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MODEL MINORITY PERCEPTIONS: THE LIVED
EXPERIENCES OF ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN
COLLEGIATE SPORTS

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
Pitzer College

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the
Degree Bachelor of Arts
In Sociology

By
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact and the implications of the model minority myth in the lives of Asian American women athletes. It draws on thirteen semi-structured, in-depth interviews with women currently competing in college sports who grapple with their intersectional identities as Asian American athletes and as women. I analyze the effects of the model minority expectations through individual internalization of the myth and its associated ideologies. This study looks at the ways that they are physically perceived as female athletes and the racialized nature of sports through the objectification of their appearances. Additionally, it explores the parental influence on their participation in athletics and contradicting factors that affect their current position as Asian American student athletes. I discovered a prominent generational shift in the understanding and implementation of the model minority myth. By focusing on this specific subgroup of Asian Americans in female student athletes, I locate a tension between how they subvert and embody the model minority. This complicates our understanding of the model minority myth because of the unexplored aspects of its effects on student athletes in collegiate sports. To further previous research, the study highlights the importance of challenging hegemonic narratives and developing one's racialized and gendered identity outside of systemic stereotypes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	4
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	5
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	10
I. The Model Minority Myth.....	10
II. Race and Sport.....	16
III. Gaps in the Current Literature.....	26
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....	28
CHAPTER FOUR: INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES WITH THE MODEL MINORITY MYTH.....	34
I. Internalized Ideas about the Model Minority Expectation.....	34
II. Embodied Pressures and Ideologies.....	38
III. Meritocracy and the American Dream.....	40
IV. Exclusion within the Model Minority Standard.....	43
CHAPTER FIVE: PHYSICAL PERCEPTIONS OF ASIAN AMERICANS.....	48
I. Initial Appearances.....	49
II. Ideal Body Images of Athletes.....	51
III. Identity within the Model Minority and Sporting Culture.....	55
IV. Exclusionary Racial Participation.....	59
CHAPTER SIX: PARENTAL INFLUENCE.....	64
I. Parental Opinions Surrounding Academics and Athletics.....	64
II. Using Sports as an Edge for College.....	71
CHAPTER SEVEN: INDIVIDUAL AGENCY.....	75
I. Division I versus Division III.....	75
II. Life After College Athletics.....	81
III. Mental Health.....	85
CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	90
APPENDIX.....	102
REFERENCES.....	107

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Chapter One: Introduction

When I first decided I wanted to write a senior thesis, I realized this was my opportunity to do a research study that was meaningful to my personal identity and that I could implement what I had learned over the past four years. Over my many years of school, we are constantly told how to write papers for certain subjects, which research articles to use, and what the conclusions should ultimately lead to. However, this was my chance to take a subject that had very little research on and expand it to give voices to marginalized individuals and further my personal knowledge on the experiences of other Asian American women.

This research study is personal to me and my own journey as an Asian American woman because I was able to frame this study to further my own understanding of how race and sport has affected others in my position. I have played sports for 18 years and four years of collegiate soccer at the Division III¹ level. However, my journey started back as a little four-year-old when my dad put my sister and I into youth soccer. Although I did not immediately excel at the sport, I developed a lifelong passion for soccer and still carry that with me today. I am invested in the results because of my differing positionality from many of the women in the study because I was adopted when I was nine months old from an orphanage in China and brought to the US by my father. I grew up in a predominantly white community, went to a predominantly white middle and high school, and was never educated about that aspect of my racial identity until I came to college. It has taken many years to come to terms with my personal identity and what it means to be an Asian American in the US today. I learned a lot about this side of myself through

¹ One of the main three divisions in the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA). Division III is unique because it does not offer athletic scholarships and focuses on academics and well-rounded experiences outside the classroom while allowing individuals to continue to play sports at a high level. This is in comparison to Division I that has offers athletic scholarships and has greater variety in academic standards while being more well known for their sports programs.

interacting with other Asian Americans in the classroom and on my soccer team. For me, it was hard to accept who I truly was, and is still to this day because of my status as an adoptee but I will continue to expand my own understandings through challenging the stereotypes. This study allows me to question notions about Asian Americans in athletics and the true racialized nature of American society that has undermined my abilities and forced me to go above and beyond to prove my worth and status in the sport.

Growing up, I was usually one of two Asians on my youth teams, the other being my sister, who was also adopted. Since I was not taught the concepts of discrimination and racism, at a young age it was hard to remember many racialized encounters that I experienced. One memory I had was before youth soccer games the referees would line up the teams and read out the names from the roster to make sure the names were correct. However, the referees would also mispronounce my sisters' name, Chloe. They called her Cole, Choley, Cleo, and rarely got the pronunciation right, despite it being a common American name. I feel as if this was my one of my first vivid memories of discrimination within my sport and how it was due to her appearance since there were few Asian Americans in our town and the referees were guessing how it was pronounced.

Looking back, I also recall memories of racism, when other kids would make fun of me for having narrower eyes and used their fingers to pull their eyelids to make them appear thinner as a way of mocking me. Additionally, it was the stereotype and assumption that my sister and I excelled within school. Our dad raised us to enjoy reading and focus on our studies, but I still never participated in the advanced math classes, much to the surprise of some of my peers.

Minor incidents like this did not stick out to me until much later in life, mostly in college, when I

realized these microaggressions were due to the color of my skin and ways that I was perceived by my peers.

Coming into college I still never felt like I fit in despite the amount of diversity present on campus and on other sports teams. Never had I been able to identify so closely with a group that looked like me and had experienced similar struggles until I came to college. I joined my Asian Pacific American Coalition Club and became a sponsor to help other Asian identifying freshmen with their transition to college. I learned so much, not only about Asian American history in the US but also about my peers' experiences and their own identities. On top of this, my soccer team was the most diverse I had been a part of in my entire life. Having that community aspect and people that I could relate to was important to my experience on the team and at the college. This understanding led me to think about the impact of these ideologies on my personal experience and the experience of others. My personal growth with my Asian American identity was reflected over the four year and my understanding of the model minority myth in how it is applied to Asian Americans regardless of their origins, ethnicity, or status. Even though my team became more diverse, I still noticed a lack of representation of Asian Americans at the collegiate level and wanted to learn about the journeys of other Asian American female athletes and how they reached their present status.

Therefore, I decided to conduct this study because I felt and saw Asian Americans constantly left out of conversations surrounding sports and athletics. Even though I was finally on a team that was not entirely white, I still felt the effects of the societal stereotypes surrounding my race and identity. I wanted to learn about the experiences of other Asian American women who had different backgrounds from me and different experiences with race. This topic is significant because I never felt in touch with this aspect of my identity until college, and the

intersection of race and gender within my sport was hardly discussed. Additionally, I focus my research on the model minority myth and its associated stereotypes that discriminate against Asian American women within academics and athletics. I have personally felt these ideologies shape how people view me as an athlete and a person throughout my whole life. There is a limited representation of Asian Americans in sports, and to be a part of this demographic has given me a sense of pride within my racial identity.

The study highlights the lack of Asian Americans within college sports and the problematic implementation of the term the model minority myth. The ideology was created in the 1960's to highlight minority differences and reinforce white supremacy. However, there has been little overlap into the discourses of race and sport. In 2020, Asian Americans comprised 7.2% of the US population, although the overall population has grown 35.5% in the past 10 years, making them the fastest growing minority group in the United States (Yam & Venkatraman, 2021). That number includes Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders even though the overall population consists of numerous ethnic groups, all of which face different social and political challenge despite the application of a broader Asian American term. For this study, my participants identify under Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI), even though I acknowledge that there is much ethnic variability among Asian Americans.

Statistics show that in 2017, Asian students made up 9.8% of undergraduate college students, which is a higher percentage than their population within the US, lending evidence to their distinct academic achievement associated with the model minority myth. However, that statistic is skewed in terms of ethnic populations and greatly obscures the fact that there are large disparities within the Asian American population. This leads to false beliefs about representation and performance within academia and the workplace even though Asian Americans have the

largest income gap and highest poverty rates of any racial groups in the US (The Practice, 2019). This surface level approach creates greater misconceptions about the Asian American population and fuels discriminatory practices and views towards the race and its social positioning in relation to other minority groups. The importance of increased discourses of minority groups in contested spaces allows counter narratives of dominant ideologies through individual agency coupled with changed understandings of the depths associated with the model minority myth. My research focuses on the effects of the model minority myth on the lived experiences of Asian American women in collegiate sports and how the perceptions associated with the stereotype have affected their personal participation as collegiate athletes. I also examine the impact of parental and individual agency in engaging in sports and academics and how that has changed their understandings of the model minority expectation. The current perception of the model minority myth places Asian Americans in opposition to other minority groups by pedestaling their academic and social achievements as exemplary behavior. My study reveals a modified understanding of the model minority myth for Asian American student athletes and the contemporary generational shift that has occurred to allow them to both subvert and embody the ideology. The creation of this study is meant to highlight inequities of Asian Americans in sports and the effects of the model minority myth on the current generation. Due to their contested position in the racialized institution of sports, Asian Americans continue to defy stereotypes through their participation in these spaces and reaffirm the importance of increased research about the race. This study aims to expand the limited literature on this topic, provide a voice for Asian American women in collegiate athletics, and showcase the barriers they have overcome as individuals to play their sport at a high level.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The Model Minority Myth

The model minority myth refers to the Asian American population and their supposed academic and socioeconomic successes as well as achievement of the elusive American Dream. This term was coined in the 1960's following the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which effectively ended the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and allowed a greater influx of Asians to immigrate and obtain citizenship within the United States. However, they targeted certain skilled laborers and professionals that would help boost their economy, which led to the creation of the model minority myth stereotype of socioeconomic success and social mobility. According to Museus & King (2009), less than 1% of higher education research is focused on Asian Americans because of the ideas associated with the model minority myth and how they are not considered minorities and do not face social challenges. This ideology is detrimental to their visibility as a race and minority within the country because of the broader use of Asian American to describe the whole population rather than understanding how the model minority erases racial and ethnic unity across racial and ethnic groups. By grouping Asian Americans under one term, it eliminates counter narratives and experiences of intersecting identities within race, class, and gender issues. While there are some benefits to being associated with the model minority, the contradictory ideology of the myth creates greater barriers for Asian Americans to overcome in terms of creating their own discourses and values while maintaining social legitimacy.

Problematic Generalization of Asian Americans

A common misconception associated with the term Asian American is that can be used to describe a whole population in its entirety. However, this is not the case and "Asian Americans

are not represented by one voice, one philosophy, and share no common history” (Ligutom-Kimura, 1995:41). Contrary to popular belief, there are numerous pan ethnic groups within the race who all possess unique histories, values, and beliefs and using an umbrella term to categorize these people can be problematic. This generalization based on historical connections to one place coupled with cultural essentialism, reduces difference among Asian Americans and limits a broader understanding of racial difference within their identities. By characterizing all Asian Americans as the same, it fails to account for ethnic differences, obscures their struggles, and discounts the experiences of ethnic disparities within the population (Museus & Kiang, 2009). Each ethnic group has experienced historical colonialism in a distinct manner and the act of ignoring ethnic differences contributes to internal conflicts of groups and wider discrepancies in understanding their lack of commonalities. Not all ethnic groups under the Asian American terminology have experienced unrestricted mobility and many have faced issues with discerning their individuality within the race.

The term model minority myth can be broken down in its meaning and how it is used within society to define the Asian American population. They have gone from being labeled the yellow peril and the associated job threat that they posed to the shining model for other minority groups to follow and exemplify (Lam & Hui, 2016). This idea of a model citizens places Asian Americans in tensions with other minority groups because they have in a sense achieved the elusive American Dream (Chan, 2020). Their supposed successes are attributed to their cultural values of respect, hard work, submission, parental pressures, academic emphasis, and fulfilling the true notion of what it means to be successful within the US by attaining social mobility (NG et al, 2016). Therefore, they are showing that it is possible for other minority groups to reach high levels of academic and financial success. However, many times this results in the

impression that Asian Americans are not considered a minority group and do not face discrimination or social inequalities. At the same time, they are excluded from research or funding because of these ideologies and are not provided with necessary resources available to other minorities despite facing similar societal barriers.

By being framed as a model minority, Asian Americans are seen as setting the standard for other minority groups and find themselves placed in a racial triangulation between whites and blacks. In this position they are seen as “honorary whites” within the racial hierarchy and are believed to not face similar challenges of other minority groups as a race (Nemoto, 2006; Chan, 2020; Museus & Kiang, 2009). This racial segregation is attributed to a colorblind ideology in which race is not an obstacle for Asian Americans and that they do not face racial discrimination due to the model minority myth (Law et al, 2019). These problematic ideologies contribute to the racial triangulation of Asian Americans and the cultural perceptions surrounding their othered or foreigner status (Chan, 2020). By limiting the discussions of race to a black and white spectrum, it de-minoritizes Asian Americans and discounts their problems within the social system. Asian Americans are situated at the top of the racial hierarchy for minorities because of the white dominant narrative that sets them as the model minority for other groups to follow. This causes minority groups to turn against them and creates greater divides in the system, which contributes to the ostracization of Asian Americans.

Parental and Cultural Influence

The idea of success that exists within the model minority is attributed to parental influence and cultural values. The emphasis on educational and financial success stems from the pressure to excel academically and in extracurriculars to live up to parental expectations as

evidence for fulfilling the American Dream (Noh, 2018; Park, 2008). This extends to second and third generation children who feel the need to justify their place within society because of the contradictory associations with foreignness and Americanness (Park, 2008). The model minority myth constructs their personal values based on positive social standards of respect, hard work, politeness, and familial focus in which individuals prioritize to achieve excellence within the US (Ligutom-Kimura, 1995; NG et al, 2016). These values are not the sole reason for their individual successes within the country but have been used in to comparison between other minority groups in the larger context of society.

Many people credit Asian Americans with academic success due to the pressure of the model minority myth and cultural issues, but it should be viewed through racial, sexual, and class ideologies (Noh, 2018). By assessing Asian Americans solely through academic achievement, it limits the understandings of social struggles that these populations undergo as well as the balance of expectations and familial values. Many Asian Americans seek a better future within the US but at the same time, the dissimulation of the model minority myth causes individuals to begin to place blame on themselves if they are unable to achieve the expected levels of success (Noh, 2018). The model minority myth is seen as a positive stereotype to some because of the supposed accompanying successes but it can be harmful in retrospect due to socioeconomic inequalities and discriminatory practices that exist to deter their mobility. Many people believe Asian Americans have achieved financial equity because of their education achievement but this is not applicable to all groups (Sakamoto et al, 2012). By scrutinizing Asian Americans through the model minority myth, it creates hardships for social mobility and stigmas for groups that are unable to achieve socioeconomic status. As a result, this leads to greater disparities between other minority groups as well as a lack of support in academia and public policy.

The stereotypes associated with Asian Americans stem from the model minority myth and the preconceived notions surrounding the population in comparison to other minority groups. These ideologies create an expectation for all members of the Asian American population to live up to while simultaneously obscuring the negative effects of this supposed positive stereotype. Asian Americans, especially women, are seen as quiet, passive, and submissive and are subject to racialized femininity by being exoticized and hypersexualized (Chow, 1987; Nemoto, 2006). Additionally, they find themselves excluded in political spheres and experience invisibility and powerlessness in social issues, academia, and professional environments (Mukkamala & Suymeoto, 2018; NG et al, 2016; Chow, 1987). By forcing Asian Americans to undergo microaggressions and discriminatory behaviors daily, it affects their inclusion in conversations about race and equality and discredits their attempts to challenge the white hegemonic narratives (Mukkamal & Suyemoto, 2018). Asian Americans are continuing to challenge the myth connected to the model minority and its harmful connotations at the micro, meso, and macro level while creating new intersecting identities that enable them to reproduce new discourses of visibility and recognition.

Mental Health and Social Support

One of the biggest challenges facing Asian Americans within the model minority myth is the lack of attention to mental health and available resources for the populations. Despite trying to group all the Asian ethnicities under one term, the varying groups require different resources and tools for help. Since Asian Americans are believed to be over-represented in higher education in comparison to other minority groups, others do not think they need as much support (Chan, 2020). By positioning them as a model minority, many feel as if they are the prime

example of democracy and meritocracy at work, therefore racism does not apply to them because they have become Americanized (Sakatamoto et al, 2012). These ideologies at play are detrimental to social support for different ethnic groups within mental health and other financial program. This denial of discrimination has placed Asian Americans in socially marginalized spaces and at odds with other minority groups rather than in solidarity. These mainstream societal stigmas surrounding mental health among Asian American populations affect all ages and generations. Some of these behaviors may boil down to cultural stigmas surrounding mental health within Asian American communities but this should not be a deterrent for providing resources to those in need. They still face discrimination as a minority group even though American society situates them as equal to whites.

In the future, there should be continued research on ethnic variations within the model minority myth and its effects on the different groups from not only a US standpoint but a global perspective. This study uses a broader Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) term to incorporate a multitude of lived experiences but does not compare the differences between ethnic groups. Additionally, there should be a greater emphasis on the effects of the model minority myth on mental health and available resources for Asian Americans. In many cases, these populations are less likely to reach out due to stigmas surrounding mental health and expectations within the myth that impede access to necessary resources. This is due to the way that mental illness is framed within society and Asian American communities. In Park's writing, she highlights the societal effects of the model minority contributing to the dissimulation of larger issues that compromise the identity of Asian Americans coupled with a cultural understanding of silence and invisibility with their struggles (Park, 2016). These standards of social acceptability effect Asian American immigrants and the dominant narrative that is being

used to oppress these minority groups through racism, social alienation, and reinforcement of the American Dream as the only permissible mold for individuals to achieve. The normalization of obscuring mental health within the Asian American community has contributed to broader conversations about assimilation and the complications of the Asian American identity within contemporary society as well as the ensuing consequences for these populations. Future research should examine the generational impact within Asian American communities and how the model minority myth has affected the perceptions that influence attitudes and actions. In all, previous research surrounding the model minority myth has allowed greater discourse of racial meaning for minorities but should be expanded to counter the dominant narratives and resulting marginalization.

