers out to interested students within theatre and dance departments.

To determine where to situate participants regarding focus groups or interviews, there was a 1-3 minute online screener survey (see Appendix G) that asked participants about their age, year in school, gender identity, ethnicity, and their opinions about the American image of Asian Americans. With regard to focus group composition, I wanted to have a diverse set of opinions, categorized of Caucasian, Asian American and Black Americans in separate groups which would be best to reduce issues like hegemony, "problematic silence/speech" (Hollander, 2004) and social conformity. The purpose of these focus groups was to gauge the general beliefs and opinions regarding Asian American representation in media without any prerequisite

prompting (e.g. screening if they have seen a current, all-Asian casted movie). A lack of prerequisite prompting could assist in determining whether there was a significant rise in awareness of Asian American representation in entertainment media.

### *Sampling Limitations*

A limitation of this study was that there was not enough diversity among those who participated to fulfill the proposed sampling for focus groups. There were two focus groups of three and four Caucasian participants, respectively, and a focus group that transformed into an in-depth interview with a Black-American student because he was the only participant who showed up to the focus group research session. Other focus groups with intended homogenous sampling of Asian American participants and non-Asian American and non-white participants were canceled due to lack of registrants.

In addition, after the initial focus groups and in-depth interviews were conducted, West Virginia University's campus was closed due to a global pandemic prompted by the novel coronavirus COVID-19, and thus further recruitment was prohibitive. Though the range of diversity in participants was limited, there may be more evidence of Asian American representation influencing the perception of Asian Americans in American culture because many of the participants grew up with Asian Americans only in periphery and thus primarily interacted with the representation (or lack thereof) of Asian Americans through entertainment media. The homogeneity of Caucasian American participants is nonetheless beneficial in increasing knowledge of this study's topics as they relate to the majority group. Indeed, as data shows in the results section below, there is evidence that even if representation does not personally affect individuals, diversity adds nuance to a story, adds enjoyment of the piece of media, and also normalizes and widens perception of diversity in American society.

### *Procedure*

Lindlof and Taylor (2011) instructed that the best size for a focus group is 6-12 people, but it would be beneficial to err on the smaller side to reduce “problematic silence/speech” (Hollander, 2004), where participants will either not say anything or say things they do not believe or experience because of the raised emotional climate a mixed focus group might have. In Sun’s 2002 study, the ideal number for focus group participants was four, because “more than six members in a group does not give everyone enough chance to speak” (p. 76-77). The same rationale was used for this study as well.

For the time structure of the focus groups, each session ran about 45 minutes, within the realm of 60 minutes as is desirable in communication research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). The moderator guide focused on three main topics and variables: current perceptions of Asian Americans, current perceptions of Asian American representation in entertainment media, and participants’ current knowledge and use of media literacy regarding entertainment media content. Because I am Asian American I did not conduct these focus groups in effort to reduce influencing the participants’ answers. Instead, a Caucasian individual outside of this study’s committee conducted the Caucasian focus groups, and a Black-American individual outside of this study’s committee was trained to conduct the related focus group but due to no-shows ended up conducting an in-person interview with a Black-American student.

The beginning of the focus group consisted of the moderator’s introduction guide (see Appendix A), a signing of consent form (see Appendix B), and an ice-breaker asking participants to provide their name, year in college, and their major. The discussion was begun by talking about the brief survey they had filled out prior (see Appendix G), and then the guide of questions (see Appendix C) was administered. While some further (optional) prompting/probing questions

were included in the guide, some flexibility was maintained so the participants could answer questions fully and organically and the researcher could remain responsive to the discussion's natural twists and turns (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). All focus group sessions were recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim for analysis. All resulting quotes were transcribed verbatim, but some hesitant verbosity was removed for purposes of readability.

### *Instrument*

This focus group moderator's guide (see Appendix C) addressed three variables: perceptions of Asian Americans in real-world life, perceptions of Asian American representation in entertainment media, and how people perceive the social issues (i.e. race, gender, sexuality, etc.) that appear in media content. Each section ran from 14 to 16 minutes of discussion, allowing focus on whichever question garnered the most involvement. Vital questions were bolded, and the questions that could be cut for time were italicized.

These sections and questions were structured to introduce participants into a mindset that focuses on Asian American perceptions, allowing them to provide images of how they perceived Asian Americans and then how society as a whole viewed Asian Americans. This could allow participants to see how those perceptions either align with or contradict the other and moved the discussion to how Asian Americans are portrayed in entertainment media. As participants critically examined their recalled interactions with these pieces of media, it allowed for discussion of current feelings/perceptions of these images of Asian American representation and primed them for the next section regarding their levels of media literacy regarding social issues they have interacted with in current entertainment media. This section asked for participants to recall specific examples regarding the representation (or lack thereof) of social issues (i.e. race, gender, sexuality, etc.) and critically examine and discuss the effects that content had on their

experience and interaction with entertainment media. There were additional follow-up questions for further development of a topic, yet there remained a flexibility of discussion to maintain an organic flow of conversation.

### *Analysis*

Because this research was influenced by and intended to expand on Sun's research from 2002 and Sun et. al's research from 2015, yet also sought to uncover shifting perceptions not yet captured in the literature, a two-pronged analysis approach using deductive and inductive methods was warranted. Inductively, theory was pulled from the data collected, so there needed to be an openness to the data and analysis, a continuously reflexive back-and-forth of collecting and rearranging of data into codes, categories, and themes. Deductively, prior research findings, particularly Sun (2002) and Sun et al. (2015) along with the proposed media literacy model provided above created the lenses that were compared and contrasted to the interpreted themes from new data.

The inductive research approach used grounded theory as a methodology, specifically in the symbolic interactionism tradition (Chun Tie, Birks, & Francis, 2019), or "the subjective meaning people place on objects, behaviours or events based on what they believe is true" (p. 2). This approach used open, axial, and selective coding (Saldaña, 2016), generating theory from the data itself and focusing on explicating the contexts, conditions, interactions, and consequences of the current portrayals of Asian American representation in entertainment media.

The deductive research approach applied thematic analysis to the interpreted data, comparing and contrasting the implicit and explicit ideas/themes of the past data with current data (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). As noted in the literature review, there are specified themes regarding Asian American perceptions from Sun's previous research in 2002, primarily

the Model Minority type taking prevalence (e.g. descriptions like smart, nerdy, academically successful), along with other perceptions of Asian American women being seen as overly fetishized and submissive, and Asian American men being seen as nerdy and effeminate. Data was examined to determine the extent to which it confirmed or diverged from Sun's original data, noting any anomalies (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Thematic analysis was useful in defining current levels and applicable possibilities of media literacy as well, comparing and contrasting the collected data with principles of media literacy regarding what is being presented, who is presenting it, and why it is being presented, which is reflective of the proposed media lens that highlights the situation, speaker, and solution.

