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Group 2: Culture, Identity and Diaspora

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The Rise of Asian American Discrimination During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Since the start of the pandemic, there has been an increase in discrimination and prejudice against the cultures and identities of Asian Americans. The United States has a long history of discrimination against Asian American immigrants predating the Civil War, from *People vs. Hall* to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The modern-day effects have even spread to social media, as shown in an article consisting of a group study of 274 Americans. This paper seeks to uncover the causes and effects of the rise in discrimination against Asian Americans that affects their culture, identity, and diaspora. The paper also hypothesizes that this spike in discrimination has affected Asian Americans in every aspect of life. When researching this topic, historical trends of discrimination against Asian Americans provided a useful base to compare the current events. The research consisted of scholarly sources and popular sources, with all being split up into three different subtopics. This was achieved by using the Kennesaw State University library for scholarly sources and google for popular sources. The wide range of sources used allowed for many different perspectives and viewpoints to be taken into consideration when making the hypothesis.

According to Doris F Chang, an associate professor at New York University's Silver School of Social Work and a Fellow at the Asian American Psychological Association, the pandemic era has seen an increase in Asian American discrimination. In an interview about the troubles experienced during the pandemic, Chang references the Stop AAPI (Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders) Hate group, which reports 2,808 incidents of anti-Asian crimes from March to December of 2020, 9% of which were physical assaults. After he posed several questions about the current situation, journalist Robert Polner commented, "Part of the problem, I imagine, is the long-time stereotyping of Asian Americans – in cinema, sit-coms, and the news." Chang also believes that past stereotypes play a big role in the discrimination, adding, "Representations of Asians in the US have tended to vacillate between portrayals of invisibility and one-dimensionality (as in movies and TV), Asians as alien and 'other' (as in the model minority myth), or as existential threats (the 'Yellow Peril'). Particularly in moments of social and economic instability, Asian Americans become convenient targets, and the about-face can be quite staggering." The discrimination also dates to America's early years. The Yellow Peril, the Chinese Exclusion Act, the San Francisco Plague Outbreak – these are all instances of the masses going after the easiest target during times of stress.

One of the many unfortunate side effects of the recent Covid-19 pandemic in the United States was an increase in discrimination against Asian Americans. Research has already been done by scholars like SuYeon Lee and Sara Waters in "Asians and Asian Americans' Experiences of Racial Discrimination during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Impacts on Health Outcomes and the Buffering Role of Social Support" and Stephen Croucher in "Prejudice toward Asian Americans in the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Effects of Social Media Use in the United States" that proves the link between the Covid-19 pandemic and an increase in discrimination

towards Asian Americans. However, it is not yet fully clear why the Covid-19 pandemic triggered this increase in discrimination or how it relates to increases in discrimination throughout history. The same goes for research into what can be done to prevent these increases in discrimination in the future. This is what this paper aims to do: to better understand the relation between today's increase in discrimination and those throughout history as well as attempt to find ways to prevent any future increases in discrimination.

This paper will discuss the effects that an increased amount of discrimination has had on the mental and physical health of Asian Americans, how historical stress-inducing events like Covid-19 have caused an increase in discrimination, and what can be done to prevent the harmful effects felt by an increase in discrimination. It will start with a description of the events preceding the Covid-19 pandemic that caused the increase in discrimination that are seen today as well as similar events that have happened throughout American history. It will then transition into a summary of the current discussion around Covid-19's effect on discrimination, the resulting effects on Asian American health, and what factors can mitigate these effects. Finally, it will conclude with a unique analysis of the situation as well as what is believed will serve as the best solution to this growing problem.