Race and Sport

Ben Carrington examines the critical paradigm of race and sport, and Susan Birrell urges for a more critical approach to racial theories of sport to bring more attention to the lack of research on the subjects and their intersectional features. Although more recent studies have done a better job at expanding the existing discourse, much of the focus has remained on traditional notions of masculinity and stayed within the black-white binary. Sports have always been a site of contestation in which discrimination, resistance, inequality, and power struggles have existed. Dating back to the creation of sport by indigenous people, it then underwent a transformation and was adopted by white, elite men who ultimately used it as a form of entertainment and pleasure. However, this allowed several things to occur, beginning with use by marginalized groups as a way of fighting back against colonialism through adopting the sport as their own and beating their colonizers at their own game. The cultural meaning remained consistent because sport had been formed and maintained through a white man's lens, but it also meant that it became its own

domain where racial ideologies could be demonstrated and reproduced in their own manner (Carrington, 2013). With sport at the center of changing the meaning and significance of race, it was able to challenge traditional ideologies of racial hierarchies and power structures.

Much of the discourse surrounding race and sport continues to exist in a contested space, reserved for the dominant narrative and white centered perspectives. This is seen through a history of exclusion of minority groups, especially Asian Americans, in these ideologies and marginalizes the analysis through which scholars have concentrated their approach. There has been an increased recognition of the lack of research on Asian Americans in sport due to model minority stereotypes that ostracize the race and place them in oppressed positions. Traditionally, Asian American studies have uncritically engaged with conversations around sports and the implementation of intersectional identities continues to be dictated by racialized and gendered norms surrounding their participation (Thangari et al, 2016). Although Kathleen Yep's study on Chinese Americans playing basketball in California examines the social and racialized nature of the sport on young men and women, very few studies have researched the overlap of Asian Americans within sports (Yep, 2009). In many cases, Asian Americans have not been associated with sport because of its masculine nature, which directly counters historical notions of femininity within Asian American bodies and the hyper sexualization of their race (Lee, 2005). The model minority stereotypes place Asian Americans outside the realm of sports and reinforces the hegemonic meaning of ideal athletes which fails to include adequate understandings of Asian American exclusion.

The critical approach taken towards race and sport, also extends to gendered dynamics and the ways in which ideas about masculinity have dominated the existing narratives. Even though the creation of Title IX in 1972 helped women take strides in reducing sex

discrimination, the system is still not perfect and although there has been gains in the gap between men's and women's sports with more representation, it is still not equal. Title IX influenced collegiate sports and provided more funding for women's teams, but gender inequality remains. In terms of participation in sports at the collegiate level, there has been a lack of representation of minority groups in athletics, which has not been reflective of the overall student body. The overarching research about collegiate athletics has excluded studies on the lived experiences of collegiate athletes, specifically women and the impacts of institutional inequalities. Beyond that, studies concerning ethnic and racial groups have been limited in their approach, often opting for white centered studies rather than taking a more critical perspective to understanding the intersection between race, gender, and sports. These exclusionary ideologies created contestation for Asian American participation and reaffirmed preconceived notions about their physical capabilities in comparison to other races. Without increased recognition of the marginalization of Asian Americans in sport, their perspective remains largely underrepresented in the broader context of athletics and cultural identity (Lee, 2005; Wong, 1999). The Western belief of race and sports continues to reproduce dominant ideologies and perpetuate notions of exclusion in sporting culture for minority groups through negative stereotypes and racialized perceptions.

Meritocracy

Success within sports is typically seen because of hard work and dedication to their craft by putting countless hours into their work to become the best in their field. This relates to the notion of the American Dream and how sports are a perfect embodiment of this ideology within the US because it ties into the idea of meritocracy and an individual being able to achieve upward mobility (Leonard II & Reyman, 1988). For some individuals, the only way to progress in

society and secure financial wealth and class status is through sports, which are seen as a mechanism for social mobility for some minorities (Leonard II & Reyman, 1988). However, the reality is that many athletes do not reach the professional level and if they are able to, they do not earn enough money for a sustainable career in the long run. The idea of the American Dream within the US influences the attitudes surrounding minorities and their ability to work hard to be successful without acknowledging the existence of social inequalities and systems that are detrimental to that goal. Within sports, this reaffirmation is played out through the repeated mentality that one must push themselves to reach their full potential and they need to have the drive to reach the top. However, those who fall short are looked down upon, like in society and the ways in which class hierarchy determines the dominant narrative and ideal citizen. This problematic view creates limited opportunity within the racial and gendered intersections by enforcing unequal conditions that they must abide to as well as imposing steep challenges that cannot be overcome without assistance from those in power. These discriminatory values associated with the American Dream are heavily tied into sports in the US and how they dictate success beyond individual efforts through financial and societal barriers.

Contested Spaces

Historically, there has been limited engagement with the topic of race and sport, but recent studies have started to explore a more critical approach to their intersection within society. Lee (2005) finds that, “sport is contested terrain where issues of dominance, resistance, power, and control take place, and that sport is a site where complex meanings and ideologies are produced, reproduced, and reaffirmed along diverse social categories” (p. 492). Defining sport as a social construct has opened the path to analyzing its impact within intersectional categories for individual experiences and ways in which they attempt to challenge dominant narratives. In this

way, sports have become a site of contestation for intersecting disciplines such as, race, gender, class, and sexuality to become redefined and reproduced (Thangari, 2010; Thangari et al, 2016; Carrington, 2013; Birrell, 1989). This has played out in several ways, but on a micro level, individuals use sports to help develop their identities through notions of self, community engagement, and resistance of dominant structures (Thangari, 2010). On a macro level, it creates a space in which race relations can be constructed to challenge hegemonic ideologies and develop new methods of exploring these issues. The colorblind ideologies behind race and sport that have been controlled by white men, have produced unbalanced discussions regarding the importance of new cultural productions. Additionally, these theories have revolved around the black-white discourse and have heavily influenced the current topics of research. However, the need to include literature on minority groups and other intersecting identities is crucial to breaking down traditional notions of athletics. By including marginalized perspectives in the field of race and sport, this approach will broaden the existing ideologies and expand the restrictive binaries that center around the white, masculine point of view.

There has been an exclusion of sport in research because it has not been seen as its own domain, rather an activity that has been influenced by racial ideologies (Birrell, 1989). This lack of research on sport has limited new avenues for exploring race and created a broader misunderstanding of the power of sport in countering dominant power structures. Sport reproduces and reexamines racial meaning and significance through counter narratives and disrupting the status quo. This is linked to spatial understandings of contested spaces not being limited to discourses but rather those in which the body itself is a site of struggle within gender, sexuality, and racial discussions (van Ingen, 2003). These spaces of representation reproduce power relations for marginalized groups and affect the ways identities are expressed in the

broader context of social spaces (van Ingen, 2003). For Asian Americans, this relates to how their bodies are excluded from dominant spaces and how they create counter narratives to find new avenues of breaking stereotypes within the contested space of race and sport. Asian Americans constantly find their bodies regulated and controlled in arenas of sport because of preconceived notions about physical participation and hegemonic ideologies of their abilities as athletes. The historical exclusion of Asian American women from these spaces is attributed to a racialized understanding of sports and how individual identities are produced and maintained in direct contradiction to the dominant narrative of sporting cultures. In recent years, sport has begun to be seen as central in addressing social problems and issues but continues to omit lived experiences of athletes and the impact that this institution has had on their capacity to reproduce new cultural discourses within this contested space. The intersectional approach to race, gender, and sports highlights new ways and places that these frameworks can be examined and expanded.

Black-White Male Discourse

The institution of sport has primarily focused on the black-white discourse and this exclusiveness has failed to account for ethnic and racial differences among minority populations (Lee, 2005). Additionally, “sport is a complex web of ideologies about race and gender, all of which seem to place the white male body as the norm, while other bodies are depicted as possessing deficiencies or special abilities that require special note and consideration. (Willms, 2020:70)” By centering the white male body as the dominant narrative, it effectively limits additional discourses in minority framing and creates hegemonic images within sports. The white male is then placed as the universal definition of athletic excellence and criticizes those who fail to fit these norms and standards. This ideology bars the participation of other intersectional

identity from these realms, instead situating white males as the focal point in conversations about physical abilities within sporting cultures. This narrow approach has affected issues of segregation and resistance within sports, especially during the civil rights era and the rising significance of African American athletes but at the same time, has obscured the narratives of other populations. These ideologies have subsequently equated race with only referring to the black population within sport (Birrell, 1989). The consequences of that results in a lack of distinction between race and ethnicity, which reduces the relevancy of other minority groups and dismisses the importance of inclusion in the study of sports. In addition, the racial reference in terms of black athletes, is also gendered by concentrating on black male athletes and excluding the notion of gender combined with race.

The few references to black female athletes have given them a platform to redefine ideals surrounding women in sports but often results in questioning their femininity and historical beliefs about strength and body types (Carrington, 2013). The issue of femininity in relation to sports arises outside of the black female body being scrutinized in the public eye, and transitions to the objectification of other minority groups and their participation within sport. Specifically, the stereotypes about Asian Americans through the model minority myth and the preconceived notions about their physical abilities are highlighted through ideas of submissiveness, weakness, and fragility. In this way, Asian American women are racialized, gendered, and sexualized different than other minority groups on a societal level because they are exoticized and hyper sexualized as perpetual foreigners (Arnaldo, 2020; Thangari et al, 2016). These ideologies are harmful to current Asian American women in sports because they are forced to acknowledge them and then redefine the existing discourses to prove their status within sport. Additionally, there has been a lack of female representation in sports at the youth, collegiate, and professional

levels in all positions including, athletes, coaches, and administration, which has contributed to the existing discourse surrounding their relevancy (Gregory, 2021). By obscuring the gendered aspect to sports in tandem with race, the field of study will continue to be dominated by the white hegemonic narrative of masculinity and hierarchy while reducing the importance of outside groups.

The discipline of Asian American studies has failed to engage with the topic of sport despite its proven ability to help individuals develop identities through notions of self, community, and challenging hegemonic ideas (Thangari, 2010; Thangari et al, 2016). Many aspects of sport have been represented as access to American acceptance by participating in popular cultural activities, as well as creating communities in which ethnic groups can flourish and interact. Through sport, minority groups have found ways to integrate into previously marginalized American culture. Sports have provided a space in which these groups can develop their own notions of Americanization to gain visibility and recognition on a larger scale. Often, their contributions to sport have been overlooked but the inclusion of their stories and actions within the realm of sport require further exploration to see their full effects.

The impact of sport on Asian American groups, especially youth, has been overlooked by researchers who limit knowledge on ways that they can continue to counter narratives and challenge existing stereotypes that have formed. The field of sport opens a path for minority groups to resist marginalization from society and explore ways to critically engage with existing racial theories rather than be subject to dominant discourses. The current lack of Asian Americans within the industry of sports and athletics highlights the gap in existing studies on minority groups as well as the gendered aspect, which reframes ideologies surrounding power dynamics and white male focused values.

The existing literature of sport has revolved around a male centered perspective but the shift to include female experiences, especially within minority groups has emerged (Arnaldo 2020; Wong, 1999). This would allow for greater recognition for women within sports, as well as the creation of new theories within sociology that question gender roles and dynamics that rule the current discussion. The exclusion of the intersection between race and gender may be in part to the marginalization of feminist theory within sociology, but new studies are continuing to explore issues surrounding their effects (Birrell, 1989). The exclusion of Asian Americans in the topic of sport has limited the cultural and societal discourse within representations of minorities as well as in-depth analysis of these spaces.

The relation of gender within sports has typically been viewed from a male dominated perspective that has skewed ideas of femininity for women and resorted to a biological understanding of gendered differences. These ideologies surrounding women in sports places them in a subordinate position compared to male athletes and reinforces power relations of male superiority due to notions of ideal physicality (Birrell, 1989). In many cases, there is an ideal image associated with a successful athlete. One that possesses strength, intelligence, aggression, and a more masculine mindset is seen as being dominant within their sport. There are lingering effects that translate into ideal images surrounding women in sports, especially black female athletes who create their own forms of strength and confidence (Carrington, 2013). However, this also creates a contradiction with ideologies surrounding femininity because it is commonly associated with passivity and softness. Sports are seen as a socialization tool for gender roles and can heavily influence ideas of femininity as well as the creation of new discourses that allow for counter narratives within the field. Even so, the gendered ideologies are also racialized in their application, especially for Asian American athletes in relation to the model minority myth. These

stereotypes characterize Asian American women as passive, small, and submissive (Mukkamala & Suyemoto, 2018). Within sports, these are characteristics that are not associated with success and dominance because of the socially constructed ideas about physical, strong, and aggressive athletes. Therefore, the ideas surrounding Asian American women in sports are viewed negatively because the misconceptions behind their physical capabilities cause them to be underestimated and discredited. Messner (1988) finds that, “the framing of female athletes as sex objects or as sexual deviants is no longer a tenable strategy if the media are to maintain their own legitimacy” (205). However, Asian American women are fetishized, exoticized, and hypersexualized within American society due to historical notions about their cultural images. The dominant narrative surrounding masculinity within sports creates tensions between female bodies within sport and how societal views look to subordinate and dismiss their own claims to legitimacy as athletes. Without allowing for the reproduction of identities and questioning the existing claims to current inequalities, the racialized ideals behind women in sports will continue to struggle to construct challenges within these spaces.

The study of race and sport has had a limited approach to intersectional frameworks as well as an expansion of identity discourses that highlight the importance of these ideologies. This has led to an exclusion of perspectives within race, gender, class, and sexuality in examining social dynamics within sports. For the future, there should be increased research on the gendered aspect of sports and the impact of athletics on youth, especially in terms of bolstering participation for minorities and providing a more diverse demographic within sports in the future. The current framing of race and sports provides limited opportunities for analysis because of the white dominant perspective but by challenging the hegemonic notions associated with

sports and creating new racial meanings and discourses, it will allow for new understandings of their extensive effects.

Gaps in the Current Literature

Based on previous literature and engagement with Asian Americans in sport, there has been limited research on the intersection between these identities. This study looks to fill crucial gaps on knowledge about lived experiences of Asian American women at the collegiate level. Although there is extensive research on the model minority myth and its effects, there are few studies that cover its impact within sports, specifically at the Division III level. In general, much of the current literature focuses on professional athletics with little attention being given to the collegiate level. The goal of this study is to bring more awareness to the societal effects of ideologies such as the model minority myth on Asian American women and how they understand and conceptualize their associated consequences. The critical paradigm of race and sport remains limited to conversations within the black and white dichotomy with few studies branching into minority groups and their experiences with sports. This project highlights personal experiences of marginalized individuals and the ways in which they have encountered racial stereotypes within their own lives. This nuanced subject of exploring Asian Americans within athletics, engages with previous literature on the model minority myth and how it applies to their personal perceptions and abilities. I hope to contribute to existing literature by expanding the voices of Asian American women in collegiate sports and create shared identities where communities are hard to form. The lack of Asian Americans within athletics speaks to the necessity of this study within the context of collegiate sports and their complicated position as a model minority. The analysis of their bodies and being in these spaces are hardly considered because of historical

notions of exclusion and the dominant narrative. By giving a voice to these misunderstood individuals, they can continue to defy stereotypes by participating in athletics and provide role models for the next generation. The Asian American population is increasing within the country, and they will continue to face these societal flaws and inequities throughout their lifetime, but moving forwards, this study will include a deeper understanding of the structural deficiencies in place that impede Asian American progress. In addition, this study examines a generational difference in the understanding of the model minority myth and its changing significance in the current contemporary landscape. This shifting comprehension of societal ideologies has affected the ways in which Asian Americans conceptualize stereotypes about themselves and how they deal with the accompanying consequences. The exclusion of Asian American women from these systemic conversations has restricted the ability for individuals to develop their own identities within sport and their own interpretations of the model minority expectation. I conducted this study, not only for my own personal knowledge on these issues, but to bring awareness to the lack of literature on this topic and how these issues have shaped the identities of countless Asian American women in collegiate sports now and in the future.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The methodology utilized in this study focuses on the lived experiences of Asian American women in their collegiate sports. The main source of analysis is drawn from thirteen semi structured, in-depth interviews of Asian American women at small liberal arts schools in Southern California who compete at the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) Division III level. The interviews focused on their personal experiences with the model minority myth and the impact of their parents in their athletic journeys. Additionally, my positionality as an Asian American woman who has played collegiate sports is shown through the student as a researcher method by understanding my reflexivity as a researcher and how I can relate to my participants with the critical lens that I employed in creating the study.

The research project was approved by the Pitzer College Institutional Review Board with the goal of learning about the lived experiences of Asian American women in collegiate sports at the Division III level. All the participants self-identified as Asian American women of eighteen years or older. Additionally, they were all current participants in their respective sports. Each participant engaged in an in-depth interview ranging from 25 to 85 minutes in length, with the average interview lasting around 55 minutes. The study consisted of athletes who participated in, basketball, lacrosse, soccer, swimming, tennis, volleyball, and water polo. Pseudonyms were utilized for the participants, individuals they mentioned, and the college they attended (outside the classification of small liberal arts college in Southern California). They were also allowed to omit any information and had the option to stop the interview at any time. Before the interview, all participants filled out a consent form in which they agreed to be recorded for the purpose of making a transcription of the interview. All the collected information is confidential with the data being protected on a computer only accessible by the principal investigator.