### **In-Depth Interviews**

#### *Sampling*

The rationale for selecting college undergraduate students at West Virginia University as in-depth interview participants is similar to the rationale regarding focus group participant selection. However, I used snowball sampling for the in-depth interviews, using the criteria of familiarity with content (i.e. having seen a current, all-Asian casted movie such as *Crazy Rich Asians* or *The Farewell*) to collect informed data on how those influences have shaped participants' knowledge of Asian American representation in media and how it affects their life world. It was necessary for participants to have past experience/familiarity with Asian American represented content, because while focus groups offer insight to the more general perspective regarding Asian American representation, in-depth interviews allowed specific experiences and personal reflections on the (perceived) effects of that content.

#### *Sampling Limitations*

A limitation of this study was that there were three participants who had not seen any of the selected pieces of Asian American representation content (as listed in Appendix G), so the focus group guide of questions was used for those who had no prior experience with listed Asian American images. Nine interviews with five Caucasian students, two Latino-American students, and two international students from Saudi Arabia were conducted over the phone. After the initial focus groups and in-depth interviews were conducted, West Virginia University's campus was closed due to COVID-19, and thus further recruitment was prohibited. Though the range of diversity in participants was limited, there may be more evidence of Asian American representation influencing the perception of Asian Americans in American culture because many of the participants grew up with Asian Americans only in periphery and thus primarily interacted with the representation (or lack thereof) of Asian Americans through entertainment media. The homogeneity of Caucasian American participants may be beneficial, however, because the data shows evidence that even if representation does not personally affect individuals, the diversity adds nuance to a story, adds enjoyment of the piece of media, and also normalizes and widens perception of diversity in American society.

### *Procedure*

The procedure of in-depth interviews is similar to the procedure of focus groups—each session did not go over 60 minutes (most were around 18-25 minutes long), and the interview guide focused on three main topics and variables: current perceptions of Asian Americans, current perceptions of Asian American representation in entertainment media, and participants' current knowledge and use of media literacy regarding entertainment media content—although for the interviews the questions and flexibility for follow-ups allowed for a deeper investigation into individual experiences, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.



Before the interview was conducted, participants were asked to email a signed consent form (see Appendix B), then the beginning of the interview consist of an introduction script (see Appendix D), and an ice-breaker asking participants to provide their name, year in college, and their major. The discussion was begun by talking about the brief survey participants were asked to fill out (see Appendix G), and then the guide of questions (see Appendix E) was administered.

Since this was a one-on-one interaction, the discussion had a shorter, more flexible conversation, and while some further prompting/probing questions were included in the guide, the interview developed a conversational partnership, using empathy and professional reciprocity to build trust and allow opportunities for answers of rich description and personal experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

### *Instrument*

The interview guide of questions (see Appendix E) was similar to the focus group guide and addresses the same three variables: perceptions of Asian Americans in real world life, perceptions of Asian American representation in entertainment media (interviews allow for more specific, individual experiences), and how people perceive the social issues (i.e. race, gender, sexuality, etc.) that appear in media content. Each section ran from 7-9 minutes of discussion, allowing focus on whichever question garners the most involvement. Vital questions were bolded, and the questions that could be cut for time were italicized. No questions were skipped in these interviews.

A main variance in relation to the focus group's procedure was that for the second section regarding Asian American representation in entertainment media, participants were asked to recall specific pieces of media content featuring Asian American casts (i.e. *Crazy Rich Asians*, *The Farewell*, *Fresh Off the Boat*, etc.), and critically examine their recalled interactions with

these pieces of media. This allowed for participants to discuss their current feelings/perceptions of these images of Asian American representation, how that has affected them, and primed them for the next section regarding their levels of media literacy regarding social issues they have interacted with in current entertainment media. There were additional follow-up questions for further development of a topic and a flexibility of discussion remained to maintain an organic flow of conversation. All in-depth interview sessions were recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim for analysis. All resulting quotes were transcribed verbatim, but some hesitant verbosity was removed for purposes of readability.

### *Analysis*

The two-pronged approach of inductive and deductive methods used to analyze the collected data from the in-depth interviews was similar to the focus group data analysis as described earlier. The researcher noted that there could be some relevant differences in data regarding specific encounters with media content, because the participant's individual anecdotes and conversation were allowed more time and depth than possible in a group setting.

### *Ethical and political considerations*

This research has ethical and political considerations regarding race and the power imbalance that comes with it. For some participants, talking about race and ethnicity may be a personal topic. I collected their opinions firsthand in a friendly and noncontentious manner over the phone, trying to create mutual trust in our interactions so my participants felt comfortable and able to have an open dialogue and willingness to collaborate (Brooks, 2006). I removed myself as focus group moderator to attempt to control influence over participant answers, and established with the focus group moderators that I chose to replace me that their role as researcher in focus groups was observer-as-participant (Gold, 1958), simultaneously maintaining

professional detachment and comfortable familiarity with participants (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2000). This self-distance allowed me to advance the information I was seeking without being overly disruptive to participants' interaction and opinions. My role as researcher regarding in-depth interviews functioned differently because I actively reciprocated in conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), rather performing as the passive observer (Schwartz & Schwartz, 1955). However, the interviews were conducted over the phone so participants were not reminded of my race and could not see my response to their words.

My own influence/fieldworker bias on participants must also be addressed. I am an adopted, Asian American woman with Caucasian parents, so my experiences and approaches to Asian American representation may vary from other participants of different ethnicities, as well as other experiences to gender, socio-economic status and cultural differences. To minimize researcher bias, I attempted to reduce my personal influence to participant bias, to maintain reflexivity and case myself the same as I case other scenes of study and consider the possible consequences of my identity (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) and to remain as noninvasive and professional as possible (Given, 2008).

### **Participants**

By recruiting participants through visiting classes and snowball sampling, 17 students participated in in-depth interviews and focus groups. Table 1 depicts participants' self-reported race/ethnicity and gender identity with notations for year in school whether they participated in focus groups or interviews.

Table 1

*Number of Participants in Focus Groups and In-Depth Interviews*

Participants	Caucasian	Hispanic/Latino	Black	International (Saudi Arabia)	Total
	Female* (F)	Male** (Sr)	Male**(F)	Female**(J)	
	Female*(Sp)	Male**(F)		Male** (F)	
	Female*(F)				
	Male* (Sp)				
	Female*(Sr)				
	Male* (F)				
	Male*(F)				
	Female**(F)				
	Male**(Sp)				
	Male**(F)				
	Male**(F)				
	Male**(F)				
Female	5			1	6
Male	7	2	1	1	11
Total	12	2	1	2	17

*Note.* \*references focus group participants, \*\*references in-depth interview participants, (F) references Freshman, (Sp) references Sophomore, (J) references Junior, (Sr) references Senior

## **Results**

The data collected from in-depth interviews and focus groups found several recurring themes of relevance regarding perceptions of Asian Americans in American culture, perceptions of Asian American representation in entertainment media, relation between Asian American representation in entertainment media and perceptions of Asian Americans in American culture, as well as levels of media literacy regarding entertainment media (i.e., research questions 1-3, respectively). As will be described below, the theme regarding perceptions of Asian Americans in American culture is that participants still perceive Asian Americans as the Model Minority, but there is a new tendency to question the validity of ethnic stereotypes. The theme regarding perceptions of Asian American representation in entertainment is that participants do not easily recall Asian American representation, but they welcome diversity in stories and roles. Themes regarding relation between Asian American representation in entertainment media and perceptions of Asian Americans in American culture are that participants recognize that the Model Minority is not accurate to most Asian American individuals; however, most were only able to recall stereotypical representations. The themes regarding levels of media literacy regarding entertainment media are that participants recognized social issues being shown in entertainment media, but most did not critically analyze how those issues were being portrayed and did not believe those portrayals affected their perceptions of reality.