Background and Context

In December of 2019 in Wuhan China, the first case of Covid-19 was confirmed. It did not take long for the virus to spread across the Pacific to the United States, putting the public in pandemonium. In states of panic like this, citizens usually look to leadership that they can trust to figure out what to do, and in this case that was the president of the United States. As shown in history, when something goes wrong in a country, people often tend to blame everyone but themselves. This was the route that President Trump took when he quickly went to the public,

nicknaming Covid-19 the “Wuhan Virus” and putting all the blame and responsibility of the pandemic on China. Since Trump was the president, and therefore one of the most influential people in America, at the time, this simple nickname had a large effect on the opinion of many Americans. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, he used his platform to subconsciously turn a lot of the American public against Asian Americans just because of their Asian descent. All Asians were grouped as Chinese people and therefore deemed part of the problem by the public eye and many news sources. Whether the discrimination was more subtle through the use of memes on social media or more overt like name calling and assault, it soon became clear that there were two different pandemics on the rise: one having to do with a virus and one having to do with discrimination.

The events of discrimination being experienced now are eerily similar to the historical trends of discrimination towards Asian Americans in the past. In many of these past events, a lot of people saw Asians as a threat to their normal way of life because their cultures were different. Due to this, Asians were seen as a minority and experienced discrimination and segregation with the goal being to get rid of an Asian culture that was “threatening” to American society (De Leon, 2020). Asian Americans have always been among the minority and were looked down upon because of their racial background. People referred to them as the “Yellow Peril: Unclean and unfit for citizenship in America.” (De Leon, 2020). In the 19th century, the Chinese Exclusion Act was issued for the purpose of banning Chinese immigration to the United States because of their race. This long history of discrimination has culminated into the hate crimes and attacks being made towards the Asian community today that we see as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The unfair violence they have faced before is being faced once again in an

overwhelming torrent. Clearly, the unfounded resentment has been building up for some time, only truly showing itself during times of national stress.

Evidence

The rise of discrimination and prejudice due to Covid-19 has had a severe impact on Asian American culture in recent years. Between social media platforms and the workplace, discrimination has become commonplace for most Asian Americans, immensely affecting their culture. When confronted with racism and xenophobia against their very culture and identity, many Asian Americans have made the choice to downplay their culture. In the article “Prejudice Toward Asian Americans in the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Effects of Social Media Use in the United States,” while the researchers were talking about how much of the discrimination is spread online, the author deduces that, “social media is a platform often used to communicate prejudice.” (Davidson and Farquhar, 2020). During the Covid-19 pandemic in the U.S., prejudice, hatred, and other forms of negative sentiments have been expressed on social media toward Asian Americans, particularly Chinese Americans (Mcguire, 2020). This article shows how people attack Asian-Americans but what is more important is the effect of that. In history when people are attacked for a certain thing, they tend to hide it. Due to this trend, it is very possible that we see many Asian-Americans hide their values and beliefs to stay safe, subsequently getting rid of a majorly important culture in the United States. Another article, “Asian Americans Face Dual Challenges: Surging Unemployment and Racism,” investigates bias and anti-Asian sentiments in the workplace. And the source “Asians and Asian Americans’ experiences of racial discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic” goes in-depth discussing the detrimental effect that discrimination has on overall health. The information gained by these sources easily fits into the issue of “Effects on Culture.”

Identity is impacted by the environment such as society, family, where you live, self-expression and more. Both racism and discrimination can influence a person's identity mentally. Being stereotyped and discriminated against can cause a person to develop anxiety and depression. It will make a person want to change who they are in order to "fit in" with the rest of society. The pandemic outbreak has sparked a negative effect on identity for Asian Americans in particular. In the article by Robert Polner, "Pandemic Era Sparks Both Anxiety and Activism for Asian Americans", the author discusses troubling statistics indicating a rise in discrimination, "The survey data suggest that pandemic-related incidents have unsettled the sense of belonging that people of Asian descent had felt was secure." Due to hate crimes and racism towards Asian Americans, it has been difficult for them to cope and feel comfortable wherever they go because of people's conflicting beliefs towards Asian Americans. Some people genuinely think that Asian Americans are a threat to the United States while others may not believe that is the case. This causes a huge problem in society because historically when a group of people do not want to be known for something, they tend to hide that thing that makes them stand out. This could be detrimental to society because that means that Asian-Americans could start to hide their identity, which in turn could cause them to lose any representation they have in American society.