In terms of finding participants for the study, I decided to focus on the Division III aspect and limited it to small, liberal arts schools in Southern California that participated in NCAA Division III sports. Participation in this study was voluntary, and participants were gathered through convenience sampling and snowball sampling, most of which occurred within the same team. Additionally, most of the participants were messaged directly either through Instagram or text message. The initial message² was sent to garner interest. Once they expressed interest in participation either verbally or online, they received an initial email titled Potential Participation in Research for Senior Thesis.³ After the participant agreed to participate, I sent them another email titled Email Confirmation and Zoom Scheduling.⁴

Following this email, the participant would schedule a time and date to participate in the interview, usually within a week of responding. A consent form⁵ was attached to the email that they were required to fill out prior to participation. It asked for informed consent in voluntary participation in the study and their consent to be recorded as well as their signature. It also provided additional information about the study and how the consent process worked. It was as follows:

This consent form asked for permission to record the interviews over Zoom, a video communications platform, to help with transcription purposes through Otter.ai, an online transcription application. After the interview was complete, the recording would save through zoom then the mp4 file could be downloaded onto Otter.ai and assist in making a transcription. A limitation of Otter.ai was some transcriptions were imperfect, however, it was accurate enough for the principal investigator to conduct the coding process.

² Refer to Appendix for initial message

³ Refer to Appendix for first email

⁴ Refer to Appendix for second email

⁵ Refer to Appendix for consent form

Once the zoom meeting was scheduled and the consent form was filled out, the interview was conducted. The interviews started with a confirmation of confidentiality and consent to being recorded. Some of the topics covered were, background information such as familial and racial identity, the model minority myth specifically at the collegiate level, experiences playing sports and other activities during childhood, racial experiences within sport, the recruiting process for college, parental influence with their decision to play sports in college, and personal identity in relation to sport, race, and gendered dynamics. The principal investigator followed the interview questions as the main structure, but the open-ended aspect of the interview allowed for additional questions of clarification to be asked at any point. The interview questions used are as follows:

1. What is your name? Which college do you go to? What is your major? What sport do you play? How long have you played that sport for? What drove you to play sports? What is your ethnicity?
2. What was the demographic of your school/neighborhood growing up?
3. How many Asians or other minority groups were on your sports teams growing up?
4. Were there ever moments during your childhood that you noticed a racial difference between you and your peers?
5. Did you ever feel as if you faced racism or discrimination playing sports as a child? If so, what did that look like?
6. Have you heard of the model minority myth?

[The model minority myth is a stereotype about Asian Americans, in which they are expected to have socioeconomic and academic success within the population, based on inherent talent and supposed intellectual tendencies and abilities. They have in a sense achieved the American Dream referring to hard work equals success within our country.]⁶

7. Can you share about any experiences you've had that connect to the model minority myth, whether it be within academics or athletics?
8. Have you seen other Asian American women impacted by the minority myth since starting to play your college sport?
9. What do you think is the biggest challenge facing Asian American women in collegiate sports today?
10. Follow up: What do you think can be done to fix that or improve that? And do you think you can be personally involved in that process?

⁶ I include this definition of the model minority myth to clarify how it is used in the study, as well as to provide the participant with an understanding of the term if they didn't know what it meant. This definition was developed because of personal knowledge and interaction with information provided from the literature review.

11. Besides being an athlete, what other activities did you engage in as a youth, whether it be academic, music, or community based? Do you still practice any of them today?
12. What made you decide to play sports in college? Can you walk me through your recruiting process and how you ended up at __ College?
13. Did the amount of diversity present on the team impact your decision at all?
14. Was there any outside pressure or encouragement from your parents that influenced your decision to play collegiate sports?
15. Did your parents support your decision to pursue academics and athletics in college and how did they show their support?
16. How did your family, friends, and teachers react when you told them you were going to play sports in college? Did the name of the school (prestige/division/sport) come up or seem to change their response?
17. Can you think of a moment where you have been underestimated or discredited as an athlete and would you be willing to share how you dealt with that situation?
18. How has being a woman affected your identity as an athlete and where you stand in relation to your sport?
19. Is there someone who identifies as Asian American who has really impacted your experience as an athlete?
20. Do you think there are cultural differences between Caucasian and Asian households surrounding sports and academics in tandem? If so, have you experienced these personally and what or who has shaped these ideologies?

Following the completion of the interview, the participants received a final email titled:

Debrief for Participation in Research for Senior Thesis.⁷

The following steps included uploading the audio recording of the interview to Otter.ai, an online application that turns audio files into transcriptions, which was used to assist in the coding process for this research study. The coding process consisted of reading the transcriptions, relistening to the audio files to correct any anomalies in the scripts and looking for quotes as well as common themes that emerged from the data. Then this data was organized in Google Docs to find patterns and main ideas from the interviews, which ultimately assisted with forming the chapters and the research. The transcripts were vital in reviewing the interviews and

⁷ Refer to Appendix for final email

allowed the principal investigator to focus more on the participant during the interview process rather than writing notes the whole time. The main themes surfaced through a close reading of the participants' responses. Although the significance of different themes varied per participant, the data produced on their lived experiences proved vital to the study and its goals of increasing the knowledge on this intersectional topic.

Participant Backgrounds

All the participants selected for the study attended a small, liberal arts college in Southern California and participated in a NCAA Division III varsity sport. There were thirteen individuals who identified as Asian American women and ranged from college first years to college seniors. This study consists of two basketball players, two lacrosse players, one soccer player, one swimmer, two tennis players, two volleyball players, and three water polo players. The participants identified as a range of ethnicities from, Taiwanese, Japanese, Tibetan, and Chinese. Others are mixed and either two or more races. They are Taiwanese and Laotian, Chinese, Okinawan, and Native Hawaiian, half Indian, quarter Filipino and a quarter white, half Chinese and half Taiwanese, and half Korean and half white. The most common ethnicity represented was Chinese, with five of the participants identifying as Chinese.

Challenges encountered

Some of the challenges encountered during this process was finding enough participants to partake in the study. Since this study was conducted over one semester, the thirteen interviews had to be conducted over a twenty-day period, often back-to-back to accommodate participants' schedules. Additionally, many in season athletes had busy schedules which made finding a time to meet extremely challenging. Lastly, there were some inaccuracies with the transcriptions produced from Otter.ai in terms of, not differentiating speakers from the audio file, not

transcribing words or spellings correctly, and breakages from Wi-Fi interruptions which made deciphering the transcription more difficult.

Positionality

Throughout my research process, I have been able to take a first-hand approach in relating to the importance behind the study and implementing my own experiences. As an Asian American woman who has played four year of college sports and seen the personal effects of the model minority myth, I wanted to see the ways that it affected others. I utilized a “student as a researcher” methodology to be able to gain an insider’s perspective to my research and with my participants. By interviewing individuals who fit my demographic, I was able to relate to them and recruit people who had the similar experiences to me. The important aspect of relating to my participants was being able to build a connection with their identities and allow them to be vulnerable about their stories with their race and sport. Not only did my personal identity influence the creation of this study, but how I was able to create my research and interview questions and tailor them to gain a well-rounded perspective of the experiences of my participants. Being an Asian American Division III athlete comes with the associated stigmas about their justification as serious athletes and an overall lack of recognition that I pinpointed in my questions. Additionally, the gendered dynamics within the Asian American community being tied to physical abilities was highlighted through my own experiences of constantly being underestimated and discredited as an athlete and needing to prove my worthiness on and off the field.

Chapter Four: Results

Individual Experiences with the Model Minority Myth

Based on previous literature and knowledge about Asian Americans and the term coined the model minority myth, I created a definition in how I wanted the participants to think about this concept. Although not perfect by any means, it gives a basis for a generalized idea about this term and its associated meanings. It was used as follows:

The model minority myth is a stereotype about Asian Americans, in which they are expected to have socioeconomic and academic success within the population, based on inherent talent and supposed intellectual tendencies and abilities. They have in a sense achieved the American Dream referring to hard work equals success within our country.

Based on the definition of the model minority myth used within the study, the participants internalized these ideas about socioeconomic and academic success and how they are supposed to have engrained a certain level of intellectual knowledge based on their race that has allowed them to be successful within the hierarchy of society. This has influenced the actions of many Asian Americans in how they view themselves in relation to the myth and how they must live up to those expectations. Many of them still put the pressure on themselves to succeed and achieve at a high level even if it is not explicitly enforced by their parents or society. Many times, they ended up fitting into the stereotype and ideologies because of their work ethic and high achieving personalities.

Internalized Ideas About the Model Minority Expectation

Contrary to many ideas surrounding the model minority myth, many of the women in the study found that this pressure surrounding their personal success was not explicitly applied. Rather much of the expectations that are manufactured by the model minority myth were applied

to themselves. The associated stereotypes of one having academic success plays out in the ways in which the women internalized the notions of the model minority myth through academics and athletics. There were specific instances of academic application, in which the women found themselves living up to these ideas by putting pressure on themselves to achieve to some expected levels. Other times, they faced more of an unspoken assumption, in which their teachers and peers expected them to be succeeding to a certain level of academic achievement but might not explicitly place those expectations on them. Overall, these women found themselves internalizing the stereotypes of the model minority myth, like the study by Noh (2018), in which the dissimulation of the myth contributed to internalization of expectations. These societal expectations of professional success and fitting into the mold complicates the narratives that these women are trying to create through their intersectional identities in an ever-changing global sphere.

Although, it is assumed that pressure from the model minority myth stems from parental values and institutions, many of the women found the expectations to be internalized by themselves and what they hoped to achieve. Yvonne, a tennis player, found these notions were tied into individual values rather than a societal standard.

“For the model minority stereotype, I think a lot of the pressure just comes from me internally, because I just want to do well. I know I can reach a certain grade, or I can perform to whatever level you know that I set my mind. So luckily, I've never sort of felt that pressure externally, either from society or from my parents. (Yvonne)”

This differs from previous understandings of the model minority myth, in which individuals felt explicit pressure to perform from parents or teachers. Yvonne views this myth as a personal goal that she can achieve, rather than having her parents set that standard for her. The concept of the model minority myth focuses on individual achievement, which is embodied by these Asian American women in their academics, athletics, and overall life. For Yvonne and the

other women in the study, the internalized pressure acts as a driving force in their lives, that surprises others when they learn that it does not come from their parents. Instead, they feel the individual need to apply this pressure to live up to high levels of achievement in all their actions, not just limiting it to academics. Their desire to succeed not just for others but for themselves is reflective of their personal character and values, which appear to align with the ideologies behind the model minority.

In a similar context to Yvonne, Allison finds herself embodying the model minority through her actions and determination. Allison talked about finding ways to succeed within her environment and finding ways to reach those levels of personal achievement as well as the feelings involved with overcoming stereotypes.

“You must prove yourself, but when you succeed, and when you work hard, with all these different identifying factors, it feels good. And the competitive aspect of it oftentimes, Asian Americans, and especially Asian American women, they're viewed as submissive. So being in a competitive environment where you show that side of yourself on this other level. It's affected who I am today in terms of my confidence, or my work ethic, or my relationships with other people, communication, etc. (Allison)”

She understands that the academic and athletic spheres are very competitive, not only for Asian Americans but other students as well. However, there are also preconceived notions about her race and what they are supposed to achieve. For starters, the existing ideologies surrounding Asian Americans put them on an elevated expectation of academic achievement. Many of these individuals look for ways to prove their abilities and find recognition for their achievements since it has become so common, their efforts are often disregarded and taken for granted. Additionally, this can ostracize individuals who might not fit this mold within the Asian American community and create greater stresses from failing to meet these expectations. Lindsey examines this in her interpretation of the model minority and how there is not one true definition of who fits this stereotype.

“Just seeing how they play into the model minority because they are the wealthy Chinese family that gets a good education. Her parents are doctors and lawyers. And then comparing that, to my experience, I think it made it very apparent. This is what they think a Chinese person is. There are multiple facets to what a Chinese person can be. There's no true definition. (Lindsey)”

Lindsey recognizes that some people may feed into this stereotype, but also that there is an isolating factor in terms of who is defined under these notions and who is left out. Those who find themselves on the outside looking in, frequently struggle with this pressure to perform and succeed. Therein lies the negative effects of the model minority myth and its exclusive nature. Originally, it was perceived to be a positive stereotype, but it has progressed into the erasure of problems within the race and prevented many ethnic groups from receiving proper resources to combat these problems. The umbrella term of Asian American essentially erases difference between these groups and tries to apply a generalized stereotype to a diverse population that exhibits many qualities and values that are unique to their cultures. By situating all Asian Americans within the upper-middle, and upper class, all with high paying jobs, and prestigious degrees, it creates a false image of an Asian American, rather one that only few have achieved. The Hart-Cellar Act and other policies have tried to reverse centuries of legislation that looked to exclude and discriminate against Asian immigrants. They have allowed certain people to migrate over including, members of an individual already within the US and educated, skilled professionals, which resulted in a handful of Asian immigrants that achieved a higher degree of socioeconomic status and financial mobility in comparison to the rest of the country. While the US used this to acknowledge their argument of the workings of democracy, it also placed Asian Americans in a contested situation in which they were discriminated against by white Americans for supposedly taking their jobs and earning more money than them. They were also placed as

the model minority in contrast to other minority groups and what they should be achieving within the American context.

However, as the political and social landscape has changed about the terminology and meaning of Asian American, the idea of the model minority myth has changed as well. It is still used to discriminate against other minority groups and provide an example of the working of American democracy, but it has also been seen as a positive stereotype and individual achievement. Unfortunately, the term also obscures much of the negative aspects of the stereotype and how this broader generalization leads to lack of resources and obscuring of minority narratives by framing them in a racial triangulation between whites and blacks and pedestaling their achievements as a minority race. These issues have led to no true definition of the model minority myth and a broader ideology that is placed on a population even though it is not applicable to many of the pan ethnic groups as well as those who do not fit its mold. For example, many Asian Americans fit extreme ends of the spectrum. There have been successes among the population and how they earn more than whites and other groups, as well as have a higher rate of education but they also occupy the lowest levels of poverty because of discriminatory practices and lack of resources if they do not possess the necessary education levels or financial means. This extends to who can be put into the box of the model minority and who it applies to because the pan ethnic differences within the population means that the stereotype cannot apply to all “Asian Americans” as well as to what extent or in what areas of their lives.

Embodied Pressures and Ideologies

Bailey felt that high expectations were due to the stereotypes associated with the model minority myth and other people’s understandings of its values. She said “I also put a lot of

pressure on myself to get my grades up, just because I knew that people were like, oh, she's Asian, she must be smart. (Bailey)” Even though these assumptions were placed on her by her peers and teachers, Bailey found it necessary to push herself to reach those expected levels of academic achievement. Although, the idea that Asian Americans are inherently smart and will achieve academically is not always true, the generalization of one’s individual abilities largely discredits individuals within the system because it becomes an expectation rather than an achievement. This ideology was even more detrimental to individuals who did not fit this mold and either struggled academically or were not part of a higher socioeconomic class. The pitfall to this stereotype leads to invisible ideas about Asian Americans that continue to play out in institutions and perpetuate these notions that do not apply to everyone.

For Zoe, these ideologies felt constricting to her identity in the way that society viewed her intersectional identities. She found that “same kind of feeling, put into a box a little bit. Rather than just being an athlete, you're an Asian athlete and feeling you're exerted in that way. (Zoe)” This feeling created a restriction on how she could express herself beyond her physical appearance and associated stereotypes within her race. This highlights the overall erasure of difference in Asian Americans and how commonly they are put into one group. These ideologies ostracize individuals due to their racial identities, especially as an athlete. Since Asian Americans make up such a small portion of collegiate and professional athletes, it is easy to place assumptions on their abilities due to past performances. This raises the level for future athletes as well and how they need to find ways to counter these stereotypes and create new identities outside the limiting model minority myth and its ideologies.

Other women found different ways to embody these ideals when they played out in their lives. Sloan, for example, encountered the model minority myth most commonly in an academic setting through unspoken assumptions that were reinforced by actions.

“We had to live up to that expectation that the model minority myth set for us. It was always so competitive amongst us students, and even our parents, everyone was just competing to be the best, best in school, best grades, go to the best college, get the best career. (Sloan)”

The context behind the model minority myth created the standards that all Asian Americans were supposed to uphold and embody through their work and family lives. This inherently produced competition among Asian Americans, not just in relation to other races. The ethnic difference and comparison generated the desire to reach the highest academic and socioeconomic status and exemplify the ideal citizen that worked hard to achieve their goals. This set expectation that everyone was supposed to achieve has social and political consequences in how Asians are perceived by the public and when or if they require assistance. In the case of affirmative action, many college admissions remain discriminatory towards Asian populations in trying to limit the demographic representation of the population and hold them to higher standards because they are not seen as minorities. These issues continue to place Asian Americans at the crossroads between whites and minority groups as well as discriminate against their population. Asian Americans are believed to be overrepresented in higher education, which contributes to the driving ideologies behind achievement and individual success within society. However, it also obscures the efforts of individuals to reach these levels, dismissing their struggles deeming success fundamental to their race. The reinforcement of these ideologies causes inherent competition for individuals to excel in comparison to their peers and live up to the racial standard and expectation.

Meritocracy and the American Dream

These ideologies tie into the idea of the American Dream and meritocracy that is rampant within the country but does not apply to just minority groups but rather the whole population. The idea of working hard to be successful has remained motivation for many people to achieve social mobility regardless of race. This prominent mindset within the country leads to the belief that meritocracy is achievable and puts pressure on all people through college and their careers to work hard to be successful socially and financially. This extends to parental expectations and values within America that many Asian American parents embody and project onto their children but does not always apply to just Asian parents. The value of working hard pertains to many parents within America because they want their children to achieve social mobility and financial stability by going to a good college and getting a good job. There are some circumstances of Tiger Moms and more traditional Asian households but for the most part, this idea of work ethic, especially within Division III schools that prioritize academics, has led to less assumptions being placed on Asian American parental expectations and a more generalized societal expectation for this generation.