### **Perceptions of Asian Americans in American culture**

Research question 1a asked: How do participants currently perceive Asian Americans in American culture? Analyses revealed that participants (i.e., sampled college students) who are not of Asian American ethnicity continue to perceive Asian Americans as the Model Minority, but also uncovered a new tendency to question the validity of ethnic stereotypes.

*Prevailing perceptions.* Deductive coding revealed that several elements of the Model Minority (quiet, hardworking, smart) remain a prevailing perception of Asian Americans. In the screener survey all participants took before being interviewed, there was a question asking to describe the American image for Asian Americans and nearly every answer highlighted intelligence. When asked to reflect on that answer in focus groups or in-depth interviews, participants agreed that they believed the image was commonly held to be true because of how Asian Americans are raised and how they are often seen having careers in STEM fields or becoming doctors. A Caucasian male freshman in a focus group explained the belief in this stereotype as, “I think it derives off of the Chinese view of education being more important” and a Caucasian male freshman in a different focus group said, “I feel like when you hear about Asian women—especially moms—they really push their kids to do well in school, maybe harder than my parents did.”

*Shifting belief in accuracy of Asian American perception.* Deductively, coding showed there was new, mixed nuance to how people viewed the validity of the perception that Asian Americans are seen as the stereotype of the Model Minority (quiet, hardworking, and smart). When asked if they personally thought that stereotype was an accurate representation of Asian Americans, the majority of participants said they did not think it was accurate, either because of their personal interactions with Asian Americans differed from the stereotype or because they felt that stereotypes can only represent a small handful of individuals. A Caucasian female freshman in a focus group said, “I think that all stereotypes might be a handful of individuals at best, but most stereotypes are stereotypes. They're not accurate.”

A Caucasian male freshman in the same focus group stated,

I don't really think of them [Asian Americans] being any different than a normal American. I see them very similar because if you look at regular Americans, we may be very diverse but if you split into hair color and stuff, we have the same mutations that they would.

While this supports a precedent that “regular Americans” are Caucasian Americans, the student was trying to explain why he did not think the Model Minority was accurate.

For personal interaction with Asian Americans, a Latino male freshman stated in an in-depth interview,

I was really good friends with them actually. One was like my best friend—my wrestling partner all through high school. I experienced their culture firsthand. I'd go over at their house and meet their parents and have relationships with them and their siblings. It's like the idea of the stereotypes is not that at all.

A few participants had only grown up in a Caucasian environment or experienced growing up with Asian Americans in periphery and felt that they did not have enough information to think the stereotype was true or false. A Caucasian female freshman in a focus group explained her disbelief of the stereotype, stating, “I don't have any studies that show this—that statistically they perform better in math or based on accident reports they're a lot worse at driving. I don't have anything that says that so therefore I'm just—I don't [believe the stereotype].”

Many participants did not personally agree with the Asian American stereotype because they did not believe that any stereotypes were accurate to reality. In an in-depth interview, a Caucasian male freshman explained this as,

I'm a strong believer in stereotypes being false. I think our stereotypes are affected by the lens of the stations that come to the United States. The stereotypes we create in the

United States are made from minority—the stereotypes we have are the ones that are made from the few people that come here, and then I think they usually come here for a what—educational purposes, so that's probably where the nerdy lens comes in. We're affected by what we see and even more so what we hear. I don't think they're very subjective and they're not at all accurate representation of what Asians are actually like.

To recap, research question 1a asked how participants perceive Asian Americans in American culture, and data shows that while the Model Minority is still prevalent in young adult perceptions, there is also flexibility of Asian American perception based on personal interaction and questioned validity of stereotype.

### **Perceptions of Asian American representation**

Research question 1b asked: How do participants currently perceive Asian Americans in American entertainment media? Analyses revealed that participants (i.e., sampled college students) who are not of Asian American ethnicity do not easily recall Asian American representation, but they welcome diversity in stories and roles.

*Invisibility of Asian roles.* Inductive coding revealed a pattern of inability to easily recall Asian roles onscreen. For many participants, the initial prompt to think of Asian characters they had seen on screen when they were growing up stumped them. When trying to recall any Asian American characters in television, a Caucasian male freshman in an in-depth interview said, “I'm trying to think... I don't... not off the top of my head. I mean I've seen a million different TV shows so it's hard to get all Black off the top of my head. I don't think I can think of anyone.”

The easiest to recall were *Mulan*, Jake from *Jake Long: the American Dragon*, and London Tipton from *The Suite Life of Zack & Cody*. Many participants found it surprising how difficult it was to remember other Asian characters, a Caucasian female freshman in a focus



group commenting, “The fact that we had to think *this* hard, in regard to how many hours we've spent watching TV, is not reality.”

When probed, several participants reflected the reasons that it took them so long to remember Asian characters were because many Asian roles were small, or there were not a lot of Asian actors out there. A Caucasian female sophomore in a focus group said, “It's like—they have to be in there. We just probably—they probably didn't have big enough roles to remember them.” Some felt the reason they could not remember Asian characters was because they paid more attention to the story than the actors, one Caucasian male freshman in an in-depth interview saying, “I never really paid attention to any actors anyway.” In an in-depth interview, Caucasian male freshman explained how this absence affected his perception, stating,

I think it definitely affects my perception of how I live and how everybody lives just in our society. But I don't necessarily think that it does it in like a conscious way. I think it's more of a subconscious thing that I was just like, ‘No that's like kind of just how it was,’ and so I don't even really think about it. It definitely has an effect just on the view that if I don't see them in TV necessarily or movies growing up a lot then I'm more likely to think of them as a minority rather than the people that are represented in all those movies and stuff like that. So I think it's more of a subconscious thing in the way it affects me and other people as well.

In contrast, when asked about seeing Asian American representation when growing up, a Black male freshman in an in-depth interview recalled several movies with Asian American representation, such as *Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle* and Ken Jeong's character from *The Hangover*. He also noticed how diversity was portrayed in kids' television shows, stating,

On 'Ed, Edd & Eddy' There's a character named Ralph—something like that. He was like a Middle East character and even in the show they had the stereotype, 'So he's a farmer. He has goats. Does this, does that.' And I feel like that's one character that I saw back then even. Even if you look at the very first power rangers—the black ranger was Black, the yellow ranger was Asian, and I'm pretty sure the red ranger was Native American. Even seeing those, you could see the subtle things that they put in the shows.

