

## Asian Americans and Racism: When Bad Things Happen to “Model Minorities”

ALVIN N. ALVAREZ

LINDA JUANG

San Francisco State University

CHRISTOPHER T. H. LIANG

University of La Verne

*Due to the limited psychological research on Asian Americans' experiences with racism, in the current study the authors examined the relationships between racial socialization, racial identity, and perceptions of racism, with a college-aged sample (N = 254) consisting primarily of Chinese Americans and Filipino Americans. With the use of multiple regression analyses, the results indicated that racial socialization, particularly discussions about race and racism, was positively related to one's perceptions of racism. Moreover, the study also showed that the relationship between racial socialization and perceptions of racism was partially mediated by racial identity schemas. To understand how Asian Americans regard racism, it is useful to have an understanding of racial identity theory and the manner in which Asian Americans are socialized to perceive racism.*

*Keywords:* Asian Americans, racism, racial socialization, racial identity

In stark contrast to the stereotype of Asian Americans as a “model minority” and its tacit assumption that such a “privileged” status has shielded Asian Americans from hav-

ing to deal with racism, the historical and contemporary evidence (Ancheta, 1998; Hall & Hwang, 2001; National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium [NAPALC],

- 
- Alvin N. Alvarez, Department of Counseling, San Francisco State University; Linda Juang, Department of Psychology, San Francisco State University; Christopher T. H. Liang, Department of Psychology, University of La Verne.

*This work was supported by a grant from the National Institute of Health's Minority Research Infrastructure Support Program. A version of this manuscript was presented at the 112th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association in Honolulu, HI. We express our gratitude to our research assistants, Har Tan, Cathryn Fabian, Mandy Liang, and Rajani Venkatraman, for their invaluable support.*

*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Alvin N. Alvarez, Department of Counseling, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA 94132. E-mail: aalvarez@sfsu.edu*

2003) demonstrates that racism is a facet of the life experiences of Asian Americans. Historically, despite their diverse ethnic origins, Asian Americans have been the targets of strikingly similar incidents of anti-Asian violence and the passage of antimiscegenation, antinaturalization, and anti-immigration legislation (Ancheta, 1998; Hall & Hwang, 2001). Currently, the NAPALC (2003), which conducts the Annual Audit of Violence Against Asian Pacific Americans, has reported compelling evidence to demonstrate that Asian Americans continue to be the victims of racially motivated harassment, vandalism, theft, physical assault, and in some cases, homicide. Indeed, the NAPALC found that the most commonly reported hate crime offense directed at Asian Americans in 2002 was assault and battery, comprising 29% of the cases. Nevertheless, an understanding of Asian Americans' experiences with racism has been limited by inconsistent reporting by law enforcement agencies combined with the reluctance of Asian Americans to report such incidents (NAPALC, 2003).

Similarly, an understanding of Asian Americans' experiences with racism from a psychological perspective has also been limited. Young and Takeuchi (1998) in the *Handbook of Asian American Psychology* observed that "more is known about the details of racism against Asian Americans within the sociohistorical context of the United States... than about the psychological impact of racism on Asian American individuals" (p. 428). As a result, it has been difficult to determine empirically the scope of Asian Americans' experiences with racism, much less the degree to which Asian Americans are psychologically affected by such experiences. Moreover, because much of the media focuses on highly publicized, overt, and violent incidents of racism, for example, the murders of Vincent Chin, Navroze Mody, and Thien Ly (NAPALC, 2003), minimal attention has been devoted to the range of Asian Americans' experiences with racism, such as verbal insults, harassment, differential treatment, and so forth. Consequently, a

primary purpose of the current study was to examine the scope of Asian Americans' experiences with racism.

---

### *Studies on Racism*

---

As the Office of the Surgeon General observed, the majority of studies on the topic of racism have generally focused on African Americans with minimal attention being focused on the experiences of other Communities of Color (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Although numerous researchers have clearly begun to illuminate the adverse physiological and psychological consequences (Armstead, Lawler, Gorden, Cross, & Gibbons, 1989; Broman, 1997; Krieger & Sidney, 1996) of racism on African Americans, it seems likely that Asian Americans may have unique experiences with racism. Indeed, the perceptions of Asian Americans as "foreigners" (Tuan, 1998) who present an economic, educational, or cultural threat may elicit racial dynamics that are quite distinct from the experiences of African Americans. Consequently, given the distinct historical and racial experiences of Asian Americans within the United States, then the nature of Asian Americans' experience with racism merits further examination.

Although limited in number, research studies have shown that the psychological well-being of Asian Americans may be adversely influenced by racism. For instance, Loo et al. (2001) found that a racially hostile military climate significantly contributed to psychological distress and posttraumatic stress disorders among Asian American veterans, more so than actual exposure to combat. Lee (2003) reported that for Asian American college students, discrimination was negatively related to psychological well-being and positively related to distress. Similarly, studies with Vietnamese Canadian students (Lay & Nguyen, 1998) and Vietnamese refugees in Finland (Liebkind, 1996) indicated that discrimination was related to

symptoms of psychological distress; indeed, Liebkind (1996) found discrimination to be the single best predictor of psychological distress for Vietnamese men. In the only investigation to date of Asian Americans' reactions to a specific instance of racism, Chih (1994) found that students who witnessed a racially motivated incident of battery reported feelings of helplessness, depression, psychosomatic symptoms, and a loss of face. Although the aforementioned studies clearly suggest a linkage between psychological well-being and racism for Asian Americans, these studies have been generally limited in number and atheoretical in design. Subsequently, it has been difficult to obtain a systematic and theoretically grounded understanding of the scope of Asian Americans' experiences with racism.