Laila's experience falls in line with this broader ideology of meritocracy within America.

“I think something that's innate amongst Asian kids in general is their parents pushing them to work hard to stay disciplined. So, whether that contributes to the model minority I just work as hard as I can in academics and in water polo, I didn't think it makes me as an Asian person to not before. (Laila)”

Even though the model minority myth is associated with cultural and parental values of hard work, academic prioritization, and respect, Laila finds that parental influence extends beyond being Asian American. Rather parents push their children to work hard either way and achieve good grades. Instead of associating these values solely within Asian American households, Laila argues that this willingness to work hard and commit themselves to academics and athletics, applies outside of the model minority concept. Other kids also face these societal

and parental pressure to succeed but due to historical lines of thinking, it has been heavily associated with the model minority myth, often attributing individual success to these tendencies. At the same time, the model minority myth reflects parental sacrifice, often as immigrants, to justify their presence within a nation of immigrants. Much of the political ideology ties into this idea of meritocracy and achieving upward social mobility for marginalized groups but that is believed to be a result of following the model minority conception and living up to its expectations.

Zoe related to Sloan's experience of dealing with these set of stereotypes about their future achievements coming by means of personal performance.

"I think especially the need to, like succeed, to get into a good college, and have a good life, build a better life. Especially because knowing that our parents immigrated here. There's also another underlying pressure feeling as if you must live up to their expectations of you. (Zoe)"

Zoe related in terms of expectations from the model minority myth but also in relation to her parents struggles and the sacrifices they made to immigrate to the US. This was her way of making it all worth the challenges that they faced, by establishing herself within the country and being successful. The pressure, although not always explicitly communicated from her parents, emphasized the stories of many minorities and the need to excel in this new environment despite the obstacles they have overcome. For Zoe, this perpetuated the model minority by justifying the presence of the next generation among other immigrants as well as providing evidence of parental success in the idea of the American Dream (Park, 2008). By getting into a good college and building a better life than what her parents were able to achieve, it shows the ways in which following the ideology of the model minority and its stereotypes allowed her to succeed because of her parent's sacrifice. The meritocracy that exists within the country, motivates individuals to believe that their hard work will result in excellence and success to the highest degree, something

that was previously unobtainable. However, there are misconceptions with this idea and societal barriers that are overlooked because of the blinding potential that is generated by the country. Managing expectations and fulfilling standards are only part of the struggles that many Asian Americans face when experiencing the systemic ideologies of the model minority myth that look to oppress and dictate their actions. Without the presence of Asian Americans within society, the US would not have been able to drive home their exclusive principles pertaining to achievement and success, which further isolated Asian Americans and their cultural values.

Exclusion within the Model Minority Standard

Trying to juggle expectations from parents, teachers, friends, coaches, and themselves puts Asian American women in a conflicted position between different responsibilities, especially for student athletes and managing the busy schedules from both. Fiona found herself caught in this dichotomy and excluded from both sides.

“Balancing the two made me miss out. I willingly missed out on a lot of other aspects of high school, because I was so caught up. If I wasn't doing academics first, I was playing volleyball. That was something that a lot of people on my team didn't understand, because they were white. Also, my friends at school who were Asian didn't understand because they didn't play a sport. And so, I was kind of in between, where I was not 100% dedicated to sports, but also, not 100% dedicated to academics, even if that was my priority. That was kind of a weird thing to walk because neither group understood my priorities completely. (Fiona)”

The student athletes within the study are often left at an in between position because of their pursuit of academics and sports. The stereotypes associated with the model minority myth create expectations of educational priority without room to participate in other extracurricular activities such as, sports. Those realms are reserved for the dominant groups, while Asians are presumed to only participate in academic fields. This leads to the exclusion of Asian American female athletes from both groups. On the one hand, many teammates were surprised or did not understand the academic prioritization whether it be during tournaments or not skipping class for

games. On the contrary, their Asian American friends in school did not understand their commitment to a sport with practice and games since they did not participate at the same level. For Fiona, she was not entirely committed to either side but still had a passion for both and was not willing to completely sacrifice one for the other, so she chose the balance of academics and athletics at the expense of other aspects of her social life. Although she kept academics as a priority, she was still participated in both. This was accompanied by feelings of exclusion in the way that she was not able to relate to her Asian school friends and did not fit the perfect mold of academic priority either. However, even though she was committed to her sport, she still faced differences from her teammates by doing homework in between games and not skipping school to attend tournaments. Her unique position in which she participated fully in both sides of her life meant that she felt excluded from both groups even though she was able to maintain the balance, neither side understood her predicament.

The supposed tendencies of Asian Americans under the model minority do not encompass both lifestyles and this places Asian American athletes in a dichotomy between the two. There exists the possibility to choose both sides without sacrificing the other, as seen in all the participants, but many of their peers could not conceptualize this balance and led to a larger exclusion from both. Since Fiona's priorities were a combination of academics and athletics, it challenged the notion of the given expectations from the model minority myth and how that balance is unachievable on a larger scale. The model minority expectations meant a feeling of exclusion from Fiona because of her decision to engage with activities outside of academics.

Within the model minority myth comes the expected socioeconomic and class status for the people in the population. Historically, Asian Americans have earned greater salaries than other social groups within the US and this had led to the creation of the term that sets them as a

model minority group for others to follow. However, not all Asian Americans fit within this mold or status and when they are on the outside looking in, it can be an exclusionary experience. This pressure and expectation to be financially stable, go to a good college, and work a good job has spilled into societal acknowledgements of the race's achievement levels. They see the population prospering through select individuals and highlight their accomplishments as universal. Jamie felt the pressure from the model minority myth to be a part of that status but also the negative exclusion from not truly participating.

“I think the model minority myth comes to play when people would just assume that I fit in perfectly and I don't. I was regrettably ashamed of that moment. I played into it. I was like, I fit in here. (Jamie)”

Jamie's experience relates to the idea of passing within her given environment and how others' expectations of her supposed status meant that when she did not live up to those standards, it was an ostracizing and shameful moment. Not all Asian Americans find themselves living in financial security and must deal with societal inequalities at an extreme level because they are believed to be wealthy. Asian Americans are constantly faced with this contradiction and conflict of having incredibly high standards they are supposed to achieve and live up to daily. This idea of the model minority creates a restrictive and limiting scope that all Asian Americans must exist under. However, this ideology should be contested and challenged because of the multidimensional features of the biases behind its creation.

The model minority myth continues to create an ostracizing and isolating environment for Asian Americans, specifically in academic and athletic spaces. The stereotypes surrounding their supposed behavior as well as gendered roles produces a narrative of expected performance in the classroom and the larger society. Many of these notions stem from political ideologies that work to situate minority groups in detrimental positions to each other in the white dominated society. They have played out through the personal need to self-impose values of success and personal

pressure within the highly competitive environment that forces individuals to go above and beyond to live up to these expectations. The generalization of the model minority myth is seen to not apply to all groups and create a complicated understanding of what it truly entails and who fits within its mold. The associated stereotypes are constructed from a combination of competitive mentality and drive to reach certain levels of achievement within society, and the intersectional identities of Asian American student athletes find ways to subvert and embody these socially constructed ideologies.

These stereotypes have extended into their college experience and affected the way they have been perceived by their peers and teachers as well as the way they situate themselves within academics and athletics. It comes with the increasing need for individuals to prove themselves outside of the stereotypes. They want to show that they can be successful not because they are Asian and part of the model minority ideologies, but that their personal ambition and character should be recognized along with their achievements, whether it be academic or athletic. They believe that their journeys should be understood as well as the ways they overcame social obstacles to reach their position but that it should not be attributed entirely to parental pressure or values. The women within the study push themselves because of their own free will and agency to strive to work hard and reach personal goals within their lives.

The ideologies associated with the model minority myth are not as societally enforced as in the past but rather internalized by the current generation and the understanding of its stereotypes causes Asian Americans to feel inexplicit pressure to live up to these expectations. The societal reinforcement of the American Dream means that there is increased competition between minority groups in relation to white success and as society progresses, lingering biases and hegemonic ideologies dictate the ways in which people can gain or be denied social

mobility. This idea of the model minority myth remains prevalent in society but its meanings and the ways that people understand its stereotypes and expectations have changed through the generations and created a modified definition of what it means to be an Asian American in our country today.

On an individual level, the changing social and political context has led to a dual identity of the myth living between the lines of older methods of thinking and those have who have faced past discrimination and exclusion from these ideologies and those who are paving a new identity as a growing, established minority group within the US. Each generation has found new ways to change perceptions around their abilities through their actions and voices but many of the racist ideologies continue to exist. The ideas of Asian Americans as foreigners, others, exotic, submissive, and invisible are perpetuated by societal expectations and reduce these individuals to their bare minimum in terms of racial identification. However, the women within the study are finding new ways to define their identity and how they earn their place despite the preconceived notions of the model minority. Whether it be through internalizing pressure, working hard to be successful, handling, and challenging stereotypes, or dealing with attempted exclusion, they understand that there is no true definition of the model minority myth because it has advanced since its conception in the 1960's. Given the always evolving social and political context within the country, there appears to be a shift about the generalization of the population as a whole and the development of the model minority myth. Not only has this been embodied by individuals personally affected by its stereotypes, but the generational difference has outlined the limiting nature of its ideology within the US.

Chapter Five: Physical Perceptions of Asian Americans

The stereotypes associated with Asian Americans being weaker, passive, less aggressive, and nonathletic has affected individuals' experiences within collegiate sports because it causes initial perceptions of their body types before the athlete even steps foot on the court, field, or pool. They are not given a chance to prove their abilities because they are discredited, seen as unassuming, or underestimated. Asian Americans are typically not seen within athletics or looking athletic, many times reverting to historical notions of a more feminized and hypersexualized body, especially for Asian American women. This has made it harder for them to create spaces in which they can prove their physical abilities rather than being perceived solely on how they first appear. In many cases, they are seen as shorter, weaker, and less imposing due to their race and the racialized nature of sport results in their individual experiences being affected. Often, they do not encounter explicit comments or racism but more subtle microaggressions in which they are underestimated or discredited because they do not fit the ideal athletic body. Asian Americans have historically struggled with finding recognition for their individual abilities and being associated with the model minority myth contributes to the idea of academic prioritization rather than athletic achievement. These athletes look to counter these stereotypes by not only participating in the college sports but understanding how their experiences have been affected by initial perceptions of their physical appearances.

Sports themselves are predominately seen as masculine displays of violence, aggression, and dominance, in which gendered aspects are layered into these spaces and intersectional identities struggle to gain traction. Historically, Asian American women have been hypersexualized and objectified by their bodies through social ideologies of their appearance and association with foreigners and exotification. Additionally, there has been a lack of

representation of Asian Americans in athletics from the youth to professional levels. Some may attribute this to parental values and prioritization of academics over extracurricular activities such as sports, but it also follows perceptions of the physical abilities of Asian Americans and ideal images of athletes along with the correct body types. On top of this, Asian Americans are not encouraged to pursue sports or are hardly recruited, which leads to a disconnect from their teammates and communities since they find it hard to relate to those on their teams. Lastly, some sports have gravitated towards having higher Asian participation, but only since they are seen as less physically taxing or strenuous, as well as fewer advantages for height and strength. For example, sports such as tennis, golf, and swimming tend to have higher Asian participation, since they are not considered to rely as much on brute strength or size. On the other hand, there has been less representation in team sports such as, water polo, soccer, basketball, and lacrosse, which are considered more contact and physical sports with more preference residing on physical build. In many cases, if Asian American have reached a high level within their respective sport, their abilities as athletes are constantly questioned due to preconceived notions about their physical capabilities due to historical ideologies.

Initial Appearances

Teresa faced these initial perceptions in relation to her physical appearance, which affected her experience on the team. She found that, “they would treat me like a younger child, even though I was way older than them. Because of my height. I look shorter and a little younger (Teresa).” As a result of these perceptions, she felt as if she was not taken as seriously, and it was a negative aspect of her experience since this treatment came from her teammates on her club teams. This lack of respect resided solely on her physical appearance, specifically her height, even though she was older than many of them. Height is one of the initial factors that athletes’

abilities are judged upon and just because someone is shorter, does not mean they should be discredited.

Bailey faced a similar situation during her high school experience, in which other coaches and players gauged her potential abilities on her initial appearance before she even got in the pool.

“I think that we are underestimated a lot. I feel that especially women who are Asian, because they looked more small, more feminine, they're not expected to play sports in high school, yet alone go to the collegiate levels, I think it's just a lack of understanding that just because I'm Asian doesn't mean I can't play a sport or be competitive. (Bailey)”

These ideologies are tied into the model minority perception of physical appearances and for Bailey, within sports and how coaches, teammates, and other parents viewed her. This feeling of being underestimated was coupled with the need to prove one's individual ability as an athlete. The stereotypes associated with Asian Americans are detrimental to one's experience because her ability as an athlete is placed on her initial physical appearance. They do not acknowledge speed, muscle, sports IQ, and overall capacity and potential as an athlete and instead hedge their perceptions on her body. These ideals stem from historical notions of hypersexualizing Asian American women in particular because of previous notions of exoticification and views of weakness, femininity, and passivity. This highlights the ignorance of many coaches and players within sports and how overall ability cannot be determined by the initial appearance of an athlete. In many cases, Asian Americans are more capable than what people originally believe.

Even though, Teresa and Bailey felt as though these stereotypes about their physical appearance and abilities dictated their experiences as athletes, it leads back to the idea of what an ideal athlete should look like. Lindsey believes it boils down to public portrayal of athletes in the grander scheme and which body types are associated with certain sports.

“It’s probably our first apparent physical capabilities. We tend to be smaller, not as big, more petite, and in a lot of sports, that's just not ideal. generally, you wouldn't think of basketball and think automatically, an Asian girl. That's the biggest thing is just our first appearance, trust in our physical abilities. (Lindsey)”

Lindsey found that there are few occasions of basketball being associated with Asian Americans, let alone Asian American women. The most common example is Jeremy Lin or Linsanity and the impact that he had as an Asian American basketball player in the NBA, by paving the way for future Asian Americans in basketball. However, there is still a lack of representation of Asian Americans within professional sports, especially those that are historically white dominated. This also lends to the idea of an Asian American. There are so many ethnic groups under the political umbrella term Asian American with different cultures, values, appearances, and interests, how does one define what an Asian American looks like? Using these larger generalizations contributes to ideologies around the model minority myth and what an ideal Asian American citizen should look like and how that defines them within that status. Since the model minority myth seems to lend more to East and South Asians, while excluding other ethnic groups, ideal images seem to stem from those populations. However, this ideology is very problematic in terms of understanding the Asian American population as a whole and how the stereotype itself erases difference between these groups and creates an unrealistic image to plaster over the whole group.

Ideal Body Images of Athletes

These generalized ideas about specific body types for certain sports that are racially inclined limits the participation of Asian Americans when reverting to stereotypes about their images. For many of the student athletes in the study, they faced these overt biases surrounding their physical appearance at the surface level and the ways in which their abilities were measured in relation to other athletes. This put them at an inherent disadvantage before they were able to

test themselves against other athletes and discredited their athleticism without seeing them perform. Bailey experienced these preconceived notions within her sport:

“That doesn't mean someone who's 5'4” can't be fast as well. That motivated us to work harder, and show people that even though we are smaller, we're not 6' or 5'10”, we can still excel in sports, we can still do well. You do look more athletic than someone who is on the shorter side. (Bailey)”

Bailey struggled with this throughout her career and how these internalized notions about her ability as an Asian American due to her physical appearance made her feel discredited as an athlete. Coaches and parents believed that she could not compete with some of the other athletes because she was on the shorter side of her team. However, she used this as motivation to overcome the stereotypes that were placed on her. This sense of self-determination drove her to not only prove that Asian athletes are just as capable, but also to show that body type does not determine who can be a successful athlete. These societal notions tied into appearance are detrimental to countering negative stereotype associated with Asian Americans in sports. Although not at the forefront of most conversations within the model minority myth, physical appearances of shortness, weakness, and submissiveness are tied into founding ideologies that influence initial perceptions of athletes. Asian American women, such as Bailey, are forced to prove themselves time and time again to different coaches to show their athletic potential and that their abilities should not be taken at face value.

People such as Danielle faced similar challenges in relation to ideal body types and supposed physicality. She found that “a lot of coaches have certain playing styles and players they're looking for. In my club, they like tall and super physical players, but that was never my build or my style. (Danielle)” For her, there were biological limitations that she could not overcome but she stayed consistent and relied on her abilities to help set herself apart. Even though she was not what the club coaches were initially looking for because of her smaller build,

Danielle focused on developing her strengths and found ways to stand out based on her ability rather than size. This is a common theme among Asian American female athletes and their persistence in overcoming initial stereotypes that are placed on their bodies. Their self-determination to defy the gendered and racialized notions surrounding their participation in sports puts them in a contested position that their intersectional identities work to counter. Rather than fitting into these societal standards, they find ways to prove their physical capacities through setting a new level of excellence, one that is separate from racialized ideologies about their abilities. Although the ideal image of a female athlete is usually situated within the white-black binary of conversations about race and sport, Asian American women continue to find ways to enter these discussions and create new discourses. By redefining societal perceptions of their bodies, these women can continue to counter stereotype by participating in athletics at a high level and write new narratives about their athletic potential.