*Growth in diversity.* While representation in the past was difficult to remember for the majority, many participants noted that there seems to be a growth in the current diversity of Asian American representation, gaining in quantity of roles and quality of screen time for Asian characters. A Caucasian male sophomore said in an in-depth interview, “Whether it's being pushed because it's politically correct or it's just a coincidence of change, I definitely think the representation has been way more positive now rather than, you know, racist undertones way back then.” The movie *Parasite* was often referenced as an example of new Asian stories becoming popular. Many welcomed this change because they felt that having a wider, more diverse range of stories being told led to more interesting movies in general, even if they were not personally affected or invested in Asian American representation. One Caucasian male freshman said in an in-depth interview,

I don't really have a strong preference of who is represented in TV or films that usually isn't what affects whether I watch them but I feel like with success with movies like that, there's no reason that there shouldn't be more representation in film.

To conclude this section, research question 1b asked how participants perceive Asian Americans in American entertainment media, and data reveals that participants had a hard time

remembering Asian American roles in American entertainment media, but they perceived that Asian American representation was growing and they welcomed it.

### **Relation between perception of Asian American representation in entertainment media and perception of Asian Americans in American culture**

Research question 2 asked: How, if at all, are perceptions of depictions of Asian Americans in entertainment media related to perceptions of Asian Americans in American Culture? Analyses revealed that participants (i.e., sampled college students) who are not of Asian American ethnicity recognize that the Model Minority is not accurate to most Asian American individuals; however, most were only able to recall stereotypical representations.

#### *Conflicting beliefs of the relationship between entertainment media and perceptions.*

Inductive coding revealed two conflicting patterns that arose in the data in the past two sections—that participants were not noticing the impact of Asian roles or how Asian people are portrayed in current entertainment media roles, but they were aware that the commonly held stereotype of the Model Minority is not accurate to most Asian American individuals. Regarding the representation in the past that participants watched growing up, many of them felt that the roles they remembered watching were stereotypical, showing Asian men as nerdy or karate masters like Jackie Chan, and could not recall any female Asian roles aside from Mulan and London Tipton. A Caucasian female sophomore in a focus group said, “Literally the only... I can't think of TV shows I watched as a kid. But I just keep thinking of *The Hangover* with Jackie Chan\*.” (\*Note: Ken Jeong acted in *The Hangover*, not Jackie Chan).

For current representation, participants noticed that diversity was shifting but most were not able to recall many specific examples. When asked if this representation affected their views of Asian Americans, there was a divide of some participants believing that it did affect their

perceptions and some believing that it did not. In an in-depth interview, a Caucasian male freshman believed both statements were true and stated,

Yes, to some extent but at the same time I think there's a difference between reality and what you see on TV, and so while TV does have a huge influence on the way that I view things, I think at the same time even like going back to Crazy Rich Asians, I can take that with a grain of salt because I know it is just a movie. You know what I mean so it's not like that isn't like my defined perceptive view of Asians. But I think it definitely has a role.

To recap, research question 2 asked if there was a relation between perceptions of Asian American representation in entertainment media and perceptions of Asian Americans in American culture, and data shows that participants do not believe the stereotype of the Model Minority is accurate to Asian Americans but they also only remember stereotypical portrayals of Asian Americans in entertainment media.

### **Current levels of media literacy regarding entertainment media**

Research 3 asked: How, if at all, do participants critically analyze the entertainment media they consume? Analyses found that participants (i.e. sampled college students) who are not of Asian American ethnicity recognized social issues being shown in entertainment media, yet most did not critically analyze how those issues were being portrayed and did not believe those portrayals affected their perceptions of reality.

*Situation.* Deductively, the codes regarding the situation gauged ability to recognize the situations when entertainment media showed social issues (like race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.), and whether or not the portrayal of these issues was acceptable. Most participants could recognize when they were purposefully being shown these issues; however, it was easier for

them to notice queer characters and queer issues more than racial issues. A Latino male freshman in an in-depth interview said, “I feel like there's more sexuality and what type of person you are—what attracts to you. I think there's more of that now than there was in the past.”

Though they could generally recognize that social issues were being shown more than they had in the past, participants could not easily recall specific characters or current examples of these portrayals of issues being shown (aside from in advertisements, where they are already aware that there is persuasion in the imagery and overall message). Some believed the portrayals of issues were acceptable because entertainment media was trying to normalize the images (like same-sex couples) or because they believed it was accurate to real life because they have seen similar images in real life. A Caucasian male freshman explained this in an in-depth interview as,

I would say I see it [social issues] more in commercials than anything. Especially with homosexuality. You can see, there'll be commercials—It could be like a Tide commercial or something and it's the head of the household, these two women or even with interracial relationships where it's an Asian woman and a black man. So I would say it's little subtle statements like that. There are more things I notice than anything... I grew up in a generation where having—if somebody has two moms or two dads, it's not that uncommon. Or if they have a Black father and an Asian mother, or a white father and a Black mother, it's just not that uncommon. So it doesn't really affect me in any way.

Others believed the portrayals of issues were inaccurate because the images seemed exaggerated for the story, or because there was only one side of the issue being illustrated. A Caucasian male freshman said in an in-depth interview, “The whole point of media is to give views and attention, so a lot of times a lot of these stories or issues are very exaggerated to get reactions from the

public.” Many participants believed that issues were accurate or inaccurate depending on context. In an in-depth interview, Black male freshman explained it as,

A lot of times, they'll focus on one part of the issue but won't focus on the whole issue.

So I mean, they had their moments where they do a good job of portraying the issue, but a lot of times there's just a lot of things that just go unnoticed. Just some scene that should get the media's attention. But it's not where the money is, so the media doesn't go there.

*Speaker.* Deductively, the codes regarding the speaker focused on who was speaking about the issue, if the speaker was a token character, and was the portrayal of that character acceptable. The participants who noticed queer issues noticed stereotype (like gay men being portrayed as feminine), and most could only think about the top three previously listed Asian characters regarding Asian diversity (Mulan, Jake Long, and Brenda Song) or the stereotype of Asians being portrayed as doctors. Caucasian male freshman in an in-depth interview stated, “I should say that when I see them [Asian Americans] on TV they're usually wealthy or doctors. So I guess it does affect my vision towards that.”

For queer issues, participants thought the portrayal was acceptable because the content was trying to normalize those images. A Latino male freshman explained this in an in-depth interview as, “I feel like this is letting people know that everything is going to be okay. If they open up about themselves, others don't have to hide behind closed doors.”

*Solution.* Deductively, the codes regarding the solution focused on what the story was trying to teach its audience, if the message's ideology aligned with previously held beliefs, and how that message's ideology affected those beliefs. Many participants recognized the general idea that entertainment media was showing them diverse images to normalize those images and ideas, but many did not question the images further than that. A Saudi-Arabian female junior

said in an in-depth interview, “They're sending a message to the people watching that you should respect that.”

They thought the images aligned with their previously held beliefs in welcoming diversity, though some had some ambivalence, focusing more on story than casting. Many of the participants felt that watching the portrayals of these social issues did not affect their perception of real life or challenge their previously held beliefs because they either already agreed with the ideas or they recognized that movies and television were not reality because they were exaggerated, one-sided, and many Caucasian participants felt that these issues did not reflect their personal reality. A Caucasian female freshman in a focus group said,

It's important that they bring up to stuff like that but it doesn't affect me in the same way it affects other people. I'm White, straight. Those things don't affect me—I don't have an extreme emotional tie with it. But seeing how it affects other people still breaks your heart because you're a decent human being and it's important that you bring them up for those so it doesn't suck.