To address the need for a theoretical framework, an examination of Harrell's (2000) racism-related stress model may be helpful, given that the current study is focused on the manner in which racism is subjectively experienced by Asian Americans. In contrast to attempts to objectively define what constitutes racism (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Jones, 1997), a strength of Harrell's model is its emphasis on understanding the phenomenological experience of being the target of racism. Moreover, unlike models that have been focused specifically on the impact of racism on African Americans (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999), an additional strength of her model is the focus on the experiences of People of Color in general. According to Harrell (2000) People of Color may experience six different forms of racism-related stress: (a) racism-related life stress, that is, major incidents of racism in areas such as housing, education, occupation, and so forth; (b) vicarious racism and stress, that is, observing a racist incident; (c) daily racism and microstress, that is, chronic racial slights and degradations such as being overlooked or ignored; (d) chronic contextual racism and stress, that is, chronically inadequate living conditions resulting from the unequal distribution of and access to resources; (e)

collective racism and stress, that is, an understanding of the impact of racism on one's racial group; and (f) transgenerational racism and stress, that is, an understanding of historical traumas directed at one's group. Consequently, extrapolating from Harrell's model, in the current study we will examine Asian Americans' experiences with various forms of racism to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of such experiences.

### *Awareness of Racism and Racial Socialization*

---

A central step toward understanding Asian Americans' experiences with racism involves the question of how Asian Americans develop their awareness or perceptions of racism. That is, how is it that some individuals readily recognize racism whereas other individuals trivialize it or deny its existence? How do friends, family, and teachers contribute to Asian Americans' perceptions of racism? To address such questions within a theoretical framework, Helms' psychodiagnostic model of racial identity development (1990) may be helpful in examining how Asian Americans perceive and respond to racism. Given that racial identity models "explain individuals' intrapsychic and interpersonal reactions to societal racism" (Helms & Cook, 1999, p. 81), the use of racial identity theory for the current study is particularly appropriate. Specifically, two aspects of Helms' model will be the focus of the current study: sociocultural communicators and racial identity schemas.

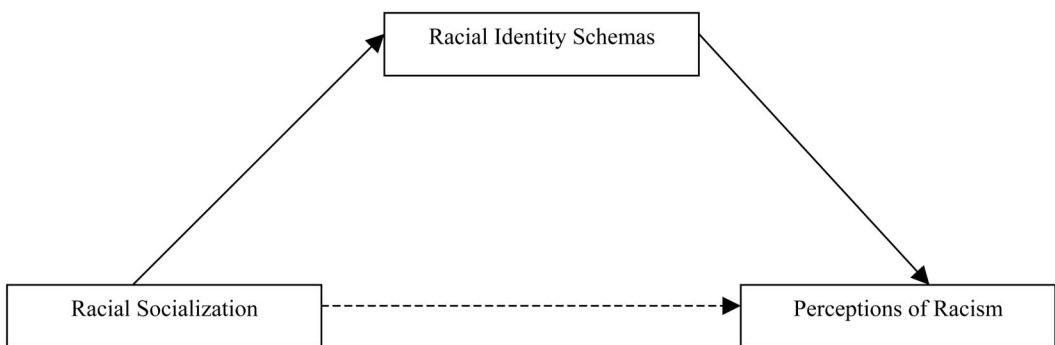
Helms (1990) theorized that "sociocultural communicators," that is, individuals and/or institutions, convey race-related messages about the value (or lack thereof) of identifying oneself as a Person of Color. Intuitively, it stands to reason that racial socialization experiences with significant individuals (e.g., parents, friends, and teachers) and institutions (e.g., churches and schools) might have a direct effect on Asian Ameri-

cans' perceptions of themselves as racial beings, that is, racial identity schemas. In addition, in what Hughes and Chen (1999) have referred to as a "preparation for bias," sociocultural communicators may also have a direct effect in enhancing one's awareness of racism. Hence, racial identity theory suggests that sociocultural communicators (i.e., racial socialization experiences) may have a direct effect on (a) one's racial identity schemas as well as (b) one's perceptions of racism.

Helms further suggested that racial identity schemas serve as cognitive and affective "filters" that guide an individual's perceptions of racism. That is, one's preferred racial identity schema may have a direct effect on whether one recognizes or minimizes the salience of racism. Therefore, by extension, racial identity theory also suggests that there may be an indirect relationship between sociocultural communicators and perceptions of racism that is mediated by one's racial identity schemas. In other words, Asian Americans' racial socialization experiences may have both a direct and indirect effect on their perceptions of racism. Consequently, using Helms' psychodiagnostic model of racial identity (1990), in the current study we will examine both (a) the direct effect of racial socialization on Asian Americans' perceptions of racism as well as (b) the indirect effect of racial socialization on one's perceptions of racism as mediated by racial identity schemas (see Figure 1).

Nevertheless, in proposing these relationships, it is important to acknowledge that the relationship between racial identity and racism is potentially multifaceted; for instance, an effective theoretical argument could be made that racial identity schemas are also an outcome of one's encounters with racism. However, as an exploratory study, we have chosen to focus this investigation on the factors that contribute to Asian Americans' perceptions of racism, that is, the role of racial identity schemas as a precursor and mediator, rather than on racial identity as an outcome of one's experiences with racism. Indeed, in support of the current mediational model, Alvarez and Helms (2001) found modest support for the role of racial identity schemas as a mediator between reflected racial appraisals and racial adjustment.