Asian-Americans have long been used as scapegoats during times of crisis in American history. Just as they were in 1882 with the Chinese Exclusion Act, or during World War II with the Japanese internment camps, today Asian-Americans are experiencing discrimination again due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Minorities are often subject to this type of discrimination because during times of crisis, people feel helpless, and they look for some way to exert that burden onto other people. During WWII, Japanese Americans, even those who had families that had lived in America for generations, were held against their will in internment camps. According to the U.S.

government at the time, this was done to prevent sabotage that may be performed by Japanese Americans who were loyal to Japan. However, no evidence of sabotage was ever discovered, so it is more likely that Japanese Americans were simply seen as “the enemy” at the time, and they therefore had to be punished. The same thing is happening today, with Asian-Americans being seen as “the enemy” for “bringing Covid to America,” so in many people’s eyes, they deserve to be punished.

While the rise of discrimination certainly has significantly negative effects on culture and identity, its effect on the mental health of Asian Americans could be seen as the most detrimental. The mental health of Asian Americans worsening is a result specifically of the hate crimes directed towards them. While talking about the sheer amount Asian Americans with effected mental health authors Sara F. Waters and Suyeon Lee mention the fact that, “Nearly 30% [of surveyed participants] reported an increase in discrimination since the pandemic, and over 40% reported an increase in anxiety, depressive symptoms, and sleep difficulties” (Lee and Waters). The unfortunately large percentage of Asian Americans with bad mental health could end up with terrible effects on American society. For starters 30-40% of Asian Americans, while only a number represented in the sample, would account to hundreds of thousands of citizens who now feel unmotivated to carry out tasks, which is bad for adults in the workforce. These effects, while terrible, could be mitigated if we worked together via social support structures built for Asian-Americans. Despite this possible solution to this problem the fact still lies that these hate crimes are taking a serious toll on thousands of Asian Americans, but with outside support for these mentally injured Asian Americans we could possibly fix this problem.

Analysis

Throughout the United States' history, racial minorities, particularly Asian Americans, have often been used as scapegoats by social majorities during times of economic or political hardship. When the causes of the problems that society is facing aren't obvious, people tend to put the blame on these racial minorities. In the article, "The painful history of anti-Asian hate crimes in America," Weijia Jiang references Asian American Studies professor Lok Siu saying, "a battered economy has always been one of the root causes for scapegoating Asian Americans." Jiang also quotes Siu speaking about historical trends, "You can see this as early as [the] 1870s... You have spikes of just outraged White workers who are claiming that Chinese are taking over jobs and therefore need to be gotten rid of" (Jiang). The historical period that Siu is referring to is the period of heightened anti-Asian discrimination that was experienced in the late 19th century as a result of an increase in Chinese immigration to the United States around that time.

An example of the kinds of situations that Asian Americans had to endure during this time is brought up in Gillian Brockell's "The long, ugly history of anti-Asian racism and violence in the U.S." in the form of the 1885 Rock Springs massacre. Brockell describes the event saying: "In Rock Springs, Wyoming Territory, long-standing aggression against Chinese miners exploded in September 1885, when 100 to 150 vigilantes surrounded and attacked Chinese mineworkers, killing 28 people and burning 79 homes. Hundreds fled to a nearby town, then were tricked into boarding a train they were told would take them to safety in San Francisco. Instead, it took them back to Rock Springs, where they were forced back into the mine. Federal troops stayed for 13 years to impose order." This is just one example of the many horrific incidents that Asian Americans had to endure in just this short period of time, not to mention other periods of increased discrimination throughout the rest of history.