That being said, many participants, even those who believed the way entertainment media portrayed social issues was accurate to real life, felt that representation could still be shown more realistically (without exaggeration) or given more time to fully delve into topics in a multifaceted way without trying to fix everything right away or dropping the topic for convenience of plot. When asked if there was something he would change about representation if he was able to, a Caucasian male freshman said in an in-depth interview,

I personally believe in equal representation for all peoples, all races, everything. I think if we're going to live in a world and coexist, then everybody should be a part of the world. And I feel like that part should be equally distributed.

To recap, research question 3 asked how participants critically analyze the entertainment media they consume, and data reveals that participants were aware of social issues being shown in entertainment media; however, they did not critically analyze the images they were being shown in depth and they also did not believe the images affected the way they perceived real life.

## **Discussion**

According to the results of this study, diverse representation of Asian Americans is growing and welcomed but is not believed to be personally influential to an individual's perception of their reality. The Model Minority stereotype is still prevalent in entertainment media and a commonly held opinion of the general public, but there is flexibility in the accuracy of that perception based on individuals' experiences and interactions with Asian Americans in real life.

*Gently shifting perceptions of Asian Americans.* The themes of the Model Minority from Sun's (2002) and Sun, et. al.'s (2015) research are prevalent in the currently held opinions of the general American public. Though participants were hesitant to agree with the stereotype, they often described the Asian Americans as smart and hardworking. However, many participants also talked about different factors when discussing the Asian Americans they had known growing up. From personal experience, new factors came into play, such as playing sports together, spending time together outside of academic environments, and appearing to be just like "regular Americans." That sets the precedent that "regular American" is synonymous with Caucasian Americans, but participants did not seem to alienate Asian Americans as foreign, and derogatory terms like "nerdy" or "effeminate" were used much less as descriptors than in Sun's previous study. Though perceptions of Asian Americans are changing, the shift is slow. In addition to "regular Americans" being synonymous with White, there are other race-based



microaggressions (Derald Wing Sue, 2008) and examples of White privilege (McIntosh, 2003) present, specifically how any male Asian actor can be interchangeable with Jackie Chan (such as Ken Jeong's character in *The Hangover*), as well as the invisibility of Asian roles and assuming it was because there were not enough Asian actors out there, rather than the fact that movies are often whitewashed and erase Asian roles (Jeunesse, 2018). However, non-Caucasian participants seemed to notice Asian American representation more and paid more attention to how they were being portrayed, because they knew from personal experience that stereotypes shown in entertainment media are not accurate to minorities.

*Rise in Asian diversity in entertainment media.* Many participants could remember seeing the Model Minority stereotype being portrayed as Asian men playing doctors or computer hackers in the past, or they were unable to recall Asian roles they had seen growing up, but they were starting to notice Asian actors currently playing less stereotypical roles and being seen more onscreen for both primary and background character roles. The most notable roles and stories came from movies like *Crazy Rich Asians*, *To All the Boys I've Loved Before*, and *Always Be My Maybe*. The foreign Korean film *Parasite* also garnered attention as it has won several academy awards, and many participants said that the success and entertainment value of movies like *Parasite* increased their desire for more diverse stories. This indicates that participants are noticing and internalizing, at least to some degree, the recent rises in Asian American entertainment media representation not yet captured in the academic literature.

*Ambivalent feelings towards Asian American representation.* While participants generally expressed neutral to positive feelings regarding diversity, there was a certain ambivalence regarding the inclusion of Asian roles in entertainment media. Participants were generally aware that the portrayals of Asian Americans in media was shifting, but it did not

resonate strongly with them, likely because they had not experienced a limited representation of their ethnicity in entertainment media before. Many of them had always seen representation of Caucasian characters, so they could not identify the lack of it, or the influence that a sudden influx of representation causes. Sun, et al. (2015) found that participants could not even picture different portrayals of Asian Americans outside of the Model Minority because that image was so prevalent in their entertainment media experiences. When *Crazy Rich Asians* had an all-Asian cast in 2018, Asian Americans were so deeply impacted that they cried after movie screenings because they had never experienced that kind of representation before (Chow & Li, 2019, para. 12; Vogue, 2019). The participants in my research did not have as strong of reactions, probably because they did not personally resonate with the new rise of Asian American representation.

*No perceived influence of Asian American representation in entertainment media.*

Participants did not tend to believe the representation of Asian Americans in entertainment media affected their perception of Asian Americans in American culture. They knew they were watching entertainment media, and they believed themselves unsusceptible to its influences. However, many of the elements of the Model Minority (smart, hardworking, etc.) were used to describe the American image of Asian Americans, and these portrayals were also prevalent in the roles they remembered Asian Americans playing in television. Participants did not personally believe this stereotypical image was accurate to real life, but they believed that the general population of America thought this image was accurate, and they did not question the imagery of Asian Americans in entertainment media further. This media bias may be explained by third person effect (Davison, 1983; Gibbon & Durkin, 1995), which is the phenomenon whereby individuals who have seen persuasive messages in media believe that the persuasive messages affect others, but not the individuals themselves. Participants believed that other Americans

were affected by stereotypical images of Asian Americans in entertainment media, but they did not believe that they were susceptible to the same images and persuasions—and thus did not critically analyze the images for themselves. Many participants also believed they were not influenced by Asian American representation on a personal level because they were Caucasian and did not have the same experiences as the characters that they saw onscreen and did not have to experience it in their real lives. These findings further point to the need for intentional, engaged media criticism on the part of viewers (perhaps especially white viewers)—particularly media literacy efforts that thoughtfully combat the apathy that may come along with third person perceptions and that increase understanding of systemic racism.

*Participant levels of media literacy.* The data regarding the participants' levels of media literacy with regard to entertainment media heavily reflects narrative transport theory (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010). Because participants either believed the onscreen portrayals of social issues were accurate to real life and aligned to their previously held beliefs or that they were not affected by the images because they knew it was fictional, they did not analyze or acknowledge how the stories impacted their perceptions of reality. Narrative transportation theory asserts that audience members will become so immersed in the story or character that they forget to question the narrative's ideology or persuasive message (Green & Clark, 2013). This was seen in practice as participants said they did not notice social issues being brought up at all—they were too focused on figuring out what happens next in the story to analyze what they were watching. Those who felt they were not affected by the social issues being portrayed did not question why they were being shown these issues or how the portrayal of these issues affected them. They believed that they could discern the difference between reality and fiction and thus dismissed the issue as narrative plot without questioning the social commentary the story was trying to reflect.

Only two participants said that seeing these issues made them wonder the purpose of why they were being shown such images. Also, it must be noted that there seemed to be a negative connotation to being affected by entertainment media. Participants automatically assumed that being affected was something bad—interpreting that to mean they were personally affronted or insulted by media images. They disagreed with that idea, which dismissed acknowledging that entertainment media does have influence over perceptions of the real world. This negative association with being affected may hinder critical analysis of the entertainment media content being consumed.