In the current study, racial identity will be operationalized by using Helms' People of Color racial identity model (1995). Helms theorized that insofar as People of Color are exposed to similar conditions of oppression, then it is likely that People of Color will also use similar psychological mechanisms to recognize and abandon their internalized experiences with racism. She also theorized that racial identity development involves the acquisition of increasingly complex schemas for responding to and processing racial information. According to Helms, racial identity development involves five successively complex schemas: (a) Conformity, that is,



**FIGURE 1.** A model of how racial identity mediates the relationship between racial socialization and perceptions of racism.

denial or trivialization of race, racism, and the racial aspects of oneself, as well as a preference for the standards and norms of White culture; (b) Dissonance, that is, confusion or ambivalence around race and racism; (c) Immersion–Emersion, that is, idealization of one’s race, a rejection of White culture, and a hypervigilance about racism; (d) Internalization, that is, an objective reappraisal of one’s own race and culture as well as White race and culture; and (e) Integrative Awareness, that is, the development of a personally meaningful and cognitively complex racial definition of oneself that is integrated with other collective aspects of one’s identity. In support of the theoretical premise for current study, a number of studies (e.g., Alvarez & Helms, 2001; Kohatsu, 1992) have shown that Asian Americans’ racial identity schemas were differentially related to their awareness of racism.

---

### Hypotheses

In summary, the hypotheses of the current study are as follows: (a) racial socialization will predict Asian Americans’ perceptions of racism, (b) racial socialization will predict Asian Americans’ racial identity schemas, (c) racial identity schemas will predict Asian Americans’ perceptions of racism, after controlling for the effects of racial socialization, and (d) racial identity schemas will mediate the relationship between racial socialization and perceptions of racism.

---

### Method

#### *Participants*

Participants consisted of undergraduate students from a large West Coast university who participated in the study to fulfill course requirements in introductory psychology courses. After removing one participant who

was underage, the final sample ( $N = 254$ ) consisted of 156 women and 98 men with an overall mean age of 19.9 years ( $SD = 2.7$ ). In terms of ethnicity, the sample consisted of Chinese (46.9%), Filipino (30.7%), Vietnamese (4.3%), Multiethnic (4.3%), other, e.g., Bangladeshi, Lao, (4.3%), and Koreans (3.9%), with the following ethnic groups (Cambodian, Indian, Japanese, Thai) each representing less than 3% of the sample. Participants’ median length of residence in the United States was 18.0 years ( $SD = 6.1$ ), and they were primarily born in the United States (64.4%) or Asia (34.4%). The majority of participants described themselves as middle class (57%), followed by upper-middle class (18.7%), lower-middle class (13.3%), lower class (10%), and upper class (0.4%).

#### *Measures*

PEOPLE OF COLOR RACIAL IDENTITY ATTITUDES SCALE. The People of Color Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (PCRIAS; Helms, 1995) was designed to assess the various schemas that People of Color use to respond to racial information. As mentioned earlier, Helms (1995) proposed five identity schemas: (a) Conformity, characterized by minimization or denial of race and racial issues; (b) Dissonance, characterized by confusion and a beginning awareness of race; (c) Immersion–Emersion, characterized by idealization of one’s racial group and hypersensitivity and cognitive rigidity around racial issues; (d) Internalization, characterized by intellectualized objectivity about one’s own racial group; and (e) Integrative Awareness, characterized by cognitive complexity and flexibility around race and racial issues.

The 50 items of the PCRIAS consist of attitudinal statements structured along a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) and divided into four scales, i.e., Conformity (11 items), Dissonance (14 items), Immersion–Emersion (15 items), and Integrative Awareness/Internalization (10 items). The Integrative

Awareness/Internalization scale, hereafter referred to as Integrative Awareness for the sake of brevity, combines items representing both the Integrative Awareness and Internalization schemas. Respondents received a score on all four scales, with higher scores interpreted as a higher degree of usage of that particular schema.

In reliability analyses with Asian American samples (Alvarez & Helms, 2001; Kohatsu, 1992), the following Cronbach's alpha coefficients were reported: .71-.75 (Conformity), .76-.78 (Dissonance), .74-.83 (Immersion-Emersion), and .61-.67 (Integrative Awareness). The current study yielded the following Cronbach's alpha coefficients: .76 (Conformity), .79 (Dissonance), .85 (Immersion-Emersion), and .71 (Integrative Awareness). In terms of the construct validity of the PCRIAS with Asian American samples, various studies have shown that the PCRIAS was predictive of anxiety (Kohatsu, 1992), assertiveness (Kohatsu, 1992), perceptions of racism (Alvarez & Helms, 2001; Kohatsu, 1992), and collective self-esteem (Alvarez & Helms, 2001) in a manner consistent with theory. Consequently, the empirical evidence suggests that the PCRIAS is reliable and valid for use with Asian American samples.

**RACIAL AND LIFE EXPERIENCES SCALE.** The Racial and Life Experiences Scale (RALES; Harrell, 1997) is a battery of instruments developed to measure multiple dimensions of an individual's perceptions of racism and racial socialization. The three scales used in the current study are as follows: Racism Experiences, Daily Life Experiences, and Socialization. The Racism Experiences scale measures one's perceptions of various forms of racism. For the purposes of the current study, the Racism Experiences scales were divided into three subscales that measured one's perceptions of various types of racism: (a) Vicarious Racism (5 items), racism directed at other individuals, for example, "hearing about someone else's experience of discrimination or prejudice," (b) Direct

Racism (6 items), racism directed at oneself, for example, "hateful or mean spirited behavior directed toward you," and (c) Collective Racism (4 items), racism directed at one's racial group, for example, "observing problems or racial disparities in different areas of life for people of your race/ethnicity (i.e., economic, health, and employment)." The Daily Life Experiences scale consists of 20 items measuring one's perceptions of racial microaggressions such as "being treated rudely or disrespectfully." The Socialization scale comprises 19 items divided into the following two subscales: (a) Social Influences (9 items), hereafter referred to as Discussions, measuring the extent to which racial and racism-related discussions occurred in one's life, e.g., "As you were growing up, to what extent did your parents, other family members, or other important adults in your life prepare you to deal with racism or talk to you about how to cope with racism" and (b) Racial Composition (10 items), hereafter referred to as Environment, measuring the racial composition of one's various environments (e.g., school and places of worship) and interpersonal relationships (e.g., friends and intimate relationships).