There is a belief that athletics is closely tied to physical appearance and socially constructed notions of athletes, muscle, and build. Not all high performing athletes fit an exact mold in terms of strength, size, and height but there is a common misconception about what it should entail. This can lead to a variety of issues, including self-consciousness and desire to fit into that ideal image. However, there is nothing wrong with how an athlete should appear but due to hegemonic ideologies an exact, racialized idea of a female athlete is formed and those who do not fit it are not considered within the athletic realm. Lindsey grappled with this concept of body image in comparison to other athletes and other Asian American women who did not compete in sports. The Asian American female athlete is a rare occurrence and the formation of a true image from this intersecting figure results in confusion and exclusion. She said the following:

“The main thing that stuck out to me was comparing my body towards other people and what the female body is supposed to look like. I struggle to this day with body competence issues, but I was bigger than my friends who are very petite and thin, very skinny. And I was very self-conscious of my thighs. Because I thought I had thunder thighs, or man legs versus my friends. (Lindsey)”

The racialized nature of sport creates an ideal image of what an athlete’s body should look like and how it should perform. However, by stripping the definition down to physical appearance, it allows for sports to be situated and dictated by the masculine narrative. Lindsey felt as if she did not fit the societal perceptions of an Asian American women, which usually fall along the lines of small and unathletic. She can challenge these stereotypes with her physical body and the muscular build that has developed because of sports, but at the same time, finds herself comparing herself to her peers and what an Asian American is historically supposed to look like. However, this subjective societal construction of body types, creates a contradiction to notions of femininity for athletes today. By placing herself in opposition to her Asian friends, Lindsey wrestles with personal acceptance because of racialized ideas of her own body type in comparison to her peers. In athletics, there is no perfect body type for any sport, and subjecting herself to these hegemonic ideologies follows the beliefs behind the model minority and the ways in which Asian American bodies should be presented. Although society has become more accepting of female validity and understanding of different body types, Asian Americans continue to see themselves objectified and hyper sexualized in the media due to historical conceptions more than other minority groups.

In terms of basketball, certain positions seem to attract more Asians based on their height and build. Sloan explained that within basketball:

“Asians are not known to be the strongest, stereotype to be quick. We get steals, we're good shooters, that's it. And we're not the strongest, we're just weak. So that's the stereotypes that we would face in basketball, outside of our Asian community. (Sloan)”

She finds that Asians seem to gravitate towards more shooting positions within basketball. They do not lack the skills or ability to be successful within their sport, but many Asian athletes have encountered a dismissal of their potential because they are taken at face value. They are perceived as weaker but faster and are not given an opportunity to prove their strength as an individual. Within California, there is a unique system called the Asian league, in which Asian American youth basketball players can participate in if they are at least 50% Asian and not Desi or Pacific Islander. Most Asian basketball players participate this league and over time it has evolved into a social space in which Asian athletes can develop and gain recognition within their community. By participating in this league, both Lindsey and Sloan have found a cultural aspect but also comfort by playing with people that look like them. Within these leagues, they have found limited discrimination despite some ethnic differences because they are brought together for their dedication to the sport, which has created an inclusive and supportive environment. In fact, most of the stereotyping based on physical appearance that they encountered during their youth occurred at tournaments when they played against teams that were predominately white or black. The environment fostered within Asian leagues gave these individuals confidence and community within their sport during their youth and allowed them to make that transition to playing in high school and college. Although they noticed that their teams became whiter as they progressed in their careers, the Asian community from these leagues have stuck with them in creating environments of inclusion within their sport and learning to counter the stereotypes placed on them outside of these spaces.

Identity within the Model Minority and Sporting Culture

The model minority ideology does not fit Asian Americans within a typical athletic image, rather they are constricted to positions within academia and corporate jobs. There is no

encouragement for Asian athletes to pursue sports into college let alone a professional career because it could take away from their academic focus. What is not seen is the ability to balance both aspects of academics and athletics at a high level, especially within the Division III spectrum. Sports are extremely important to the development and experience of individuals growing up and carrying over into their adult lives. People have cited the crucial values they have learned from being part of a team, maintaining an active lifestyle, and applying lessons such as, teamwork, flexibility, communication, and leadership skills outside of their sport. Playing sports at the collegiate level pushes an individual to the highest degree to continue this balance of academics and athletics through time pressures, responsibilities, and discipline. These qualities contribute to an individual's identity and personal growth through this period of their life and should not be limited to societal beliefs about these spaces that they should occupy. The ideologies surrounding Asian American women within sports has been restrictive and exclusionary in its practice, which has resulted in low levels of participation at the collegiate level. Additionally, those that engage in the sporting culture still feel isolated and shut out of mainstream conversations.

As mentioned previously, the model minority extends into internalized values affecting an individual's identity and how they perceive themselves in relation to the existing stereotypes. Laila's experience played out in her personal understanding of her abilities and relying on societal ideologies surrounding her image and capacity. She found that:

“Pressure from the model minority myth translates to that kind of self-negativity or self-talk because you're Asian, because you're not as tall or buff as them. So, I think the negative self-talk to me, and that's what really hindered my performance in the beginning. (Laila)”

Laila's understanding of incorporating these stereotypes about Asian American women and the historical notions about their abilities are projected onto them today and how they are expected to perform to certain levels. This limiting approach does not allow them to construct

their own identities, rather they must prove themselves in relation to the existing ideologies, which takes away from their performance and causes them to underestimate themselves. Their interpretation of how other people view them directly translates into a self-imposed consciousness through with other competition appears bigger and stronger and diminishes their personal perceptions. This is especially present in Asian American youth, where it can be hard to put themselves in a position to compete when they already feel undermined and disadvantaged due to preexisting notions. Even though many of these concepts are out of their control, it can be used as a motivating factor to counter how others view them and their abilities.

This extends to the gendered characteristic within the masculine lens of sports and the historical exclusion of women from these discourses and how they have struggled to counter the dominant narrative about who can and cannot participate. This has created a situation in which women have to fight to earn their place in these contested spaces as well as justify their abilities as separate entities rather than in relation to the male athlete. Lydia encountered this situation within her sport, lacrosse, and how she felt within the gender binary.

“I think being a woman and athletics is always been a struggle of wanting to prove yourself but then also reminding yourself that you don't need to prove anything, like living between that line of like, knowing your worth, and accepting that the best thing that you can do to prove your worth is just to not put yourself in that position of having to like demonstrate it for anybody else. I think that has been like my biggest struggle and the most growth that I've seen in playing sports in general is that I can be strong and nobody else must know it besides myself. (Lydia)”

For her, these feelings further the idea of self-imposing values of success and personal pressure on oneself and how these ideas can become internalized rather than explicitly enforce. The added layer of being a woman contributes to creating counter narratives to preconceived notions about their abilities and participation as well as understanding where her identity has been affected. Much of the conversation around sport and gender remains in a masculine focused

lens, where femininity is discredited and proving one's worth comes down to a personal understanding of strength and ability. Although, societal principles look to undermine the abilities of women within athletics and discount their identities as capable athletes, they continue to push back against these narratives and reconfigure gendered significance and meaning in these spaces.

Lydia encountered the gendered aspect of sports through playing lacrosse, which tends to lean towards a predominately white population. However, her comparison frames her experience within sport through a gendered dynamic, in which the sport itself is played differently for men and women. She found that there is a:

“Unique gendered experience because of how we're situated in terms of masculinity and what it means to be strong. In relation to my sport, it's interesting because women's lacrosse and men's lacrosse are so different, so that the very nature of it is gendered. And that creates a different aspect and how we're treated because we're seen as weak in how the sport is played, we don't have as much physical contact, and we see it more as a finesse game. (Lydia)”

This plays out through the gendered notion within sports and how the physical capabilities of women have been underestimated and how different sports are played today. For example, volleyball is perceived as a more feminine sport with greater female participation but still requires a huge amount of athleticism whether played by males or females. Additionally, there are instances of sports being played differently on the male and female side such as, tennis, water polo, and lacrosse. The gendered notions that women's athletics are seen as inferior and less aggressive obscures the fact that the difference is in the styles. These differences cause sports to be viewed in a masculinizing lens through which aggression and strength are given preference and seen as the ideal form of sport. However, women's athletics have their own defining features that challenge these ideologies and position themselves in new understandings of sport and gender. Their methods and styles are not further from how the game should be

played, but rather a reproduction of the existing narratives through which they can establish their identities and create new intersectional discourses about participation in relation to their sport.

Exclusionary Racial Participation

Within the race and sports context, there are some additional factors that are not as discussed such as, pan ethnic differences and how they are perceived differently among the Asian American population. For example, many South and Southeast Asians face more discrimination within sports because certain sports seem to have different Asian American representation. Sports such as golf, tennis, and swim have a larger Asian American population and community while others such as lacrosse, volleyball, and water polo have a whiter participation rate that emphasizes feelings of isolation and ostracization. Especially within these sports, athletes feel othered and excluded from both their white teammates and their Asian peers because they find it hard to understand the student athlete lifestyle and why they chose to pursue both. This leads into the discussion of differences between white and Caucasian household through which white teammates seem to have different cultural values in that they might prioritize sports or a tournament and focus less on school. Whereas Asian peers often focus on academics and do not understand how these individuals could spend so much time on athletics. The feeling of not fitting into either group also lends to the lack of community of Asian Americans within sport and representation among teammates where diversity is not present.

One of the key factors to participation, is being able to relate to your peers and competitors. For starters, almost all the women in the study played on sports teams growing up that were predominately white or had few minorities represented. This created an environment in which they found it hard to relate to their peers since they did not look like them, have the same cultural traditions, or similar priorities in terms of academics and athletics. Often, this put them

at odds with their teammates and created a disconnect between them. On top of this, the importance of role models is clear throughout sports and its social significance in fostering interest at the youth level. It is hard to imagine participating in one's sport for an extended period when there is no one that looks like them playing their sport on their teams or at the professional level. The women in the study cite inspiration from athletes such as Bruce Lee, Jeremy Lin, Naomi Osaka, Li Na, and Michelle Kwan but in comparison to professional athletes of other races, there are countless examples that could be called upon. This historical lack of representation and role models for younger athletes has resulted in lower participation or a sense of self-doubt in their ability to play at that level.

Recently, there has been more of a shift to try to increase minority participation within sports despite the idea that Asian American parents purposefully try to limit their children from playing sports. Fiona attributed this to the fact that, "kids these days have so many more role models to look up to, like Chloe Kim and phenomenal Asian American athletes just because Asian American parents are letting their kids play sports more. (Fiona)" This runs contrary to many beliefs that Asian households focus solely on academics and lends evidence to the idea that the generational shift from immigrants has changed to a more Americanized outlook on youth activities. This is coupled with having greater access and encouragement to participate in these activities, as well as more role models in general that the youth can look up to and aspire towards. For Yvonne, her hope is that "more little kids see that there are people who look like you who are playing this sport and enjoying the sport will encourage them to participate and hopefully you continue that cycle. (Yvonne)" The cycle referring to resisting historical exclusion of Asian Americans within sports at the youth, collegiate, and professional levels. Their capabilities should continue to be uplifted to show that they are more than capable of competing

at that level and that their participation should not be limited by race. This is crucial in the context of Asian American representation within sports and generating more role models in athletics to allow the next generation to believe that they can play at a high level themselves.

Within the critical paradigm of race and sports is the exclusionary practices of these spaces and the ways that existing discourses remain centered around the white hegemonic view. Race is a key factor in dictating participation and accessible spaces for athletes and how Asian Americans are typically rejected from entering discussions of race and sport as it stays within the white-black binary. Many sports continue to be white dominated institutions, and this is prevalent in the collegiate and professional levels with Asian Americans only making up 2.3% of all female student athletes in college sports while white female student athletes made up 69.9% of the current population at the NCAA level (Gough, 2021). Lydia noticed the prevalence of whiteness within athletics in that when “I first started playing lacrosse, it was overwhelmingly white. The sport is notorious for being a very white sport. If you are a person of color, you stand out in a way that's not always fun. (Lydia)” This contributed to feelings of isolation from her teammates and a struggle to find community within her sport. By being one of few Asians on her sport team, Lydia believed that the whiteness of sport ostracized other races and made them stand in contrast to the white population. In some sports, there seems to be a larger Asian presence such as, tennis and golf but other sports remain predominately white even at the youth levels. Historically, sports have been reserved for the upper-class white population and exclusive to minority groups and women. This trend has continued in some ways, such that many sports at the collegiate and professional level are dominated by white participants. This may be attributed to socioeconomic factors that exist at the youth level due to rising costs of club sports and equipment, as well as generalized lack of interest due to few role models as mentioned earlier.

Either way, the whiteness of the institution of sport continues to dominant the narrative and exclude diverse populations, which adds to the existing black-white binary and limits new discourses for marginalized groups.

The status of Asian American athletes tends to fall in between two different groups: their white teammates and their Asian peers. Existing in this limbo creates tension and misunderstanding from both groups as well as an overall exclusion because of the racial triangulation of Asian Americans. The racialization of Asian Americans has led to a tentative status within society and based on modern progressions, an uncertainty about their belonging within the racial hierarchy. Asian Americans are situated between blacks and whites and seen as neither inferior or superior but rather given a foreigner status and kept at odds from the racial conversations of black and white. Additionally, there is the added layer of the term student athlete, which refers to an individual who prioritizes school but also participates in sports. By putting student before athlete, it reinforces the added value put on school but still includes the balance between both fields. The women in the study highlighted the racialized nature of student athlete in relation to being Asian American and how it further isolated themselves from their teammates and friends. Bailey noticed that:

“I was kind of in the middle. I wasn't really excluded from either group, but I didn't really fit into either. I think that I experienced it because my high school was so white. The older I got, the more I realized how much racism was thrown at me that I just didn't realize when I was younger. (Bailey)”

This emphasizes the middle status of Asian Americans as student athletes and the slim margin that they exist within. For one, they did not really fit in traditional, cultural, or priority wise with their white friends and teammates, but at the same time struggled to feel connected to their Asian identity because of the white predominance within their school and sport.

These preconceived notions about physical appearances and individual capabilities still exist within the model minority myth in conversations about Asian Americans in athletics and have affected their individual experiences in collegiate sports. The prevalence of these stereotypes has led to exclusion from discourses surrounding race and sport and a struggle to create their own identities within these contested spaces. Individuals have found ways to counter these ideologies through their intersectional identities but much of the dominant narratives are tied to the ideal body type within athletics. For Asian Americans, their participation is a way to challenge these views as well as prove their abilities as athletes beyond initial perceptions, but it has affected their overall experience with teammates, coaches, other parents, and competitors. The model minority understanding situates these individuals in a disadvantaged position as they are often excluded from conversations within sport and contributions to sporting culture through their identities. Moving forwards, continued engagement with these discourses will result in a more critical interpretation about their role within race and sport and the gendered dynamics that defy the exclusive community.

Chapter Six: Parental Influence

Parental Opinions Surrounding Academics and Athletics

Asian American parents have the stereotype of pushing their children to focus solely on academics and urge them to only apply to top Ivy League and big schools that have the most prestige to get the best education. It is believed that they will also lead to them pursuing careers in science, medicine, law, or technology. We continue to see a lack of Asian Americans in humanities, business, and the arts because of the societal stereotypes of which majors they are choosing year in and year out. However, in recent years there has been more of a shift and generational difference as many of the current Asian American students are third or fourth generation immigrants whose parents and parents' parents have grown up in America and been immersed in their ideologies and culture. The typical nuclear American family gives off the impression of a more light-hearted, open-minded attitude that encourages their children to pursue their dreams and passions regardless of salaries or prestige because they come from predominantly upper-middle and middle-class families with financial stability. Nevertheless, this has not always been the case for Asian American families who have struggled to make a living and earn recognition within the larger national context. On top of this, society continues to not view Asian Americans in position of authority and leadership within businesses and condemn them to lower ranking jobs due to notions of submissiveness and fragility. The only believed way that Asian Americans can be successful is through putting their heads down, working hard, respecting others, and not speaking out of turn.

This has perpetuated into exclusion from major discourses around carefree upbringings because they are not afforded an average performance in school to get accepted into college. They must bring the spectacular and go above and beyond and much of this is fueled by parental

values and pressure. Society still believes that parents are the driving force behind children's successes and for Asian Americans specifically, their sole focus is academic prioritization above all else to set them up for future, high achieving careers. These exceedingly high standards are not applicable to all Asian Americans and the women in this study continue to show ways that they defy the model minority stereotype. Rather than academic hyper fixation, instead they utilize individual agency in pursuing interests outside of academics. This contradiction arises of understanding the importance of academics but also being more flexible for their children's pastimes, which in turn a new standard for the capabilities of Asian Americans within society and the larger world at hand.

Many of the women believed there were subtle differences between white and Asian families that influenced their upbringing because of parental values and priorities. Fiona cited this through her personal experiences within school and sports.

“There are a lot of cultural nuances that people don't understand about the way Asian family structures operate and respect, and pertaining specifically to sports, the team that I was on would go to the gym all the time, work out and stuff like that. I didn't have that capacity. I worked out but my main thing was studying. And my parents made that very clear to me, and I made that a priority for myself. Sports was an edge that was helping me get into college, but ultimately, it would be my academics providing the bulk of support. (Fiona)”

Fiona managed her priorities throughout high school, but the focus remained on academics even when she was playing sports. For her, she experienced different cultural values within her household, specific to her Asian parents that framed her mindset around sports, which differed from her teammates who did not understand her prioritization of academics. In her mind, sports assisted with the college process, but academics carried most of the weight. This leads back to fitting within the model minority and societal expectations of academic achievement by getting into a good college and the methods that one uses to reach that level. These parental

differences played out in both her academic and sports participation and set her apart from her peers.

Many of the women felt as though there was a different approach to parenting styles and the amount of applied pressure was racialized. Tying back into earlier points concerning overall meritocracy within the country, Sloan believed this applied within her own context.

“I think Asian parents are a little less forgiving than Caucasian parents, but everyone that I knew, their parents were hard on them, no matter what race you were, and I do think that the expectation for Asians is a bit more high end, because it's not easy for Asian Americans in our sport. At least Asians in my sport. (Sloan)”

Sloan encountered different standards between her own household and familial expectations in comparison to teammates and other students. For her, she felt pushed by her parents because of the elevated expectations that had been placed on her for being Asian and the added difficulties that she faced in sports. Sloan found it harder to be recognized for her athletic accomplishments because of societal standards that discriminated against her achievements due to her race. As a result, her parents pushed her to go above and beyond to stand out within her sport since Asian Americans typically did not excel in that arena. The one exception was through Asian league but when transitioning into college, Sloan had to deal with the hegemonic ideals of her capabilities as well as her parents' aspirations for her to succeed.