*Applicability of media lens.* Regarding the proposed media lens, it seems that it is already being used shallowly—participants recognized social issues being shown (though many had difficulty regarding racial issues or being able to recall specific examples of these portrayals) but there was tension between believing it was accurate to real life or that it was being exaggerated or one-sided. Because of an unforeseen limitation to the instrument of questions, it is difficult to gauge whether or not participants could recognize if the speaker is the only minority present or question their reason for being given screen time (i.e. the character is only being used as a token minority). In future research, there should be more probing questions that hone into a specific character, whether or not it was a token character, what that character's role is in illuminating an issue, and thus be able to gauge a more developed dataset of the influence of speaker. Participants could shallowly recognize why they were being shown entertainment images of diversity (to normalize those images to the public) and thought the ideology was aligned with their beliefs (or, even if they were rather ambivalent to diversity, they were comfortable with it) or they thought they were not affected by these images because they knew the images were fictitious, exaggerated, and one-sided.

These findings provide evidence that the proposed lens for media literacy would be beneficial, so that future individuals will be able to more deeply analyze the entertainment media they consume and self-regulate their analysis of recognizing what they are being shown, question who is being used to explain this issue (and if that is their sole purpose), and the underlying agenda of why the images are being shown the way they are. For example, participants were aware of queer representation in entertainment media but did not critically analyze how or why the images were being shown. The proposed lens could prompt deeper inquiry to how queer issues are portrayed in the following or similar questions: whether there are stereotypes involved in the portrayal, if the character's main purpose is to promote the social issue and has no further development, whether the behavior towards this character (both by other characters and general environment) is acceptable or not (as well as internal questions as to why the behavior is thought to be acceptable/not acceptable), as well as internal questions about how the images have an effect on personal opinion and behavior towards queer social issues in real life and personal interaction. Overall, many participants wanted to see more representation and diversity of social issues; however, they also commented that the endings, or "fixes," of these issues happened too quickly and were then left unsatisfied. Several expressed desire to see diverse representation because they felt they learned a wider, more accurate view of the world from it, and the proposed media lens could provide them tools to better assess what they are learning.

*An Extenuating Limitation.* In addition and incorporating the limitations described below, it is important first for me to transparently address the insufficient data for analysis of the applicability of the media lens due to the trials and tribulations of conducting thesis research during attempted containment of the spread of the novel coronavirus COVID-19. I moved forward with my thesis data analysis even though I would have conducted more iterative and

reflexive data collection if I and other students were able to return to campus (or were not contending with life-altering and time-consuming conditions off campus).

Perhaps unlike more linear quantitative research, qualitative research is iterative, allowing for simultaneous data collection and analysis and incorporating earlier findings into later activities (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). Therefore, insights that become evident during data collection can enable the researcher to adapt in many ways (e.g. adjust sampling, instrument, analysis procedures, or other components). Under normal circumstances, I would have met with Dr. Fraustino and gone over the initial data collection's preliminary results, gone back, and: (1) revised my sampling plan to extend to other populations of participants, attempting to achieve the desired diversity of participants as intended by the original sampling plan; and (2) added questions and potential follow-ups, prompts, and probes to the focus group and in-depth interview instruments, especially to more rigorously test the media lens' applicability. Ultimately this kind of iteration would have enabled me to collect richer data that would have addressed the research questions and allowed for reaching data saturation (i.e., starting to see the same patterns across data and few or no new themes emerging; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Future research should expand sampling and instrumentation to confirm, deny, and/or expand on the current manuscript's findings.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

*Need for ethnic and racial diversity.* The biggest limitation of this research was that saturation of data was not reached due to difficulties in recruiting human subjects based on the spread of the novel coronavirus COVID-19, and lack of diversity of participants. The majority of responses were from Caucasian participants who had benevolent but ambivalent feelings regarding Asian American representation, which may be because the majority of representation

in entertainment media is composed of Caucasian roles, and thus Caucasian participants have not felt the effects of exclusion. Future research should include more diverse responses from participants with non-Caucasian ethnic backgrounds, especially Asian American responses because Asian American representation tries to specifically portray Asian American experiences. Non-Caucasian and Non-Asian American responses will also be important for future research to help gauge American perceptions of Asian American representation that is not directly identifying with Asian American representation and is not benefitting from the White majority of representation. Future research with a more diverse group of participants would also illuminate a more in-depth reflection on the relationship between Asian American representation and Asian American perception in American culture.

*Need for varying demographics.* While this research focused on students at West Virginia University, future research would greatly benefit from studying groups from different locations within America. Varying geographic locations may have different exposure to the Asian American image and thus will offer a more diverse range of perceptions. There is also a need to study different age groups because the specific age limitation of college undergrad students. College-aged participants are still forming their beliefs about the world and have generally more limited (or different) experiences that cannot enable them to fully reflect the general population of America, which varies from college students within a variety of dimensions, nor the perceptions of individuals in different life stages who have already solidified their world views.

*Need for depth in media literacy.* Future research should go more in-depth to the applicability to proposed media lens of situation, speaker, and solution. The initial responses illuminated questions that would be useful to ask in the future: (1) For situation, there need to be

questions specifically asking the participants to recall characters or events that had racial or social issues being portrayed, describing what happened (to demonstrate their understanding of the situation) or describing how the character is being portrayed, and why they do or do not think that representation is acceptable. (2) For speaker, future questions should inquire about the character who is speaking the most about the issue/event, if they are the only minority present or the only one experiencing the issue/expected to teach the audience about it (being a token character), how this character is being portrayed, and why the participant does or does not think that representation is acceptable. (3) For the solution, questions may ask the participant to truly analyze why they are being shown these images, and how those images are being presented, as well as prompt the participant to more critically reflect on how they are being influenced by these images. It would be beneficial to test how the media lens works on select pieces of entertainment media, and revisit how individuals become more aware of media influence over time with this constant media-appraisal with the media lens.

*Need for longitudinal research.* Given that perceptions of Asian Americans are still currently shifting and the applicability of the media lens needs to be tested over time, there should be future studies that are longitudinal in nature. Future studies could ask a diverse selection of participants to utilize the media lens whenever they watched entertainment media, and the researcher could check in with participants once every month over the course of a semester or year, as participants become more aware of the effects representational imagery has in the entertainment media they watch (or not, indicating a need for further refinement of the media literacy lens).

Essentially, future research should study how Asian American representation in entertainment media continues to shift over time, reach data saturation for insights about how



individuals from Asian American and non-Caucasian American ethnic backgrounds perceive current Asian American representation, ask more probing questions regarding media literacy, potentially test the proposed media lens' serviceability in application, and check for growth of media literacy over time as participants continue to appraise entertainment media through the media lens.

## **Conclusion**

There is a subtle but important shift in how Asian Americans are perceived in American culture. Though some elements of the Model Minority are still prevalent, the "othering" of seeming "forever foreign" (Zhou, 2004) does not seem to be a recurring theme. The study's participants have desire for more diversity and view new representations as a positive addition even though they feel detached from the effects of representation because the majority of them (Caucasian Americans) are already being represented.