Participants received a score on each of the Racism Experiences subscales, that is, Direct Racism, Vicarious Racism, and Collective Racism, as well as the Daily Life Experiences scale, with higher scores indicating a perception that a particular form of racism was more frequently encountered by an individual. For the Socialization scales, a higher score on the Discussions subscale was interpreted as a higher frequency of socialization experiences explicitly discussing race and racism whereas a higher score on the Environment subscale was interpreted as a higher degree of exposure to racial/ethnic groups other than one's own.

In multiracial validation samples that included Asian Americans, Harrell, Merchant, and Young (1997) reported the following reliability coefficients: (a) .85-.87 for Vicarious Racism, (b) .74-.85 for Direct Racism, (c) .89-.94 for Daily Life Experiences, (d)

.70 for Discussions, and (e) .77 for Environment. Harrell et al. did not provide reliability data for the Collective Racism scale. In the current study, the following reliability coefficients were calculated: (a) .78 for Vicarious Racism, (b) .76 for Direct Racism, (c) .81 for Collective Racism, (d) .94 for Daily Life Experiences, (e) .80 for Discussions, and (f) .80 for Environment.

With respect to construct validity, Harrell et al. (1997) reported that the RALES scales were significantly correlated with collective self-esteem, cultural mistrust, and salience of racial identity in a manner consistent with theory. Harrell et al. also reported significant correlations with urban life stress, trauma-related symptoms, and psychological symptomology that support the criterion validity of the RALES. Consequently, given Harrell et al.'s findings, the RALES appears to be psychometrically valid and reliable for examining one's perceptions of racism.

**DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET.** The Demographic Sheet assessed background information about participants and their parents, for example, age, gender, generational status, educational level, and length of residence in the United States. In addition, the Demographic Sheet also assessed participants' racial socialization experiences in formal education settings. Specifically, the Demographic Sheet incorporated an Asian American Knowledge scale consisting of four items, measuring one's familiarity with Asian American-related politics, history, films, and literature, and an Education scale consisting of a single item measuring the number of courses completed in Asian American Studies, Ethnic Studies, or Women's Studies. Higher scores on the Asian American Knowledge and Education scales were interpreted as a higher degree of familiarity with Asian American-specific issues. An internal consistency coefficient for the Asian American Knowledge scale was found to be .80. Participants' responses on both the Asian American Knowledge scale and the Education scale were used along with

the RALES Discussions and Environment subscales in subsequent analyses to operationalize different aspects of Asian Americans' racial socialization experiences.

### *Procedure*

Participants were recruited through direct solicitation during undergraduate psychology courses as part of a larger study on Asian Americans' experiences with racism. Students who agreed to participate received the questionnaires and a consent form, indicating that participation was voluntary and confidential. As an inducement, students were informed that completion of the questionnaires fulfilled course requirements. Participants completed the questionnaires outside of class and were asked to return both the consent forms and the questionnaires during the following class period. After returning the completed questionnaire packets, all students received a written debriefing about the underlying goals and hypotheses of the study. The university's human subjects committee approved all procedures.

---

## **Results**

### *Preliminary Analyses*

First, descriptive analyses of the variables are reported (see Table 1 for the means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations among the study variables). According to the RALES, the most frequent type of racism (approximately a few times in 5 years) that Asian Americans perceived was vicarious racism ( $M = 1.99$ ,  $SD = .83$ ), whereas the least frequent (less than once or twice in 5 years) was direct racism ( $M = .66$ ,  $SD = .59$ ). The results indicated that 98% of participants reported encountering a daily life form of racism or microaggression at least once or twice in the past year. The percentage of participants who perceived racism at least once or twice in the last 5 years was as fol-

**TABLE 1** Bivariate Correlations and Descriptives Among Main Study Variables ( $N = 248$  to  $254$ )

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Direct <sup>a</sup>	—											
2. Vicarious <sup>a</sup>	.45*	—										
3. Collective <sup>a</sup>	.52*	.50*	—									
4. Daily life <sup>b</sup>	.64*	.55*	.48*	—								
5. Conformity	.24*	.00	.11	.13	—							
6. Dissonance	.29*	.09	.26*	.23*	.53*	—						
7. Immersion emersion	.36*	.11	.27*	.25*	.11	.34*	—					
8. Integrative awareness	-.28*	.12	-.05	-.09	-.36*	-.25*	-.11	—				
9. Environment	.06	.21*	.07	.21	.09	-.06	-.19	.20	—			
10. Discussions	.34*	.35*	.32*	.37*	.11	.23*	.16	-.02	.18	—		
11. Knowledge	.13	.13	.13	.05	-.08	.01	.20	.03	-.02	.27*	—	
12. Education	.02	.03	.06	-.03	-.14	-.13	.11	.11	.00	.00	.28*	—
<i>M</i>	.66	1.99	1.11	1.15	2.12	2.83	2.82	4.19	2.19	1.60	2.50	1.26
<i>SD</i>	.59	.83	.91	.87	.56	.51	.55	.43	.66	.68	.78	1.32

<sup>a</sup> Frequency of racism over five years. <sup>b</sup> Frequency of racism over past year. Direct, vicarious, collective, and daily life from RALES; Conformity, dissonance, immersion-emersion, and integrative awareness from PCRIAS.

\* Bonferroni correction set at significance level  $p < .001$ .

lows: 99% vicarious racism, 90% direct racism, and 85% collective racism.