Choosing a college to attend seemed to boil down to individual agency and the freedom granted by their parents to make that choice. Even though it might bring them hundreds of miles away from home, these Asian American parents seemed to find ways to support them and give them the best opportunities possible. Their applied pressures were disguised as wanting the best for them in the long run and pursuing their passions and interests. For many, such as Zoe, it was a combination of academics and athletics and finding the balance that she desired out of her college experience.

“My dad has always really wanted me to play college tennis. That was probably a factor in playing but it was more of an underlying pressure rather than a blatant pressure. Ultimately, it was my own decision, I played because I wanted to. My mom's kind of the opposite. She didn't necessarily want me to play college sports, she wanted me to focus more on school and less on athletics. (Zoe)”

Zoe experienced both aspects of being a student athlete through parental pressure to follow both avenues. Within tennis, it is common for many young players to focus solely on the sport and try to play at the professional level from an early age. However, her mother did not want that to be her career and instead wanted her to focus more on school during college in preparation for her future. Her father saw the natural progression of high school to collegiate tennis and saw it as a payoff in terms of investing his time, energy, and money over the years. Ultimately, Zoe utilized her individual agency outside the desires of her parents to pursue collegiate tennis because she wanted the balance of both aspects, school, and sports. She was able to accomplish that through playing at the Division III level and make that decision that her parents ended up supporting because she was able to focus on both at a high level.

These shifting ideologies around participation in school and sports is reflective of a changing attitude of Asian American parents within the US. Although some aspects of cultural difference still reflect the way that the model minority myth is imposed upon individuals, there seems to be more recognition of personal achievement and support given to their activities.

Jamie received family support when she decided to play sports in college.

“My parents are proud when I achieve something. They didn't really show that as much from there, but they're proud they would tell other people. It was more the community itself, outside of my family, you're using sports to get into college, to write it on your resume or your college apps so you can have a more holistic application. (Jamie)”

Jamie's parents did not always show explicit verbal support for her achievements but rather showed their support through their actions. Whether it be sending her to tournaments, investing time to come watch games, as well as telling other people, they were able to show their

pride in a multitude of ways that was not always direct to Jamie. Although others in her Tibetan community did not realize her dedication and seriousness to the sport since it was not as commonly seen, Jamie found ways to prove her worthiness and justify her decision to continue playing in college. This was common among the other women in the study who found consistent support and acceptance in choosing to pursue sports at the Division III level because of the focus on academics. They found that their parents wanted to support their choice even if it fell outside the typical norm for other Asian Americans in their community.

These sentiments were reflected in Devin's parental experiences that may seem unconventional to some in the Asian American population.

"My parents were less rigorous on me in terms of my academics and what they expected of me because they were also raised in America. My parents were both raised in the US and their parents were immigrants who came third generation. Immigrants are second generation Americans. I don't feel the same Model Minority pressure as my mom does. (Devin)"

Devin felt as though her parents did not fit within the model minority expectation of Asian parents, specifically outside the commonly used phrase "Tiger Mom." They had experienced a generational shift in terms of the ideologies surrounding their understanding of the model minority myth and how it is embodied through parenting. Her mother faced a gendered model minority pressure in the sense that her family imposed these values on the males in the family while she was not given the same treatment. This resulted in a different understanding of the values associated with the model minority myth and allowed their children to pursue interests outside of school, such as sports. Devin's family did not quite fit the mold of a typical Asian American household and although there was still an unspoken pressure to live up to those expectations, she felt more agency to challenge those stereotypes because of the shifted mindset within her family growing up. She attributed this to growing up in America and how this

different environment led to milder level of pressure and expectations being placed upon her by her parents.

Bailey also found this personal freedom more apparent in her household, despite growing up with white parents, they were more lenient in trying interests outside of school.

“My parents said do what you want. If you want to play a sport, we'll give you some options. My parents were very harsh on me, grade wise, which wasn't as common for people who were white at my high school, their parents didn't put that amount of pressure on them. (Bailey)”

Bailey's parents gave her the freedom to pursue her interests if she was able to continue to perform in the classroom. Their expectations, despite being white since she was adopted, remained just as high for her, if not higher than her peers. Although many of the women internalized pressure from values associated with the model minority myth, they also experienced a certain level of parental expectations. Her parents seemed more open to having Bailey try new activities and find what makes her happy if she was able to keep academics on the forefront. The comparison to her white peers made her feel as if she had to live up to these unspoken assumptions regardless of her racial identity. Bailey's experience runs contrary to some of the other women in the study who had more traditional upbringings from their Asian parents, but the results remain the same: excel at a high level in academics.

Yvonne experienced a nontraditional upbringing despite her parents living in China. She had to navigate the transition to an American culture through a host family but still found a support system from her parents even though they were in another country.

“Open communication and valuing my opinion and explaining reasons not just speaking down to me as parents. That was the biggest difference in the way they brought me up compared to traditional Chinese parents. And not having academic or athletic pressure. (Yvonne)”

Yvonne found that they treated her as an adult from an early age and expected her to make her own decisions. Although this was more of an unconventional parenting style, they allowed her to prioritize what she wanted and not apply overtly strict pressure to avoid burnout.

This parental trust and respect transferred to her decision on where to attend college. Initially she wanted to go to the East Coast, which would have put her further from her parents and they were concerned about the rampant burnout present in some of those schools. However, they also encouraged her desire to pursue collegiate tennis and participate in a team culture where she would have friends and a support system. In the end, they gave her the individual agency to make her own decision and embraced the academic and athletic balance because of the mental break that it gave her.

In terms of having balanced values, Danielle found this very apparent in her household of mixed racial identities through her parents. Rather than them clashing, she believed it synchronized to give her a solid foundation of which to base her decisions and rely on for advice.

“My dad has these three principles in Korean. They're called Gee (지), duck (덕), Che (체). It's academics, athletics, and perceptibility. And he really focuses on those, and you need to work as hard as you can to make these three like pillars great and losing out on any one of them is equally important. (Danielle)”

They represent knowledge, morals, and body, and is a perfect representation of her parent's acknowledgement of balance within one's experiences and providing a holistic experience. For Danielle, it was perfectly aligned with her decision to play Division III soccer and maintain a solid set of values to live by growing up because they are all equally important in her father's perspective. These Korean principles provide the foundation that overlapped with the values that her white mother prioritized, and their overlap created a harmonization of beliefs for Danielle to embody through her sport and academics.

In all, the parents of the Asian American women supported their children through their decision to pursue academics and athletics in college despite the increasing workload and balancing of responsibilities. Although the model minority ideology created higher standards for their achievements, many have noticed a generational shift in their upbringing and less of a hyper

fixation on school. Having the agency to participate in other activities outside of academics allowed an individual to have a more holistic experience in terms of achieving academically, staying active through sports, earning a degree, and preserving their mental health in the long run. Many of the parents put their children in sports at a young age to keep them active, but their persistent participation has not only taught them countless lessons about hard work, commitment, and teamwork, but provided them an opportunity to play at the next level.

Using Sports as an Edge for College

In recent years, there has been a sharp decline in admission rates to top universities all over the country. Some have cited making their student body population more equitable and reflective of the country's demographic through affirmative action and increasing opportunities for underrepresented minority populations. However, for Asian Americans, this has resulted in increased discrimination and tensions between themselves and other minority groups. Their contested position in society has left them in between whites and minority populations and often not defined as being a minority group due to their academic successes. This has resulted in admissions for Asian Americans declining, even if they fulfill the academic standards required at these colleges to create more selectivity for their students. Asian Americans have continued to face racialized biases in applying to colleges and needing to find new ways to gain an edge over competitors when applying to these schools. One of the paths less traveled is through sports. Asian Americans currently only make up 2.3% of female student athletes and Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders only make up 0.3% of female student athletes across NCAA Division I, II, III in 2022 (Gough,2021). When student athletes commit to a school for athletics, it essentially ensures their position at the university barring any major academic or personal slips in their performance. Although they still go through the admissions process, these individuals are considered

committed to the school and should be accepted without a doubt. In many cases, the coaches have a say in these applicants and can save several spots for athletes. However, it is not always guaranteed, especially at the Division III level since they offer no athletic scholarships, and their balance of academics and athletics requires more rigorous academic transcripts. These Division III athletes must rely more on a well-balanced application of school and sports accomplishments even if they verbally committed to the college. Therefore, to still be considered a competitive applicant, they must maintain a commitment to high academic achievement even if they are also attending the school to play sports.

For Lydia, when looking at colleges her father made it clear that, “it was never about sports, as much as it was academics. My dad framed it to me as, athletics is going to be your way into academics. (Lydia)” Although her parents showed support in pursuing athletics at the next level, they also understood the importance of receiving a good education and that sports could be an avenue for getting a foot in the door. There are increasing difficulties with biases in college admissions, which has led to the process of applying and getting into colleges harder for Asian Americans. This discrimination against minorities has caused them to find new ways to get an edge over their competitors through extracurricular activities such as clubs, volunteering, or musical instruments. However, there are also shifts towards using athletics to gain admissions because sports teams at these universities have reserved spots for top performing athletes. Many Asian American families have recognized this opportunity, such as Lindsey’s parents:

“I think what really solidified it was the intent to go to college for basketball. That's what really sold my parents on playing it and they ended up loving the sport, loving watching me play the sport. But the whole intent of going to high school to play basketball was to get recruited by a top-notch college that maybe I couldn't have gotten into myself. So, once they found that out, it was very enticing for them, they really dedicated a lot of time, energy, and money into that for me. It was something that I took into consideration constantly while playing like, I must play my best. (Lindsey)”

This increased the amount of parental support she received for playing her sport when they realized that her pursuit of playing at the next level was directly tied into receiving a quality education at a top university. Although she possessed high levels of academic achievement, the idea of using her ability within sport to ensure a position in these universities motivated her parents to invest more into her athletic career. As a result, Lindsey wanted to take this opportunity and parental backing to make the most of her parent's time, money, and energy that were put into her future. Ultimately, her parents wanted the best circumstances for her academic potential but piggybacked off the added guarantee of her sports participation to allow her to find a situation in which she could pursue both. For Lindsey, this process was not something to be taken for granted and she wanted to prove that they were making the right decision by investing in her basketball rather than other activities that were put to the side.

Colleges require well-rounded individuals with high achieving goals and going to the right school can be key for future career plans. Allison's parents understood the stigmas and status of attending an Ivy League school, especially among the Asian American populations and the recognition of attending these institutions. They also acknowledged how difficult it was to attend these schools and how the applicants were required to have a complete application in terms of academic achievement and extracurricular involvement. For many college applicants, sports were an added characteristic that set them apart from students that focused solely on the academic aspect. Specifically, those looking to pursue sports at the next level and manage that added load of being a student athlete within college. Even if one was qualified academically, sports were an added guarantee to the admissions process in terms of the school's commitment to the individual. Allison found this notion to be true and implemented by her parents during her college application process.

“My parents were the ones that were pushing it a little more, especially for Ivy’s or Division One schools where this could help you get in. Not that you're not smart. This just adds another layer to you. (Allison)”

For Allison, her parents aspired for her to attend a more selective and prestigious school to receive a quality education. They saw sports as an added feature to justify her qualification for these colleges and an edge for getting into one of them. They pushed for recruiting through her sport and reaching out to these coaches because sports can provide an automatic assured spot at one of these institutions. Even though the natural progress of her athletic career was to keep playing volleyball in college, her parents saw it as an opportunity to make the most of her circumstances and receive almost guaranteed admission to these schools. They saw attending a good college as ensuring future success within her career and life and that going to one of these top-quality institutions and graduating from there would help set up her future.

Chapter Seven: Individual Agency

Division I versus Division III

Within all three divisions, there continues to be low levels of representation from minority groups in all sports offered at the Division III level. In terms of framing this within the model minority myth, there arises a contradiction. Participation levels of Asian Americans have remained relatively consistent over the last few years but at astonishingly low levels hovering around 2.3% for Asian American women in Division III athletics and 2.2% for Division I (Lapchick, 2020). This lack of participation leads back to earlier claims surrounding historical exclusions of Asian Americans within athletics due to a variety of reasons, many stemming from the model minority myth. However, within my study, there has been a shifting generational attitude towards sports participation, even at the collegiate levels despite participation rates remaining low. The possibility of rising levels in the future could support the idea that parents are more open to allowing their children to pursue activities outside of academics or that parents only see sports as an added level of guarantee into college admissions. These ideas run more parallel to current understandings of the model minority myth and how typical Asian parents hyper fixate on academics but also a changed ideology of allowing their children to participate in extracurricular activities, such as sports. It appears that the main prioritization remains on academics, which falls in line with the Division III narrative, however, many of the women in the study chose to pursue college sports on their own accord separate from parental pressures or desires.

Despite this, many Asian Americans still face challenges with belonging in the sports realm as well as being taken seriously beyond their academics. For Laila, she believed Division III was the best fit for college experience because of the academic and athletic balance.

“Asians when it comes to focusing on college and sports, you don't have potential for D1 in the first place, so they prioritize academics and extracurriculars to get your college resume solid, while for white individuals, they see sports as a relatively same level as academics. If you can work hard in sports, and your academics are kind of below that, it's fine. Like, at least you can use that to go to school. (Laila)

Laila points out a difference between white and Asians in reference to sports and academics. For whites, they treat sports and academics on a similar level so they can afford to prioritize one over the other and still be fine in terms of applying to college because the weight of one can push their application through if they are playing Division I. However, for Asian Americans, initially they are not perceived as being able to even compete at the Division I level so therefore they must focus on putting together a well-rounded resume when applying to colleges because they are not afforded the same buffer within sports. Their applications must carry by themselves, regardless of athletics if they want to get admitted into college. This attends to two points, the Division I versus Division III difference as well as racial exclusion within top levels of collegiate sport. For starters, within Division III there is more of a focus on a balanced college experience with both academics and athletics. Whereas Division I does contain both qualities, but there is a greater association with athletics focus even at the expense of academics at some times. Additionally, some Division I athletes can only select certain majors that fit within their practice and game schedule while Division III athletes have flexibility within their major and can pursue any field that they desire because of an increased prioritization of academics. Secondly, due to perceived ideologies tied to the model minority myth, Asian Americans are often not considered candidates to play at the Division I level. Laila believed this difference was racialized and statistics represent this fact in the sense that Asian Americans only make up a small percentage of college athletes at the Division I, II, and III levels. Their exclusion from collegiate athletics is attributed to the model minority stereotypes surrounding

their physical appearance and preconceived notions about their abilities as athletes and competing at a high level.

One of the main draws to Division III schools is the academic focus and quality. Even though some consider Division III athletics to be less competitive, many athletes and sports team could easily compete at that level, which still makes it very challenging to be successful on the national level.

“It's a very academically rigorous school. Once again, everybody puts pressure on themselves because a lot of us could have gone, D1. The self-selecting process is that once we decide we want to play D3, tennis is something we do because we love it and school is prioritized. Everybody has that same mindset, including our coach, which is academics come first. I realized D1 comes with giving up some of the things that I prioritize the most like, my friends and my academics. (Yvonne)”

Many of Yvonne's teammates, including herself, could have pursued Division I athletics but wanted a balanced experience in college that allowed them to focus on academics. Her parents supported this decision in that many Division I athletes experience burnout from the multiple stressors and overpacked schedules coupled with juggling too many responsibilities between academics and athletics. Division III athletes have many jobs to handle as well, but they are presented with a much more manageable experience and can remain academically focused while pursuing their sport at a high level. Division III is no walk in the park, as very few teams find success on the national level and since many individual athletes could have played on Division I teams, that the level of competition is remains intense. Although there are certain perks that accompany being a Division I athlete such as, first for class selection, special dining halls, and loads of free gear that are not always offered to Division III athletes, it seems to become a full-time job with little room for socializing outside of their sport. In addition, many Division I athletes have to sacrifice other opportunities because of sports commitments.

Danielle felt this in her recruitment process and the weight of participating at the Division I level. She was very passionate about soccer but knew that she held interests outside of sports.

“It started to dawn on me that D1 soccer was a job and that I wanted to go to school, not that I wanted to throw away soccer completely, it didn't need to be equal or more weighted than school. Division III has a different reaction than Division I. For teachers it was a good choice. I'm glad you're prioritizing academics. But for coaches, you could have done better. Why would you choose that when you had a D1 option? Any option except D3? Why would you choose that? Not all of them were entirely understanding of the fact that soccer was not my entire life like it was theirs. (Danielle)”

Danielle's realization that playing at the Division I level would consume her life and limit a lot of her future opportunities within academics and her career were one of the main reasons she chose Division III soccer. She wanted to continue to play her sport but did not need it to take priority over school and did not see the need for one to be more important than the other. On top of this, her parents did not care if she played soccer or not but were supportive of her decision to play at the Division III level because she could choose a harder major without sacrificing her sport. People outside her family had different reactions. Division I athletes are much more known for their athletic commitment when they choose their school unlike Division III athletes who are known for picking a college and level where they can focus on their academics. Many teachers recognize this and commend their students for this choice, such as Danielle, while club and high school coaches might be confused as to why an athlete would not pick a Division I school. For many individuals, their decision to play Division III is not solely on the athletic aspect but more the prospect of receiving a great education, playing at the next level, and having a well-rounded college experience. Not saying that this is not possible at the Division I level, it just becomes increasingly difficult with their loaded athletic schedule that makes it feel like a job. For many Division III athletes, they are passionate about interests outside of sports and understand that sports are not their entire life and that there will be a future without sports. Many

parents are supportive of their decision to play Division III athletics because of this balance and without sacrificing their passion for either sphere.