The results of this study give evidence for the need of a media literacy lens regarding social issues being shown in entertainment media, because while many participants were (or were not) informed enough to discern whether or not the portrayal was accurate to real life situations, most of the participants did not question the reasoning behind showing social issues much further than that, and many participants did not critically evaluate the entertainment media they consumed because it was designed to entertain.

Regarding the Model Minority, Mitsuye Yamada said "Invisibility is not a natural state for anyone" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2005, p. 40). Asian Americans are coming into vision, gaining more diverse representation in entertainment media and slowly derailing the image of being forever foreign. With the rise of opportunity, there is new meaning being derived from the

Asian American experience and further developing the epistemology of the Asian American identity.

## APPENDIX A

### Focus Group Moderator's Guide

Hi everyone, thank you all for coming today and participating in this focus group. I'm Lydia Owens, a master's student in Journalism with the Reed College of Media. I am conducting this focus group for my thesis, and I will be moderator for today's discussion.

Our discussion will consist of listening to your thoughts on Asian Americans in America today, their representation in movies and television, and how you interact with movies and television in general. I will be here to guide our time and ensure your voice is heard. This is a safe space to share your opinions; there are no wrong answers.

Please be polite, honest, and listen to everyone as they talk. I will make sure everyone has equal time to answer. Please turn off your phones, unless you have an emergency you need to check on. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask me.

This session will be recorded for future review and accuracy and will last for no longer than 60 minutes. It will remain confidential, meaning there will be no first or full names mentioned. Each participant will be given a pseudonym for anonymity in my research.

Before we start, please take time to fully read and sign your consent forms. When you are ready, we will begin.

## APPENDIX B

### Informed Consent Form

**Principal Investigator (PI) |** Dr. Julia Fraustino  
**Department |** Reed College of Media  
**WVU IRB Protocol # |** 2001864836  
**Study Title |** Perceptions of Asian American Representation in Entertainment Media

#### **Why is this research being done and what is involved?**

This is a master's thesis study conducted by Lydia Owens, a graduate student in journalism with the Reed College of Media. You will be asked to participate in answering questions regarding your knowledge of Asian Americans, Asian Americans in entertainment media, and your knowledge of social issues being used as storylines in entertainment media. Your participation will require no more than 60 minutes. You will receive food (and potentially extra credit) for participating.

#### **Do I have to participate and what are the risks?**

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the research at any time. You may or may not directly benefit from participating in this research. Risks from participation in this study include potential discomfort from talking about difficult issues such as race.

#### **Will I be compensated for my participation?**

You will be paid in food and (and potentially extra credit) for participating. You may only receive partial extra credit if you do not complete the entire study. Your data, research results, or any and all other information related to this research study used in this research study may contribute to a new discovery. In some instances, your data, your research results, these discoveries, or any other information related to this research study, even if identifiers are removed, may be of commercial value and may be sold, patented, or licensed by the investigators and West Virginia University for use in other research or the development of new products. You will not retain any property rights, nor will you share in any money or commercial profit that the investigators, West Virginia University, or their agents may realize.

#### **What will happen to my research information and data?**

Any information about you that is obtained as a result of your participation in this research will be kept as confidential as legally possible. Your research records and test results, just like hospital records, may be subpoenaed by court order or may be inspected by the study sponsor or federal regulatory authorities, without your additional consent.

In addition, there are certain instances where the researcher is legally required to give information to the appropriate authorities. These would include mandatory reporting of information about behavior that is imminently dangerous to you or to others, such as suicide, child abuse, etc.

Audiotapes or videotapes will be kept locked up and will be destroyed as soon as possible after the research is finished.

In any publications that result from this research, neither your name nor any information from which you might be identified will be published without your consent.

### **You may Cancel this Authorization at Any Time by Writing to the Principal Investigator**

The Principal Investigator is Doctor Julia Fraustino and can be contacted at [jdfraustino@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:jdfraustino@mail.wvu.edu).

If you cancel this authorization, any information that was collected already for this study cannot be withdrawn. Once information is disclosed, according to this authorization, the recipient may re-disclose it and then the information may no longer be protected by federal regulations.

This authorization will expire at the end of the study unless you cancel it before that time.

### **Who can I talk to if I have questions or concerns?**

The Principal Investigator is Doctor Julia Fraustino and can be contacted at [jdfraustino@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:jdfraustino@mail.wvu.edu). If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you can contact Lydia Owens at [lsowens@mix.wvu.edu](mailto:lsowens@mix.wvu.edu) from the Dept. of the Reed College of Media at West Virginia University.

For information regarding your rights as a participant in research or to talk about the research, contact the WVU Office of Human Research Protection (OHRP) at (304) 293-7073 or by email at [IRB@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:IRB@mail.wvu.edu).

### **Consenting Individual Signature**

The participant has had the opportunity to have questions addressed. The participant willingly agrees to be in the study.

---

Signature of Subject

---

Printed Name

---

Date

---

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

---

---

Printed Name

Date

## APPENDIX C

### Focus Group Moderator's Guide & Questions

Hi everyone, thank you all for coming today and participating in this focus group. I'm Lydia Owens, a master's student in Journalism with the Reed College of Media. I am conducting this focus group for my thesis, and I will be moderator for today's discussion.

Our discussion will consist of listening to your thoughts on Asian Americans in America today, their representation in movies and television, and how you interact with movies and television in general. I will be here to guide our time and ensure your voice is heard. This is a safe space to share your opinions; there are no wrong answers.

Please be polite, honest, and listen to everyone as they talk. I will make sure everyone has equal time to answer. Please turn off your phones, unless you have an emergency you need to check on. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask me.

This session will be recorded for future review and accuracy and will last for no longer than 60 minutes. It will remain confidential, meaning there will be no first or full names mentioned. Each participant will be given a pseudonym for anonymity in my research.

Before we start, please take time to fully read and sign your consent forms. When you are ready, we will begin.

Everyone ready? Let's go around the room and introduce ourselves, starting with the person to my right. Please say your name, year in school, your major, and a TV show you're currently binge-watching.

1. Asian Americans in Real Life

a). **When you think about Asian American women, what kind of images/things come to your mind?**

b). **What about Asian American men?**

c). *What do you think are some “Asian” stereotypes?*

d). Would you say that it is an accurate representation of the Asian Americans today?

e). Were you friends with any Asian Americans growing up?

2. Asian Americans in Entertainment Media

a). **What are some Asian American characters you remember seeing in movies/television as a child?** How did you feel about these characters, or lack thereof? Did it affect you?

b). *When you were a child growing up, what were the movies/television shows that impacted you? Were there any specific characters you identified with or wanted to be?*

Prompt question: were there any cartoons or Disney/Nickelodeon shows that you really liked? Did you notice if there were any non-Caucasian characters that made appearances? Were these characters the main stars of the show, or guest stars?

c). **How do you feel about today’s content in movies/television regarding Asian Americans?** Do you notice a difference?

d). Are there any stereotypes you still see in today’s movies/television regarding Asian Americans? Is there anything you would change if you could?