Preliminary analyses with the demographic variables (i.e., age, socioeconomic status, sex, generational status, and ethnicity) and study variables were also conducted. Bivariate correlational analyses (two-tailed) were used if the demographic variables were ordinal and independent  $t$  tests or one-way analyses of variance if they were nominal. For all analyses, participants' ethnicity was aggregated into three categories, that is, Chinese ( $n = 119$ ), Filipino ( $n = 78$ ), and Other Asian ( $n = 57$ ). The results indicated that age, socioeconomic status, generational status, and ethnicity were significantly related to racial socialization. The results indicated that age was positively correlated with Asian American Knowledge [ $r(251) = .13$ ,  $p < .05$ ] and Education, that is, the number of Asian American or Ethnic Studies courses taken [ $r(250) = .13$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. Socioeconomic status was also positively correlated with Environment, that is, the racial composition of social environments [ $r(237) = .20$ ,  $p < .01$ ]. First-generation participants ( $M = 2.03$ ,  $SD = .72$ ), compared with the second- or later-generation participants ( $M = 2.28$ ,  $SD = .60$ ), were more likely to

live in areas that comprised people mostly of their own race,  $t(246) = -8.90$ ,  $p < .01$ . Chinese participants ( $M = 2.00$ ,  $SD = .64$ ) were more likely to live in neighborhoods that were of their own race compared with Filipinos ( $M = 2.38$ ,  $SD = .62$ ) and Other Asian ethnic groups ( $M = 2.34$ ,  $SD = .63$ ),  $F(2, 247) = 10.16$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Age, socioeconomic status, sex, and ethnic differences were also correlated with participants' perceptions of racism. The participants who were older [ $r(253) = -.18$ ,  $p < .01$ ] and of lower socioeconomic status were less likely to report vicarious racism [ $r(241) = .14$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. Men reported a higher frequency of direct racism,  $t(252) = 6.02$ ,  $p < .05$ , and daily life racism, that is, microaggressions,  $t(251) = 8.35$ ,  $p < .01$ , compared with women. Filipino ( $M = 2.14$ ,  $SD = .86$ ), and Other Asian participants ( $M = 2.19$ ,  $SD = .78$ ) reported a higher frequency,  $F(2, 251) = 6.34$ ,  $p < .01$ , of vicarious racism compared with Chinese participants ( $M = 1.80$ ,  $SD = .80$ ). Filipino participants ( $M = 1.37$ ,  $SD = .88$ ) also reported a higher frequency,  $F(2, 250) = 3.69$ ,  $p < .05$ , of daily life racism compared with Chinese participants ( $M = 1.03$ ,  $SD = .83$ ). In light of these



significant relationships, in the remaining analyses, age, socioeconomic status, sex, generational status, and ethnicity were used as control variables.

### *Testing the Mediation Model*

Baron and Kenny's (1986) three-step causal procedure was used to determine whether racial identity schemas mediated the relationship between racial socialization and participants' perceptions of various forms of racism. Accordingly, using multiple regression analyses, mediation exists if (a) in Step 1, racial socialization significantly predicts perceptions of racism, (b) in Step 2, racial socialization significantly predicts racial identity schemas, (c) in Step 3, racial identity schemas are significant predictors of perceptions of racism, after controlling for the effect of racial socialization, and (d) a formerly significant relationship(s) (as indicated by beta weights) between racial socialization and perceptions of racism disappears (full mediation) or is reduced (partial mediation) when the combination of predictors is used. Given the number of regressions being conducted, a Bonferroni adjustment was used in each step of the mediational analyses to control for family-wise Type I error rates.

To test Step 1, four multiple hierarchical regression analyses were conducted with the following RALES scales measuring perceptions of racism, as the dependent variables: (a) Direct Racism, (b) Vicarious Racism, (c) Collective Racism, and (d) Daily Life Experiences. In the first step, the control variables of age, socioeconomic status, sex, generational status, and ethnicity were entered. In the second step, the racial socialization variables were entered. With a Bonferroni adjustment, the significance level for Step 1 was set at  $p < .01$ . An examination of the change in the proportion of variance accounted for by racial socialization indicate that racial socialization was related significantly to all of the perception of racism variables. More specifically, examination of

the significant beta weights indicated that individuals who reported more exposure to explicit discussions about race and racism also reported perceiving more racism (see Table 2). Thus, Step 1 was satisfied for all the racism variables in the mediational model, and the results indicate a significant and direct effect between racial socialization and perceptions of racism.

To test Step 2, multiple hierarchical regression analyses were conducted separately with each of the four racial identity schemas as dependent variables. In the first step, demographic control variables were entered and in the second step, the racial socialization variables were entered. With a Bonferroni correction, the significance level for Step 2 was set at  $p < .01$ . The results indicated that racial socialization significantly predicted the Dissonance and Immersion–Emersion identity schemas beyond what was predicted by the demographic control variables (see Table 3). An examination of the beta weights indicated that individuals who were more exposed to discussions about race and racism were more likely to endorse Dissonance and Immersion–Emersion schemas. Given the Bonferroni correction, racial socialization did not significantly predict the Conformity or Integrative Awareness schemas and therefore these two identity schemas were not included in Step 3 of the mediational analyses. Thus, Step 2 was satisfied in the mediational model for two of the four racial identity schemas.

Lastly, to test Step 3, both racial socialization and racial identity schemas variables were entered into multiple hierarchical regressions for each of the four perceptions of racism variables, i.e., Direct Racism, Vicarious Racism, Collective Racism, and Daily Life Experiences. The variables were entered as blocks in this order: (a) demographic control variables, (b) the racial socialization variables, (c) and racial identity schemas (i.e., Dissonance and Immersion–Emersion). With a Bonferroni correction, the significance level was set at  $p < .01$  for Step 3. The results show that racial identity schemas were significantly related to three

**TABLE 2 Hierarchical Regression Analyses Using Racial Socialization and Racial Identity to Predict Perceptions of Racism**