In the above sections, evidence backing the claim made about discrimination caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has been thoroughly discussed. But one aspect that should be further explored is the effect on the mental health of affected people. In a survey done by Sara Waters, a professor at Washington State University Vancouver with a Bachelor's in psychology, a Master's in child development and a PhD in human development, and SuYeon Lee, a student at the same university pursuing a PhD in prevention science, the mental health of Asian Americans who have been discriminated against are measured. Out of 400 Asian Americans, 29% noted an increase in discrimination as a result of the pandemic, 41% noted an increase in overall anxiety, 53% had an increase in depressive symptoms, 15% reported increased physical symptoms, and 43% presented with sleep difficulties. And that's only 600 of those affected. While they may not be physically assaulted, people are still suffering from the narrow minds of the bereaved. Their identities and culture are being prodded at and picked apart. Some participants revealed their experiences, from bystanders acting oddly to being outright threatened. One participant, known as Participant 5e5298967df9e6296875d368, talked about a joke their co-worker made, "A coworker joked that I had the coronavirus because I was 'from Asia'" (Waters and Lee). She also made jokes referring to the virus as the "Kung-Flu." Another said that "I was threatened by someone that they would knife me because I am Asian". The list goes on and on. After their research, Waters and Lee came to a similar solution as the one mentioned in this essay: "intergroup contact, cultural competency trainings, and antiracism efforts that explicitly address and debunk anti-Asian sentiment are necessary to combat the current climate of discrimination and could help prevent poorer health outcomes among Asians and Asian Americans".

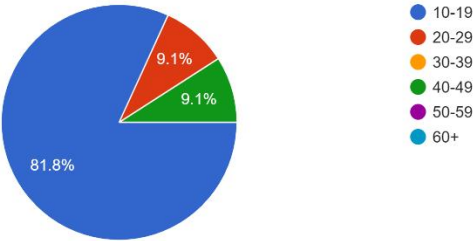
The article by Stephen Croucher, Thao Nguyen, and Diyako Rahmani "Prejudice Toward Asian Americans in the Covid-19 Pandemic: The Effects of social Media Use in the United

States” argues that social media is one of the causes for the growth of discrimination and hate toward Asian Americans in the United States. This article studies the link between social media and prejudices toward Asian-Americans, particularly Chinese, in the United States. It discusses the three results that were concluded from its studies, the first one being “...the more a social media user believes their most used daily social media is fair, accurate, presents the facts, and is concerned about the public (social media believe), the more likely that user is to believe Chinese pose a realistic and symbolic threat to America” (Croucher, Nguyen, and Rahmani). Secondly, “...men scoring higher on intergroup anxiety and women higher on symbolic and realistic threat.” and thirdly, that “...respondents who do not use social media on a daily basis are less likely than those who use Facebook to perceive Chinese as a symbolic threat.” This reinforces our claim that Asian Americans are being targeted because they are a minority during these stressful times. Though the reasoning is controversial, the evidence from source, such as this one, reinstates the urgency of this issue of discrimination toward Asian Americans. The article also brings up the “Integrated Threat Theory” in which it is believed that the dominate culture groups or the “ingroup” tends to express more pessimistic attitudes and beliefs toward inferior culture groups also called the out-group, which in this case, referring to Asian Americans.

The following graphs consist of data gathered from a survey of academic students in an English Composition II class:

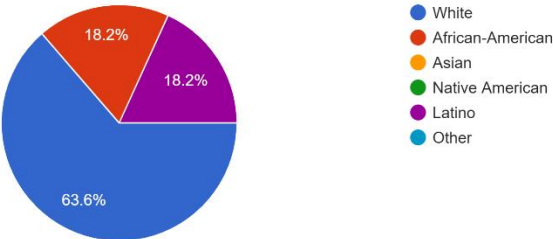
What is your age?

11 responses



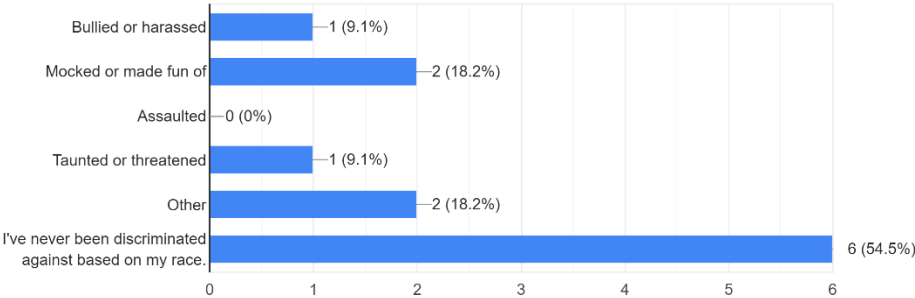
Which race do you identify most with?