3. Media Literacy in Entertainment Media

a). **Do you notice if movies/television bring up social issues** (i.e. race, gender, sexuality, etc.)? Can you give me a specific example?



- b). How do you feel when media brings up these issues? Does it affect you?
- c). **Do you think the way movies/television show those issues is accurate to real life?**
- d). *How do movies/television typically resolve the end of those issues?* How do you feel after the story ends?
- e). Is there anything you wish movies/television would change about showing these issues?

Finally, is there anything else you'd like to add or clarify? Or anything you feel I should know before we finish our time today?

## APPENDIX D

### In-Depth Interviewer's Guide

Hi [participant's name], thank you so much for coming today and participating in this interview. I'm Lydia Owens, a master's student in Journalism with the Reed College of Media. I am conducting this interview for my thesis, and essentially you and I are just having a conversation, and we will be discussing your thoughts on Asian Americans in America today, their representation in movies and television, and how you interact with movies and television in general. This is a safe space to share your opinions; there are no wrong answers.

Please turn off your phone, unless you have an emergency you need to check on. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask me.

This session will be recorded for future review and accuracy and will last for no longer than 60 minutes. It will remain confidential, meaning there will be no first or full names mentioned. You will be given a pseudonym for anonymity in my research.

Before we start, please take time to fully read and sign your consent form. When you are ready, we will begin.

## APPENDIX E

## In-Depth Interviewer Guide &amp; Questions

Hi [participant's name], thank you so much for coming today and participating in this interview. I'm Lydia Owens, a master's student in Journalism with the Reed College of Media. I am conducting this interview for my thesis, and essentially you and I are just having a conversation, and we will be discussing your thoughts on Asian Americans in America today, their representation in movies and television, and how you interact with movies and television in general. This is a safe space to share your opinions; there are no wrong answers.

Please turn off your phone, unless you have an emergency you need to check on. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask me.

This session will be recorded for future review and accuracy and will last for no longer than 60 minutes. It will remain confidential, meaning there will be no first or full names mentioned. You will be given a pseudonym for anonymity in my research.

Before we start, please take time to fully read and sign your consent form. When you are ready, we will begin.

Ready to go? Let's start by getting to know you a little better. Can you please tell me your name, year in school, your major, and a TV show you're currently binge-watching?

1. Asian Americans in Real Life

a). **When you think about Asian American women, what kind of images/things come to your mind?**

b). **What about Asian American men?**

c). *What do you think are some "Asian" stereotypes?*

- d). Would you say that it is an accurate representation of the Asian Americans today?
- e). Were you friends with any Asian Americans growing up?

## 2. Asian Americans in Entertainment Media

- a). **What was the movie/television show you saw that was Asian-casted** (i.e. Crazy Rich Asians, The Farewell, Fresh Off the Boat, etc.)? Can you walk me through that experience? What/how did it make you think and feel?
- b). What are some Asian American characters you remember seeing in movies/television as a child? How did you feel about these characters, or lack thereof? Did it affect you?
- c). **Do you think the movies/television shows featuring Asian American characters have influenced how you think about Asian Americans in real life?** How so?

Follow-up question: do those movies/shows make you want to see more content featuring Asian Americans?

- d). Are there any stereotypes you still see in today's movies/television regarding Asian Americans? Is there anything you would change if you could?

## 3. Media Literacy in Entertainment Media

- a). **Do you notice if movies/television bring up social issues** (i.e. race, gender, sexuality, etc.)? Can you give me a specific example?
- b). How do you feel when media brings up these issues? Does it affect you?
- c). **Do you think the way movies/television show those issues is accurate to real life?**
- d). *How do movies/television typically resolve the end of those issues?* How do you feel after the story ends?
- e). Is there anything you wish movies/television would change about showing these issues?

Finally, is there anything else you'd like to add or clarify? Or anything you feel I should know before we finish our time today?

## APPENDIX F

## Focus Group Flyer

## Join Us for a Diversity in Media Research Focus Group – Earn Pizza & Extra Credit

### We Want Your Opinions About Asian American Representation in Movies

We would like your input! Please help us answer these questions:

- ~ What are the current perceptions of Asian American representation in entertainment media?
- ~ What are the current perceptions of Asian American representation in American culture?
- ~ How do individuals critically watch entertainment media content?

Lydia Owens, a graduate student in Journalism from the Reed College of Media wants to explore the current perceptions of Asian American representation in entertainment media. They want to hear from students across campus, from every major.

### Your opinions & experiences matter!

We are looking for women to participate in a 1-hour *focus group* discussion. **You will be paid in pizza and extra credit for your time.** [A focus group is a discussion with 4 to 6 people about their views and experiences of a topic. Lydia Owens will lead the discussion.]

- When: TBD
- Where: TBD



**To Register for the Focus Group:** Please scan this QR Code and answer a few questions to sign up, or email the local focus group leader, Lydia Owens at [lsowens@mix.wvu.edu](mailto:lsowens@mix.wvu.edu)  
**Questions?** Please email the local focus group leader, Lydia Owens at [lsowens@mix.wvu.edu](mailto:lsowens@mix.wvu.edu)

**ALL INFORMATION WILL BE CONFIDENTIAL.** No one will be identified by name in any reports. No one's name will be shared with any other agency. WVU IRB approval on File.  
APPENDIX G

### Screener Survey Questions

(Link to the online Qualtrics survey can be found here:

[https://wvu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_07BIYjnVW0LS1rn](https://wvu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_07BIYjnVW0LS1rn))

Thank you so much for showing interest in Asian American representation in entertainment media. Your thoughts and opinions will help provide context to current perceptions of representation regarding race.

Before we get started, please answer these preliminary questions, as they will help determine which type of research group you will fit best.

This questionnaire is voluntary and will take 2-3 minutes to complete. WVU IRB Approval is on file.

If you have any questions, please contact [lsowens@mix.wvu.edu](mailto:lsowens@mix.wvu.edu) for more information.

Are you 18 or older?

- Yes
- No

Which gender best describes you?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Other:

What year are you currently in school?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Grad student
- Other (please describe)

Which one of the following racial or ethnic group do you most identify with?

- White
- Black or African-American
- Hispanic, Latino, or Latin-American
- Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander
- Native American or American Indian
- Middle Eastern or North African
- 2+/other
- Other (please describe)

Do you prefer speaking in focus groups, interviews, or either (check all that apply)?

- Focus groups
- Private In-depth Interview
- Both

Have you seen any of the following pieces of entertainment media (check all that apply)?

- Crazy Rich Asians
- The Farewell



- Parasite
- Always Be My Maybe
- To All the Boys I've Loved Before
- Fresh Off the Boat
- Awkwafina is Nora from Queens
- I have not seen any of these

If you were asked to describe the American image of the Asian stereotype, what sort of image(s) comes to mind?

- Paragraph text entry to describe

In past movies (*Aloha*, *Ghost in the Shell*, *Doctor Strange*), some characters that were described with Asian features were played by White actors. Some people think only actors of Asian descent should play Asian characters; some people think any actor should be able to play any character. What are your thoughts on the matter?

- Paragraph text entry to describe

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