<i>Step and Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	<i>Total R<sup>2</sup></i>
<i>Dependent variable: Direct racism</i>					
Step 1					
Covariates <sup>a</sup>					.03
Step 2				.11***	.14***
Discussions	.28	.06	.32***		
Environment	.02	.06	.02		
Education	.02	.03	.04		
Knowledge	.02	.05	.03		
Step 3				.10***	.25***
Discussions	.20	.06	.23***		
Environment	.07	.06	.08		
Education	.02	.03	.04		
Knowledge	.00	.05	.01		
Dissonance	.23	.08	.20**		
Immerse-Emersion	.23	.07	.22**		
<i>Dependent variable: Vicarious racism</i>					
Step 1					
Covariates <sup>a</sup>					.07*
Step 2				.11***	.18***
Discussions	.35	.08	.30***		
Environment	.12	.08	.10		
Education	.05	.04	.09		
Knowledge	.00	.07	.00		
Step 3				.01	.20***
Discussions	.33	.08	.27***		
Environment	.15	.08	.12		
Education	.05	.04	.08		
Knowledge	.00	.07	.00		
Dissonance	.05	.11	.03		
Immerse-Emersion	.17	.10	.12		
<i>Dependent variable: Collective racism</i>					
Step 1					
Covariates <sup>a</sup>					.05
Step 2				.08**	.12**
Discussions	.36	.09	.27***		
Environment	.03	.09	.02		
Education	.04	.05	.06		
Knowledge	-.03	.08	-.02		
Step 3				.07***	.20***
Discussions	.26	.09	.20**		
Environment	.10	.09	.08		
Education	.04	.04	.06		
Knowledge	-.04	.08	-.03		
Dissonance	.31	.12	.18*		
Immerse-Emersion	.29	.12	.18*		
<i>Dependent variable: Daily life racism</i>					
Step 1					
Covariates <sup>a</sup>					.06*
Step 2				.13***	.20***
Discussions	.43	.08	.34***		
Environment	.14	.09	.11		

TABLE 2 (continued)

Step and Variable	B	SE B	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	Total $R^2$
<i>Dependent variable: Daily life racism (continued)</i>					
Step 2 (continued)					
Education	.02	.04	.03		
Knowledge	-.05	.07	-.04		
Step 3				.06***	.25***
Discussions	.35	.08	.28***		
Environment	.20	.09	.16*		
Education	.01	.04	.02		
Knowledge	-.06	.07	-.06		
Dissonance	.20	.11	.12		
Immerse-Emersion	.30	.11	.20**		

<sup>a</sup> Step 1 involves addition of covariates, e.g., age, gender, SES, generational status, and ethnicity. Step 2 involves addition of racial socialization variables. Step 3 involves addition of racial identity schemas.

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

perceptions of racism variables (i.e., direct, collective, and daily life) beyond what was predicted by racial socialization. As demonstrated by the reduction of the beta weights associated with racial socialization (see Table 2), the results further indicated that racial identity schemas partially mediated the relationship between racial socialization and these three perceptions of racism variables. Specifically, both the Dissonance and Immersion–Emersion identity schemas partially mediated the relationship between racial socialization and direct and collective racism. Only the Immersion–Emersion schema partially mediated the relationship between racial socialization and daily life racism, that is, microaggressions. Racial identity schemas were not significantly unique predictors of vicarious racism, and, thus, a mediational relationship was not found for this form of racism. Thus, in general, support was found for an indirect effect of racial socialization on perceptions of racism such that racial socialization predicted racial identity schemas which, in turn, predicted perceptions of racism. The more participants were exposed to discussions about race and racism, the more likely they were to endorse Dissonance and Immersion–Emersion identity schemas, which then increased the likelihood that an individual would perceive more racism.

### Discussion

Contrary to the privileged status implied by the model minority stereotype, the results of the current study suggest that racism directed at Asian Americans occurs at a scope and frequency that merit further attention. Without detracting from the more publicized incidents of anti-Asian violence, researchers and clinicians alike should be particularly concerned by the finding that 98% of the participants reported at least one encounter with a racial microaggression in the past year and that 99% of the participants vicariously experienced some form of racism directed at other Asian Americans in the past 5 years.

Insofar as racism is a psychologically significant experience for Asian Americans, then a goal of the current study was to address an important and initial question about this experience for this community. That is, how do Asian Americans develop their perceptions of racism? How do parents, peers, educational experiences, and so forth influence one’s understanding of racism? To this end, we found that racial socialization may be a key factor in shaping, both directly and indirectly, one’s perceptions of racism. With regard to a direct effect, the results indicate that explicit discussions with

**TABLE 3** Hierarchical Regression Analyses Using Racial Socialization to Predict Racial Identity Schemas

<i>Step and Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	<i>Total R<sup>2</sup></i>
<i>Dependent variable: Conformity</i>					
Step 1					
Covariates <sup>a</sup>					.04
Step 2				.04*	.08*
Discussions	.11	.06	.13		
Environment	.06	.06	.08		
Education	-.03	.03	-.08		
Knowledge	-.07	.05	-.10		
<i>Dependent variable: Dissonance</i>					
Step 1					
Covariates <sup>a</sup>					.03
Step 2				.08**	.11**
Discussions	.20	.05	.27***		
Environment	-.08	.05	-.11		
Education	-.03	.03	-.09		
Knowledge	-.02	.05	-.04		
<i>Dependent variable: Immersion-Emersion</i>					
Step 1					
Covariates <sup>a</sup>					.13***
Step 2				.07**	.20***
Discussions	.11	.05	.14*		
Environment	-.14	.06	-.17*		
Education	.04	.03	.11		
Knowledge	.07	.05	.10		
<i>Dependent variable: Integrative Awareness</i>					
Step 1					
Covariates <sup>a</sup>					.06*
Step 2				.04*	.10**
Discussions	.03	.04	.05		
Environment	.13	.05	.20**		
Education	.03	.02	.11		
Knowledge	-.08	.04	-.02		

<sup>a</sup> Step 1 involves addition of covariates, e.g., age, gender, SES, generational status, and ethnicity. Step 2 involves addition of racial socialization variables.