11 responses



Have you ever experienced discrimination based on your race? If so, how were you discriminated against?

11 responses



Implications

The best way to address these issues would be to institute better education on discrimination, particularly in United States history. People should be taught about events like the Rock Springs Massacre and the reasons that people are driven to commit these atrocities. To achieve this goal, modifications should be made to the curriculums of classes teaching U.S. history to teach not only about these events involving discrimination, but also why they occurred in the first place. This topic could also be brought up in sociology classes, where students can learn about the societal factors that lead to events like these. If successful, these practices can be applied to other education systems in countries dealing with similar problems of discrimination.

Now while addressing the problem and bringing attention to the issue at hand for people who are in most cases unaware of the rise in discrimination, that's only half of the way in which our project will try to accomplish our goals. Part of our plan is to teach kids and young adults in high school how to combat this hate and rise above it. This aspect of our plan is extremely important to our goals because if the young adults are aware of the situation but do not know how to effectively combat hate, all our efforts would have been for nothing. The ways in which people will combat the hate would be reporting hate speech directed towards Asians Americans, supporting Asian-American owned businesses, and supporting Asian unions throughout the United States. For this to work, the Non-Asian American people of the United States and our future generation of adults are going to have to step up to make a stand that if successful, will be a huge step in the right direction for America

The results of these changes will hopefully be a decrease in the amount of discrimination against all minority groups, a better familiarization with U.S. history and long-standing societal issues, and an overall increase in the physical, societal, and economic health of minority groups, particularly for Asian Americans as they're the ones being discriminated against the most due to

the Covid-19 pandemic. While these measures will not completely get rid of discrimination, they will reduce the amount of this particular type of discrimination that comes as a result of economic crisis.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, the discrimination against Asian Americans due to the pandemic and the effect of it has been discussed in-depth. When confronted with racism and xenophobia against their very culture and identity, many Asian Americans have made the choice to downplay their culture. In the sources above, the authors discuss the building resentment of Americans during the Covid-19 crisis and their subsequent blaming of Asian Americans. The article by SuYeon Lee and Sara F. Waters “Asians and Asian Americans’ Experiences of Racial Discrimination during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Impacts on Health Outcomes and the Buffering Role of Social Support” goes in-depth discussing the detrimental effect discrimination has on overall health as well as data and testimonies from those affected. Not only are there concrete scientific findings showing both the increase in xenophobia since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, but first-hand accounts of casual racism, people being outright blamed for the virus, and even flat-out threats to people’s well-being. As the research into this paper went on, it became more and more apparent that the root of the problem comes from lack of information. When coronavirus came around, people were frightened and confused. They had no idea where this virus came from or if they would survive it. So, when the news broke that the virus had originated in the Wuhan province of China, and the news outlets picked up the story, people finally had someone to blame. But if they knew more about the topic and the people they were placing blame on, the issue could begin to be solved.

Asian Americans are being wrongly killed and discriminated against because of the long-term hatred towards them. Minority groups are wrongly targeted because they are often looked down on. People become hostile and push feelings of hatred upon those who are seen as less in society. It is a defense mechanism in a sense in which people do so in order to inflict the blame onto someone else to avoid feelings of guilt or whatever reason there may be. After World War II, the Japanese were treated differently out of the fear of being betrayed by them and America's solution was to hold them in camps and separate them. According to the U.S. government at the time, this was done to prevent sabotage that may be performed by Japanese Americans who were loyal to Japan. Because of their race, the whole Asian community were all subject to unfair treatment. The same thing is still going on today, following the pandemic, with Asian-Americans being seen as a target for "bringing Covid to America," so in many people's eyes, they deserve to be punished and treated differently from everyone else for their so-called faults.

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