Laila relates to her peer's experiences within Division III sports and having a balanced lifestyle in college.

“I really like the idea of a d3 athlete and a sense of how they prioritize academics. I really loved water polo in high school, the team aspect, there was no drama, and it was a very good source of stress relief for me. And I love exercising. (Laila)”

For her, Division III has provided a way to play her sport, be on a team, and prioritize her mental health alongside her academics. The social aspect of engaging in a team sport as well as being able to manage her interests appeals in more than one way. Additionally, she can navigate her parental wishes of staying healthy and happy. One of the biggest challenges that student athletes face is burnout and overwork. Mental health is not talked about nearly enough within athletics and the exclusion of that narrative leaves out many necessary resources for those individuals. Going to college as a normal student is stress inducing but an added time constraint and commitment of playing a sport brings a multitude of responsibilities that can be difficult for an individual to balance. This is prevalent in all the divisions, but Division III provides a more complete experience without compromising one's priorities.

Following these understandings of the divisional difference, the sports aspect is brought to the front during a high school senior year commitment and subsequent signing day. Lindsey experienced this firsthand and the stigma around Division III compared to Division I schools.

“When I finally committed, I felt like it was under shadowed by some of my teammates who committed to D1s like Yale and Stanford, which was fine, because those are big achievements in itself. They got a big signing day during one of the recess or lunches, where everyone in our school watched, and I wasn't a part of that. (Lindsey)”

This under recognition struck home for Lindsey because she felt as though her achievement was just as valuable but due to societal preference for Division I athletes, her

achievements were overlooked by other students, coaches, and teachers. The idea that Division III is taken less seriously is perpetuated through lack of media coverage due to lower budgets and a lesser public image. In many cases, other people had not even heard of the school that she committed to, which was not the case for her teammates. In general, there appears to be an overall discrediting of Asian American athletic achievement, male or female, in the sense that they are not seen as fitting the ideal image of an athlete. Their participation in these spaces is contested due to historical notions about their abilities and their justifications to prove their worthiness in their positions when compared to their white counterparts. Asian Americans have struggled to break into the institution of sports due to its framing within the white-black binary, as well as stereotypes about their physical capabilities. The lack of individuals who take part in sports at a high level are few and far between, which creates more reasons for others to argue for their exclusion.

Sloan experienced a similar situation in terms of divisional commitment difference in the eyes of her peers.

“I feel like the vibes in the basketball community, as a woman if you're not going to Stanford or let's say a big D1, like UCLA, Duke or North Carolina. It doesn't feel as great or as grand as people make men feel when they get accepted somewhere. Women are just not celebrated enough. (Sloan)”

Sloan highlights the gendered aspect of college commitment and the divisional differences within sport. In her experience, Division I is celebrated and recognized more, and men get congratulated for going anywhere to play, even if it is a smaller, more obscure school. Whereas women need to justify the division and rigor of the school in academics and athletics or others will not recognize her achievements. This is emphasized and overshadowed in comparison to Division I recruits because people can refer to their school's name, which is more difficult for the Division III level despite the academic quality present at the universities. In general, women

struggle to receive the same recognition for athletic accomplishments, especially minority groups because of their exclusion from sport. At the same time, many athletes are overshadowed for committing to a Division III school because of the lack of understanding about their competition levels and that playing collegiate sports is still a huge accomplishment. This is seen across all NCAA sports, not just within basketball, but the divisional difference creates larger than necessary gaps between athletes and underestimates many at the Division III level.

Life After College Athletics

Building off the importance of this major decision, choosing a good college to attend helps an individual in terms of future career goals and plans. The stigma around playing sports in college believes that one is sacrificing their academics for athletics. However, the unique aspect of Division III is the academic prioritization coupled with the balance of pursuing sports at the next level. In this environment, one can have flexibility with their major, participate in activities outside of school and athletics, as well as receive a quality education to prep for their lives after college.

Lydia understood this dichotomy going into college and where her focus could lie:

“Wanting to focus on academics more and that mindset of being realistic. This is just a game. You can't put your life into it and make it a career, but you need your academics for your career. You're not going to play lacrosse forever, sports aren't forever. (Lydia)”

Lydia recognized that while playing sports was important to the development of her identity and character, she had to look at life beyond athletics. Up to that point, she had participated in various sports during her childhood before settling on lacrosse in high school and then wanting to pursue it at the next level in college. However, she took this opportunity into perspective within the bigger picture and how she could utilize her sport to create a successful college experience but also plan a career for when she was finished playing. The understanding that sports cannot be a career can be hard for many athletes to accept and due to the racialized

nature of sports, it lends towards certain populations trying to achieve social mobility through this method. At the same time, the lack of representation in professional sports by Asian Americans continues to perpetuate the ideology that they have no place in that realm and that it is unachievable for their population. This attitude is down to earth and realistic in terms of the low number of collegiate athletes who go on to play sports at the next level, especially from Division III athletics. For Lydia, the balance of being able to pursue her sport at the next level while simultaneously receiving a good education was crucial for building a future for her career after college.

Devin echoed these thoughts about life after college and participating in collegiate athletics:

“I’m not going to be playing this sport forever, in terms of being able to financially support myself in the future. I have other interests, I wanted to have a balance between the two. And I think that division three really provided that, I can still have that community and make those friendships. (Devin)”

Devin found that sports provided access into institutions that were previously inaccessible spaces and gave her a well-rounded experience. The understanding that sport does not last forever, highlighted the importance of balance in academics and athletics and having a foundation to build on after her collegiate experience was finished. The balance from Division III for academics and athletics allowed Devin to maintain a positive social life and sense of community outside her sport, which attributed to the more holistic experience of Division III in comparison to Division I athletics. By maintaining other interests and social relations outside of her team and sport, Devin felt as though she could focus on her academics and the understanding of their importance for her future in the real world.

Jamie struggled with this throughout high school by focusing on water polo at the expense of academics at times but coming to college made her reevaluate. She knew that “my

parents were worried that I was going to sacrifice school for water polo. But I know, that would be a mistake in my heart. So, I told them, I won't do that, I promise. (Jamie)" This understanding and maturity of life outside of sports allowed her to see her parental concern about her prioritizes. By considering the opportunity of pursuing athletics and academics at the highest degree, Jamie took full advantage of her athletic abilities to use it to get into a good school and refocus her values.

These future centered beliefs are common amongst college students when deciding where to attend university that would best set them up for success after school. However, student athletes also strive for that balance of pursuing their sport but keeping academics as a priority. The Division III aspect allows them to maintain these values and engage in college life outside of these two realms. In the long run, these women have been able to make decisions about their future and use their athletics to their advantage while still enjoying participating in the process. Most importantly, they can reassure their parents that they understand that sports do not last forever, and they will partake in a well-rounded experience during college that sets the up for a successful career and future.

For the women in the study, their parents played a big role in their initial participation in sports, which grew and developed into a deep passion for the game, which they continued from the youth levels all the way to collegiate athletics. They affected an individual's experience within sports by being their biggest supporters and always encouraging them to be the best at what they do. All parents wanted their kids to be happy and healthy throughout their lives and were supportive of any major decision they made such as, going to college and what they decided to study. However, their influence only extended to a certain degree because it was ultimately their choice. For the Asian American women in this study, they faced a contradiction

in their understanding of the model minority myth. The ideology centers around academic prioritization, which has been echoed by their parents throughout their lives, but they feel the desire to couple this with participation in athletics. In addition, their parents seem to support their decision in that they choose Division III athletics so that academics and life after college can continue to be the focus of their collegiate experience. Alongside that, parental attitudes surrounding sports see it as an opportunity to grow individual identity and stay active, but also as an avenue into top quality university that bypasses the selective admissions process. This mindset appears as a difference between Asian and white parents and how they frame the importance of academics in comparison to athletics.

The individual means of navigating the college process runs parallel to preexisting ideologies of Asian American academic tendencies and abilities. For many, they chose the Division III level to maintain a balance of academics and athletics as well as understanding that there must be a career beyond sports. Although they have felt the generational difference around a model minority understanding in relation to interests outside of academics. Even though there are lingering cultural ideologies of academic prioritization, they have found that their parents are more open to participating in both academics and athletics. This opens the gate for greater representation of Asian Americans in collegiate athletics but also shows the impact of individual agency in pursuing both interests to a high degree. The ideologies surrounding athletics and academics have changed with each generation and participating in an Americanized culture but many stereotypes about the model minority expectations continue to be perpetuated in these spaces. Asian American women face the contradiction between prioritizing their academics and playing collegiate sports. For many, the Division III provides a happy medium in which they can maintain a balance as well as manage their parental expectations and wishes. In conclusion,

parental influences continue to push for an academic prioritization but many of these values along with model minority expectations become internalized in an individual's decision to focus on academics while choosing to participate in athletics. This source of agency stems from a generational shift in understanding the balance between school and sports as well as realizing the appeal of participating in a more well-rounded Division III collegiate experience.

Mental Health

Historically, there has been a stigma around mental health within the Asian American community, especially for Asian American women. Part of this is attributed to the lack of seriousness of societal inequalities and issues that face the Asian American community and the other part is due to traditional cultural values that do not view mental health as a legitimate concern. However, there has been a dramatic rise in mental health problems within the US in recent years, specifically among high school and college age students who have felt increasing societal pressures and stresses. For Asian Americans, the ideology of the model minority myth results in the population being overlooked in terms of providing them with adequate resources to combat these illnesses as well as the pressure to live up to these stereotypes. The internalization of embodying the ideal image of a successful Asian American within this country has come at the expense of individual risk trying to achieve these expectations and standards. Within athletics, mental health is still under discussed in terms of combating its consequences and dealing with stress inducing circumstances. For Asian Americans, they already face many issues with justifying their position within sports let alone living up to high standards of athletic excellence. They are used to pushing through in so many situations with their academics and managing this balance of time consuming and rigorous activities along with educational responsibilities can be overbearing and stressful to an individual.

Asian Americans struggle more than other populations with mental health but are the least likely to report experiencing issues. Fiona found this to be true in sports and school and how Asian American women are not given adequate help to combat these problems.

“Mental health, and the Asian American community is a huge issue. As a woman, that's a huge issue. And then as an athlete, that's also a huge issue, because there's so many forces that play within each identity that champion, this idea of, self-sufficiency, and being able to handle it as an athlete. Handle it, push through it, just do whatever you can to succeed. My parents are like, you must be able to sacrifice and push through the hard times to get to the good times. This idea that if you work hard, I'm pursuing the American dream. This intersection of identity with being an Asian American, female athlete, forces us to not be open and vulnerable and share struggles. As a student athlete, we're handling so much and we're taught to just do it and, handle it and push through it when that is not what's best for us. That is something that should be talked about more. (Fiona)”

Her perspective drives home the point about the implementation of the model minority myth into individual internalized experiences and how they are constantly told to sacrifice their own well-being to achieve success. This idea of the American Dream can only be achieved through hard work and sacrifice but is often out of reach for many populations because of its false ideology. Fiona experienced this first-hand by wanting to justify her parents initial sacrifice by migrating over to the US, but also how these beliefs have affected her personally and the effects on others like her. Mental health is rarely talked about in the athletic community due to stigmas seeing it as weakness and not fulfilling the ideal mentally strong, tough athlete that has been constructed by society. However, by engaging in more conversations about resources within athletics, specifically for minority communities, we can begin to break the stigmas surrounding mental health and encourage individuals to reach out for help rather than suffer in silence.

This is all too apparent for Jamie who felt pressure from her coaches to pursue Division I water polo. “They wanted me to go D1, but I could not do that to myself. Sorry, mental health. (Jamie)” The Division I pressure, and responsibility can make it feel like a job and a greater load

to carry over the Division III balance. Jamie's belief was that playing Division I would mean sacrificing her mental health for her sport and that was not something she was willing to do. She enjoyed many aspects of playing, the physicality, the stress release, and knew that she wanted to play at the next level and found a great compromise within Division III. This division allowed for academic and athletic balance as well as greater connection to the overall community not just within sports. She made the decision to prioritize her own mental health and happiness while continuing to play water polo at a high level.

Sports require a high amount of concentration and mental capacity for its athletes and successful individuals are usually indicated by their mental abilities under pressure as well as through their performance. Laila cites one of her friends who plays tennis as an example of strong mental will.

“She blocks out everyone, the praise and just works on constructive criticism, she works very hard in academics and sports and she's so happy all the freaking time. She just has a positive outlook and tons of things I think that contributes to how well she does in her sports as well because the mental factor is of huge importance. (Laila)”

Laila believed the positivity and mental strength of her friend was a huge indicator of her personal success on the court and having that mental capacity is impressive under high pressure. Her friend, who also identifies as Asian American, deals with personal academic and athletic pressures but manages to find a happy medium between the two and excel in both avenues.

This extends into personal experiences within college and finding ways to manage mental health. For Lindsey, her parents were very adamant about attending a good college but ultimately wanted to show their support for her achievements.

“When I do well, and throughout the process of recruiting, they were very supportive for any college that I got into. And they were very proud and happy that I made it this far, and they just wanted me to be happy at the end of the day. (Lindsey)”

For Lindsey's parents, they saw sports as contributing to helping navigate mental health through stress relief and happiness. Ultimately, although they want her to succeed, her individual happiness is more important and wanting what is best for her. This was true throughout the recruiting process and when she decided to commit to a school. Rather than sacrificing her well-being by attending a top Division I school, they were more concerned about Lindsey having a well-rounded and pleasant experience, in which she could make connections and receive a top-quality education.

Yvonne echoed these thoughts through her personal experiences with her parents.

"I think their biggest thing is, they just want me to be healthy and happy. When I mentioned I was looking at Ivy's, they were trying to hold me back in the sense that you don't have to. They read stories where kids, especially Chinese students, go, and push themselves so much that they break, either mentally or physically. You're our only child, we just want you to be safe. (Yvonne)"

Burnout and stress are rampant, especially among student athletes from trying to juggle so many responsibilities, which can be very isolating. Many people do not understand the stresses and time restraints on their schedules that being a student athlete entails, practices, games, time with the team, meals, and fitting school into that process can be draining and exhausting. Being in college means being away from parents for the first time in many cases, and not having constant surveillance over their children in this new environment can be stressful for the parents so they are bound to worry about their health and happiness. Many of the women in this study found that sports bring them a break from school and gives them a chance to relieve stress as well as gives them an automatic group of friends coming into college. Using sports as an avenue to exert physical energy and maintain an active and healthy lifestyle can contribute to positive mental health. The ability to manage a busy schedule of balancing sports and academics can be rigorous, but at the same time, student athletes are among the best students at universities and have great time management skills. There should be increased conversations about mental

health among student athletes, especially among minority communities because of the increased societal pressures to manage stress while over working to achieve excellence.

Chapter Eight: Discussion and Conclusion

The Asian American population is on the rise within the US. They are one of the fastest growing minority groups in America and have begun to contest their current position in society. For many, the stereotypes placed on them by the model minority myth and historical notions about their behaviors and actions have limited their participation in social, economic, and political discourses within the US. However, their growing population means that they cannot be kept out of these conversations any longer and that they are going to continue to put themselves in positions of leadership. One of these realms is within sports. Many of the participants mentioned the lack of representation of Asian Americans within sports, and this is not limited to just athletes but extends to all positions such as, coaches, administrators, journalists, broadcasters, etc. Having Asian Americans in these roles will help encourage participation at the youth level and increase overall diversity on teams. One continues to break stereotypes of Asian Americans simply by playing a sport but by increasing representation, these youth can realize their potential to play at the next level and beyond. Additionally, having teammates that look like you can help create more of a feeling of community rather than racial isolation through increasing the number of Asian American athletes.

Throughout this study, the importance of mental health for Asian American women and athletes continued to emerge. The historical stigma around mental health issues within the Asian American community has led to limited conversations about outreach and treatment for the population, which leads to more silenced issues. The dissimulation of the model minority myth contributes to these problems and the individual pressure placed upon them to live up to these standards, even while discounting other deterring factors. Maintaining a position as a student athlete brings many added stressors and responsibilities that can be difficult for individuals to

handle on their own and by encouraging future dialogue, there can be more resources made available. Within athletics, there are increased occurrences of burnout and challenges with choosing priorities that contribute to mental health problems. However, many find the solution within Division III athletics and their ability to maintain a healthy balance of academics and sports without overexerting themselves in either field. The opportunity to focus on all aspects of a student athlete are exemplified at the Division III level because of the complementary feature of athletics to academics while still competing at a high level. The women in the study found that Division III allowed them to prioritize their mental health and capacities as student athletes while being able to create a foundation for their future career goals. The parental support for athletics during college was also increased once they realized the academic opportunity that existed within the Division III level as well as the ability to have a well-rounded experience.

Despite somewhat increased participation, there remains a continued exclusion of Asian Americans from the contested space of sports. They are left out of discourses within athletics because of its focus on the black-white binary and images of what an ideal athlete should entail. By limiting their participation in discussions of race and sport, Asian Americans struggle to counter hegemonic ideas surrounding masculinity and femininity as well as the implementation of the model minority myth on their perceived abilities. These exclusionary practices led to feelings of isolation and difficulty in community building within their respective spaces of academics and athletics because of the double standard of being a student athlete. The racialized nature of the model minority myth puts them in opposition to other minority groups and creates continued struggles with discrimination and ethnic differences. The struggles of Asian Americans are highlighted through recent anti-Asian racism and perpetuating ideologies

surrounding the application of the model minority myth and how they are not viewed as victims of racism or biases because of their socioeconomic successes.