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

significant others regarding race and racism are a consistent predictor of one's perceptions of racism. In contrast, other aspects of Asian Americans' racial socialization (e.g., number of ethnic studies courses, self-reported familiarity with Asian American issues, and racial composition of social environments) did not significantly predict one's perceptions of racism. Hence, consistent with the work conducted with other

racial groups (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Stevenson, 1994), the current study suggests that the role of racial socialization for Asian Americans may be a significant variable worthy of further examination.

In addition, we found support for a mediational model proposing that the effect of racial socialization on Asian Americans' perceptions of racism is mediated by racial identity schemas. As predicted by theory, the

results indicate that racial socialization and, more specifically, discussions about race and racism may influence the utilization of certain racial identity schemas (i.e., Dissonance and Immersion–Emersion). It is reasonable to assume that Asian Americans' exposure to more explicit discussions about racism facilitates both a beginning awareness of racism as characterized by the utilization of Dissonance schemas as well as a sense of hypervigilance about racism as characterized by the utilization of Immersion–Emersion schemas. In turn, the relationship between racial identity schemas (Dissonance and Immersion–Emersion) and perceptions of racism was also found to be significant. Given that Dissonance is characterized by a newly awakened consciousness of race-related issues and that Immersion–Emersion is characterized by hyperawareness of racism, then the findings that these two schemas are positively associated with one's perceptions of racism are theoretically consistent with racial identity theory (Helms, 1990, 1995).

Hence, in response to a key question of the current study, Asian Americans' perceptions of racism are directly shaped by the conversations and discussions that one has in regards to race and racism as well as indirectly shaped by the influence of these discussions on one's racial identity and racial worldview. In effect, the current study underscores and provides empirical support for the central role that family, friends, mentors, and so forth may have in shaping Asian Americans' perceptions of racism. That is, explicit discussions about race and racism may be instrumental in normalizing the issue as a topic of concern as well as preparing Asian Americans to encounter such incidents.

From a theoretical perspective, the study also suggests that racial identity theory may be a useful framework for describing how Asian Americans develop their perceptions of racism. Consistent with racial identity theory (Helms, 1990, 1995), in the current study we found significant relationships between racial socialization, racial identity, and perceptions of racism. In light of the

relatively minimal empirical attention devoted to Asian Americans' experiences with racism, the use of racial identity theory may provide a useful conceptual framework to stimulate future investigations of this phenomenon.

#### *Clinical and Training Implications*

Results from the current study strongly suggest that clinicians and trainees may need to sensitize themselves to the racial experiences of Asian Americans and, more important, recognize that racism may be a salient experience for this community. Given the pervasiveness of model minority assumptions about Asian Americans, we urge clinicians and trainees on the basis of the current study to attend to the presence of racism in the lives of their Asian American clients. In particular, an assessment of Asian Americans' socialization experiences around racism may provide clinicians with insights into how they conceptualize their experiences with and their comfort level in discussing racism. For instance, it is conceivable that the challenge of talking about one's experiences around racism with a clinician may be exacerbated by socialization experiences that trivialized or denied the significance of racism. Additionally, clinicians and trainees may need to be mindful of the possibility that the manner in which they address or do not address issues of racism can be another socializing experience that validates or invalidates clients' racial experiences.

#### *Limitations and Future Directions*

With regards to limitations, it should be noted that the investigators involved in the current study are all Asian Americans, with both personal and professional commitments for addressing social injustices such as racism. As a result of these commitments, it is important for us to acknowledge the potential for bias that may result in our design,

implementation, and interpretation of the current study and its findings. Moreover, in the current study we relied on the responses of traditional age college students on the West Coast, and our sample was heavily skewed with Chinese and Filipino American participants. As a result, one must be cautious in generalizing the findings of the current study, given sampling restrictions due to ethnicity, age, and geographic region. It may be plausible, for instance, that the experiences of South Asian Americans or Hmong Americans may be wholly different from those of the participants in the current study or that racial dynamics may vary across geographic regions. Similarly, our reliance in the current study on a college-based sample hinders our understanding of how maturation influences Asian Americans' understanding of racism. It seems likely that older adults, particularly those who have lived in this country longer, may have a more sophisticated understanding of and experiences with racism than traditional age college students. For instance, older Asian Americans may be more likely to have accrued more experiences with racism and/or experienced more blatant forms of racism such as the internment of the Japanese American community, pre-1965 anti-immigration legislation and so forth. Hence, the literature may benefit from an examination of Asian Americans' racial experiences across a broader demographic sample. Lastly, given that no existing measures of racism have been developed specifically for Asian Americans in general (although it is notable that Loo et al., 2001, developed a measure specifically for Asian American Vietnam veterans), the validity of the racism and racism socialization measures for Asian Americans in the current study should be regarded with caution. Despite the use of multiracial samples in the development of the RALES (Harell et al., 1997), the samples contained relatively small numbers of Asian Americans and clearly indicate the need for future instrument validation with this population. Also, it should be noted that the RALES is a retrospective measure that may be limited

by participants' abilities to remember accurately their experiences with racism and racial socialization.

In terms of future directions, given the robust findings in regard to racial socialization, the current study suggests that this construct may benefit from further exploration by researchers. To date, much of the literature on racial socialization has been devoted to African Americans (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Stevenson, 1994). As a result, the manner in which Asian Americans and their families discuss race and racial dynamics remains unclear. Moreover, additional research is clearly needed to examine within-group differences in Asian Americans' perceptions of race, particularly in light of the ethnic, socioeconomic, and gender differences found in the current study. Because of exploratory nature of the current study, these demographic characteristics were treated as control variables. However, in light of the heterogeneity of the Asian American community, it is clear that future researchers will need to address such within-group differences to examine how different segments of the Asian American community experience racism. For instance, given that the current study as well as prior studies (Cassidy, O'Connor, Howe, & Warden, 2004; Kuo, 1995) have shown that Asian men in both the United States and Scotland report a higher incidence of racism, the role of gender in influencing one's perceptions of racism clearly deserves further investigation. Additional research may be needed to determine whether the ethnic differences found in the current study, i.e., Filipinos reporting more perceptions of racism than other Asian ethnic groups, are unique to the sample or an accurate reflection of this ethnic community's experiences.

Lastly, a critical step for future researchers will be to examine the psychological impact of Asian Americans' experiences with racism. Given the focus of the current study on the precursors to Asian Americans' perceptions of racism, the outcomes of these experiences remain unclear. In light of the research conducted with other groups dem-

onstrating the adverse psychological and physiological consequences of racism (Armstead et al., 1989; Broman, 1997), the need to study the outcomes of racism for Asian Americans is self-evident. Finally, with the intent of developing effective interventions, both researchers and practitioners may benefit from examining the coping styles used by Asian Americans to respond to racism. In short, the current study suggests that, in light of the paucity of research conducted on this topic, the study of Asian Americans' experiences with racism from a psychological perspective clearly merits further exploration.

### References

- Alvarez, A. N., & Helms, J. E. (2001). Racial identity and reflected appraisals as influences on Asian Americans' racial adjustment. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 7*, 217–231.
- Ancheta, A. N. (1998). *Race, rights and the Asian American experience*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Armstead, C., Lawler, K., Gorden, G., Cross, J., & Gibbons, J. (1989). Relationship of racial stressors to blood pressure responses and anger expression in Black college students. *Health Psychology, 8*, 541–556.
- Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 51*, 1173–1182.
- Broman, C. L. (1997). Race-related factors and life satisfaction among African Americans. *Journal of Black Psychology, 23*, 36–49.
- Cassidy, C., O'Connor, R. C., Howe, C., & Warden, D. (2004). Perceived discrimination and psychological distress: The role of personal and ethnic self-esteem. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 51*, 329–339.
- Chih, D. W. (1994). College students' reactions to and coping with anti-Asian violence. In J. Y. Fong (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Asian American Psychological Association: 1994 Convention* (pp. 32–37). Atascadero, CA: Gold Shadow Press.
- Clark, R., Anderson, N., Clark, V., & Williams, D. (1999). Racism as a stressor for African Americans: A biopsychosocial model. *American Psychologist, 54*, 805–816.
- Gaertner, S. L., & Dovidio, J. F. (1986). The aversive form of racism. In S. L. Gaertner & J. F. Dovidio (Eds.), *Prejudice, discrimination, and racism*, (pp. 61–89). New York: Academic Press.
- Hall, P. W., & Hwang, V. M. (2001). *Anti-Asian violence in North America*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- Harrell, S. P. (1997). *The Racism and Life Experiences Scales-Revised*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Harrell, S. P. (2000). A multidimensional conceptualization of racism-related stress: Implications for the well-being of people of color. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 70*, 42–57.
- Harrell, S. P., Merchant, M. A., & Young, S. A. (1997). *Psychometric properties of the Racism and Life Experiences Scales*. Symposium presented at the 1997 Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association. Chicago, IL.
- Helms, J. E. (1990). *Black and White racial identity: Theory, research, and practice*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Helms, J. E. (1995). An update on Helms' White and people of Color racial identity models. In J. G. Ponterotto, J. M. Casas, L. A. Suzuki, and C. M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling*, (pp. 181–198). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Helms, J. E., & Cook, D. A. (1999). *Using race and culture in counseling and psychotherapy: Theory and process*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Hughes, D., & Chen, L. (1999). The nature of parents' race-related communications to children: A developmental perspective. In L. Balter and C. S. Tamis LeMonda (Eds.), *Child psychology: A handbook of contemporary issues*, (pp. 467–490). Philadelphia: Psychology Press.
- Jones, J. M. (1997). *Prejudice and racism* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw Hill.
- Kohatsu, E. L. (1992). *The effects of racial identity and acculturation on anxiety, assertiveness, and ascribed identity among Asian American college students*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park.
- Krieger, N., & Sidney, S. (1996). Racial discrimi-

- nation and blood pressure: The CARDIA study of young Black and White adults. *American Journal of Public Health*, *86*, 1370–1378.
- Kuo, W. H. (1995). Coping with racial discrimination: The case of Asian Americans. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *18*, 109–127.
- Lay, C., & Nguyen, T. (1998). The role of acculturation-related and acculturation non-specific daily hassles: Vietnamese Canadian students and psychological distress. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, *30*, 172–181.
- Lee, R. M. (2003). Do ethnic identity and other group orientation protect against discrimination for Asian Americans? *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *50*, 133–141.
- Liebkind, K. (1996). Acculturation and stress: Vietnamese refugees in Finland. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *27*, 161–180.
- Loo, C. M., Fairbank, J. A., Scurfield, R. M., Ruch, L. O., King, D. W., Adams, L. J., & Chemtob, C. M. (2001). Measuring exposure to racism: Development and validation of a race-related stressor scale (RRSS) for Asian American Vietnam veterans. *Psychological Assessment*, *13*, 503–520.
- National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium. (2003). *Remembering: A ten year retrospective*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Stevenson, H. C. (1994). Validation of the scale of Racial Socialization for African American adolescents: Steps toward multidimensionality. *Journal of Black Psychology*, *20*, 445–468.
- Tuan, M. (1998). *Forever foreigners or honorary Whites?* New Brunswick, NJ: Routledge Press.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2001). *Mental health: Culture, race, and ethnicity—A supplement to mental health: A report of the Surgeon General*. Rockville, MD: Author.
- Young, K., & Takeuchi, D. T. (1998). Racism. In L. C. Lee and N. W. S. Zane (Eds.), *Handbook of Asian American psychology*, (pp. 401–432). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.