In addition, the model minority myth continues to put Asian Americans in tension with other minority groups, which contributes to feelings of social isolation. Even though some Asian Americans have found academic and socioeconomic successes, their achievements are used to undermine other groups even though they are still a minority group and face many societal inequalities and disparities within their own population. The consistent use of the broader term Asian American, obscures the ethnic differences within the race as well as the inconsistencies that exist in the larger group. For example, many Pacific Islanders find difficulty with relating to the larger Asian American terminology because of the separate issues that they face, yet they are still categorized under the broader term. The persistent implementation of the model minority myth on the race leads to many issues within the Asian American population as well as in comparison to other racial groups. This generalization creates problematic understandings of the model minority standard, and the purposeful exclusion of the race limits their ability to create community within social spaces, such as sports, because of lack of shared identity.

Asian Americans continue to struggle with the lingering stereotypes of the model minority myth and its social constructions being used to define their behaviors, appearances, and beliefs. The limitations of these ideologies place Asian Americans in a racial triangulation between white and black populations, in which their social status is racialized in relation to these groups. By situating them within this system, the model minority myth can be used to perpetuate white hegemonic values and reinforce racial inferiority. However, rather than relying on structural change, agency is put on Asian American individuals to change these ideas about their race within society. This occurs within athletics, politics, and other areas of society through

which existing white ideologies oppress and discriminate against Asian Americans. Even though the social construction of the model minority myth and its associated stereotypes falls within the dominant narrative, the responsibility to counter their contentious position is given to the individual. By the governing body failing to correct these structural issues within American society, many of these problems continue to exist within racial discourses and their position within the racial hierarchy.

Even though the model minority myth continues to affect the ways that Asian Americans are perceived today, its associated standards have experienced a generational shift in its understanding and application. The ideologies seem to vary between embodying the myth, internalizing its expectations, or defying it. Those who embody it want to justify their position in society as immigrants, which ends up playing into the positive stereotypes of their successes as a population. However, this ties into the idea of meritocracy and achieving the American Dream, even though it is not obtainable for many ethnic groups due to societal inequalities and discriminatory narratives. Additionally, those who internalize its expectations, experience more of an unspoken or invisible pressure to perform, and while not explicitly stated, its standards remain the same. In this way, individuals take it upon themselves to try to meet these academic and socioeconomic goals through values that align with the model minority myth such as, hard work, discipline, and respect. However, they are often associated with the negative stereotypes as well such as, submission, inferiority, and quietness, which makes it harder to establish themselves within their given environments because of preexisting ideologies. Lastly, those who defy the dominant portrayal find it difficult to counter the pervasive nature of the model minority myth and the preconceived notions about the race. In this way, they are unable to deny the meaning behind the ideology because of its continuous existence and enforcement by white

hegemonic narratives. Although they try to change these stereotypes about the race, they find it difficult to contradict values assigned to their actions and often end up playing into these discourses.

The model minority myth has multiple connotations within the Asian American population that cannot be applied to all ethnic and racial groups because of economic and cultural differences. Many people view Asian Americans within the model minority myth as being successful members of society through hard work, discipline, and academic achievement but therein lies a tension. In terms of the changing social and political context in the US, a true definition cannot be assigned to the current understanding of the model minority myth and the way that it is perceived by other racial groups and within the population itself. Asian Americans continue to face marginalization through their constant pedestaling by white hegemonic narratives, but their achievements should not be overlooked despite historical notions about their perceived images. The challenges that Asian Americans experience today cannot be obscured under the model minority ideology, but it is a result of deep structural flaws within the American system that cannot be reversed but rather adapted and changed through the actions of individuals and organizations. Even though the model minority perception will continue to be applied in society for years to come, Asian Americans must find ways to parallel these expectations and develop their own intersectional identities within contested spaces and find new ways to counter white supremacy.

Through this understanding of the model minority myth comes a generational shift for accepting and fitting into the given expectations. As Asian Americans become further removed from their initial migrant status, the ideologies of the model minority become more filtered and shifted to accommodate the changing meanings of the myth. This has happened as parents

experienced a different culture within the US, one that prioritized balance and expansion of interests rather than a sole focus on academic achievement. This changing understanding of their personal experiences within the model minority myth has also affected the current generation of Asian Americans and the ways in which the stereotypes are applied to their own beings. As a result, an altered perception of the model minority myth has emerged within the changing contemporary context that better encapsulates their experiences as Asian Americans and student athletes.

Through my research and analysis, I find that the model minority myth still applies to many Asian Americans but the ways it is interpreted has changed, especially within athletics and collegiate athletes. This manifests within the current generation and their personal experiences with these ideologies as negative to their participation in discourses of race and sport. The contemporary model minority understanding is not upheld to a degree by present Asian American student athletes as their contested position within society challenges the ways it is subverted and embodied. This study shows the ways Asian American athletes have experienced the model minority myth in their lives and how the ideology has resulted in a shifted perspective about their personal understandings of their intersectional identities. The generational effect sees parental support for participation in collegiate athletics increasing as well as the overall goal of achieving balance and happiness in their personal lives. However, the lingering model minority expectations continue to prevent complete freedom from past stereotypes about Asian American priorities and abilities within society. This subversion is seen on both the parental and individual level as neither seem to be able to completely break free from the model minority standard, but also find ways to undermine its application. Previous studies failed to account for this specific approach to the model minority myth and how its definition has varied for Asian American

student athletes. Therefore, I propose a new interpretation to encompass their experiences and reflect the shifting perceptions of these individuals.

The model minority myth is a stereotype about the believed abilities and achievements of the Asian American population in comparison to other minority groups that aims to pedestal their accomplishments as a race through exemplification of meritocracy and the American Dream within the US. However, many of the previous perceptions exclude the intersectional identities of Asian American student athletes and their contested positions within collegiate athletics. Their personal experiences show the ways in which they challenge stereotypes about their participation through subverting but also embodying the model minority expectation. On one hand, by virtue of being active college athletes, they are undermining views of Asian American women as submissive, hyper sexualized peoples through playing their sport at a high level. Additionally, they find greater support from their parents' conscious decisions to push them outside school and to prioritize happiness and balance which goes against the grain of stereotypical Asian cultural values. However, all the women in the study continued to deal with applied expectations that aligned with the model minority understanding of their physical appearances and capabilities as athletes. Furthermore, their parents found recognizable actions such as, using sports as an edge for college and the academic focus within Division III athletics as appealing, which played into the model minority expectations. The model minority myth values are pervasive and will persistently affect the involvement of Asian American in college sports now and in the future. However, the intersectional identity of these individuals will reassess the ways that its meaning and understanding has been changed. Therefore, Asian American female athletes continue to be placed in contentious positions where they actively challenge existing notions while upholding an understanding of the prominent nature of the existing ideologies.

Although this study helps increase the literature on Asian American women within collegiate sports, there are always intersections that will be left out of the conversation. In the case of my study, the research only stayed within basketball, lacrosse, soccer, swimming, tennis, volleyball, and water polo. Originally, I planned on interviewing at least one from every female NCAA sanctioned sport offered at the Division III small liberal arts colleges in which my study is based on. However, due to lack of responses and a limited time frame, I had to settle for these seven sports but that leaves out women from cross country, golf, softball, and track and field. It also leaves out other Division III sports that were not offered such as field hockey, ice hockey, and rowing, which are stories in themselves for Asian Americans. The conversations about differences between sports can be tied back into ideal physicality as well as youth opportunity but examining the varying levels of participation in white dominated sports could reveal more information about social variability within the population.

In the future, there should be more studies on the experiences of Asian Americans within athletics, not just women but men as well because they face their own challenges with their racial identity and being associated with more feminine characteristics. Additionally, future studies should examine the ethnic and class disparities within the Asian American population and how that affects participation in athletics as well as in academia. It would be valuable to compare the experiences of Division I Asian American athletes to Division III Asian American athletes to see similarities and differences in terms of priorities for academics and athletics as well as balancing parental expectations. There are more Asian Americans within Division III athletics, but further research on career development within sports for Division I athletes including the transition to a potential professional career could give insights into the changing dynamics of their participation at higher levels. Additionally, future studies can examine in-depth Asian American experiences

in specific sports. Even though this study provided a thorough exploration of seven NCAA Division III sports, future studies can build on this work in looking at specific sports such as, recreational basketball, and how Asian Americans continue to disrupt the model minority myth and create community. This perspective will be useful in investigating the ways in which Asian Americans are excluded from popular narratives within amateur, recreational, and professional realms of sport.

A significant factor that limited my project was COVID-19. Due to the global pandemic and following safety concerns, I conducted all my interviews on the online video application, Zoom. Although it was helpful in terms of creating an audio file, which was put into Otter.ai, an online transcribing tool, to make a transcription, it was hard to connect with my participants. An important aspect of the interview process is building a connection with your interviewees and creating a space in which they can be vulnerable and open about their experiences. Even though I was able to learn about their experiences to a certain degree, having an in-person interaction can be extremely valuable in the interview process. Lastly, there are many variations and further understandings of the model minority that were not included in the initial or Asian American student athlete specific definition as future research will expand and develop the idea within contemporary society. There are many realms that the model minority myth can be utilized within such as, politics, social justice, civic engagement, leadership, and cultural situations that were not included within this current study. Even though the study is limited in its approach, it still provides an in-depth analysis of the model minority perceptions of Asian Americans within a previously minimally discussed topic.

In essence, this study examines the ways that Asian Americans deal with the model minority myth. The question arises if they are breaking free from its associated stereotypes or

rather reifying it through their actions. I believe that it is more complicated than that. I find a tension and ambiguity in the ways that it is applied to Asian American women, specifically student athletes. By focusing on such a specific subgroup, it allowed me to really explore the nuances of the ideology and how it has impacted Asian American student athletes. This topic is truly unexplored in the realms of Asian Americans because they are not considered minorities to many groups and Asian American studies have previously failed to engage with the intersection of race and sport. Specifically focusing on the Division III level has complicated the narrative of the model minority application in how Asian American women have dealt with this tension because of the academic prioritization coupled with athletic participation.

Playing sports at the collegiate level is a huge accomplishment because of the low number of individuals who excel at their sport for an extended period and can compete in such an intense environment. For the women in this study, they have overcome the odds and become part of this exclusive population. However, they continue to face systemic discrimination against their abilities and capacities as athletes because of their race. Being an Asian American student athlete means being part of only 2.3% of college athletes, who are still only a fraction of the individuals attending college (Gough, 2021). Many come to believe that these individuals are exemplary of overcoming the model minority myth by participating in both academics and athletics at a high level, despite stereotypes about Asians in athletics viewing them as not belonging in these spaces. One might expect that this specific group of Asian American student athletes are able to leave these ideologies behind by asserting themselves into these spheres. Not only are they participating in athletics, which is not typically associated with Asian Americans, but they received parental support through this process of not focusing solely on academics. However, I find this issue to be more complicated in that many of the model minority

expectations continue to persist in these arenas. Additionally, many of the Asian American women are still closely tied to the academic aspect and parents view sports as another avenue into selective colleges. Therefore, even though these Asian American women have overcome countless barriers to participate at this level, they are not free and have not completely broken these stereotypes.

It would be inaccurate to state that these individuals have broken away from the restrictive, pervasive nature of the model minority myth. I discover that they still feel the impacts of its associated standards that they must live up to even though it manifests itself in different ways such as, mental health and expectations of oneself. On top of this, there continue to be unspoken and invisible assumptions about their abilities from coaches and teammates which contributes to their perceptions of themselves and beliefs about their own performances. Therein lies an internal and external application of the model minority myth to a group that others think are exempt from these ideologies. However, the understanding of the prevalence of the model minority myth in their individual experiences and how it cannot be discarded so easily, adds to a shifted application of the ideology. This group has the potential to push back against stereotypes and even break many of these preconceived notions through their participation in collegiate sports, but in some ways, they can never be free from its effects. The narratives produced by this population lends support to subverting and embodying the model minority myth through their actions. The realization of the strength and persistence of the model minority myth within our own society becomes more enforced in the ways that Asian American student athletes operate to try to counter these ideologies. The significance of research on this topic, opens the doors for future discourses about subgroups within the Asian American population who work to create counter narratives to dominant beliefs as well as those who understand how it manifests in

society today. I hope this research furthers discussions about the prevalence of the model minority and how it affects different groups in their journeys to reconceptualize racial discourses.

On a personal level, despite being adopted, I have faced the model minority myth and its associated stereotypes throughout my life in academics and athletics. Being constantly underestimated and stereotyped has affected my own experience with my racial identity and constantly being assessed at face value. For years I have struggled to exist outside these ideas and break preconceived notions that others have placed on me. I have failed to reach expectations numerous times and I have been discriminated against for my appearance. However, I found solace in soccer. Even though I was not the biggest, fastest, strongest, or smartest kid on the field, I believed in myself and what I could accomplish. As I ascended from youth sports to high school and eventually college, I realized these perceptions of my abilities were due to racist ideologies and the model minority understanding by other groups. As my career continued into college, so did these racial ideas about what I could and could not do. I felt as if I had accomplished so much, yet at the same time, felt limited in my approach due to others' beliefs about me. One of the most challenging aspects of coming into my intersectional identity was creating my own counter narratives to the model minority myth and how it applied within my life. I think that this ideology will continue to affect the way that I am perceived, as an Asian American woman, in my athletic or professional career. The relentless nature of model minority has made it difficult to push back against the stereotypes that looked to undermine my performances but also shaped my understanding of its harmful effects. My hope with this study is to give a voice to these women through empowering their experiences with race and the ways they developed their identities despite systemic biases but also further the ways that Asian Americans are perceived in the social context today through the lens of the model minority myth.

Appendix

¹Hi (Name of Participant)! My name is Anna Ponzio & I am a senior at Pitzer. I'm currently writing my thesis this semester on the experiences of Asian American women in collegiate sports & was wondering if you or someone you know would be interested in being interviewed for my project! If so, may you please send me your email & I can send some more information! Thank you!

²Dear (Name of Participant),

My name is Anna Ponzio, and I am working on my honors thesis in sociology. I am a member of the Pomona-Pitzer Women's Soccer team and a current senior at Pitzer College. I am currently recruiting participants for my study on Asian American Women in Collegiate Athletics. I am looking for varsity student athletes at Division III liberal arts schools that identify as Asian American women and would be interested in getting interviewed about their experiences. The study will consist of an interview lasting between 1-2 hours, in which I will ask you a series of questions about your experiences as an Asian American student athlete participating in collegiate sports. The interview will take place over zoom due to COVID-19 safety considerations. If you are interested in learning more about the study, would like to get involved, or know someone who would be interested in participating, please respond to this email at aponzio@students.pitzer.edu. Students must be 18 years or older in order to participate. [I am reaching out because one of your teammates listed you as a potential participant!]⁸ If this is something you are interested in partaking in, please email me back and I can send you more information!

Thank you,
Anna Ponzio

³Dear (Name of Participant),

Thank you for showing interest in participating in my study. I am looking forward to learning about your experiences as an Asian American woman, as well as a collegiate athlete.

⁸ Only included if the participant was recommended to me as a potential participant

The interview will take place over zoom, due to COVID-19 safety considerations and will last around 1-2 hours.

My goal for the study is to learn about your experiences as a collegiate athlete with the model minority myth and your intersectional identities as an Asian American woman. As you know, there is limited research on this topic, and I think that this study will help expand this topic. If you weren't familiar, the model minority myth is a stereotype about Asian Americans where they are expected to have socioeconomic and academic success within the population. This leads to many assumptions made about the race concerning their intelligence, physical abilities, and extends to gendered biases as well. Many of my questions will center around your experience playing sports throughout your life, from childhood to your current status. Additionally, I will ask questions about the familial impact on your athletic career as well as the influence of your personal identity as an Asian American woman. Before we can meet to conduct this interview and if you decide this is something you want to participate in, you must complete the attached consent form. Participating in this interview is entirely voluntary and involves no more risk than what a typical person experiences on a regular day. You may withdraw at any time for any reason but if you are interested in continuing with this study, please read the form for more information.

Lastly, once the form has been completed, we will be able to set up a time and date to conduct the interview. Please send me three potential times that are available for you over the next week that we can meet. I would appreciate if you included the time/date/time zone to make scheduling easier for both of us.

Thank you again for participating and I look forward to meeting you and hearing about your experiences,

Anna Ponzio

⁴Consent to Participate in Study on Asian American Women in Collegiate Athletics

You are invited to participate in a research study about the lived experiences of Asian American women in collegiate sports. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a member of a Division III liberal arts school and identify as an Asian American woman who is participating in a varsity sport. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. If you decide to participate, you will complete an

interview with the principal investigator that lasts around 1-2 hours that will ask you questions about your personal life and experiences with sports at the collegiate level.

Volunteering for this study involves limited risk except for a discussion about potentially sensitive personal experiences. Your involvement is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time for any reason. You also have the option to omit any information from the interview that you do not wish to be included. Please continue reading for more information about the study.

Background Information: The purpose of the study is to learn more about the experiences of Asian American women in collegiate athletics and how that has been affected by the model minority myth. The model minority myth is a stereotype about Asian Americans where they are expected to have socioeconomic and academic success within the population. This leads to many assumptions made about the race concerning their intelligence, physical abilities, and extends to gendered biases as well.

Study Leadership: This research study is conducted by Anna Ponzio, a student at Pitzer College. She is being supervised by Azamat Junisbai, professor of sociology at Pitzer College.

Participation: For the study, you will be asked to participate in an interview with the principal investigator, lasting around 1-2 hours where you will be asked a series of questions about your experiences as a collegiate athlete.

Risks of Participation: The risks for participating in this study are minimal but if you were to experience any emotional discomfort during the interview or after wards, you are free to stop or withdraw at any time and can inform the student investigator, Anna Ponzio (aponzio@students.pitzer.edu) or the faculty advisor, Azamat Junisbai (azamat_junisbai@pitzer.edu) that you no longer wish to continue with the study. Furthermore, we encourage you to seek assistance (if necessary) from the Monsour Counseling Center, located at Tranquada Student Services Center, 1st floor, 757 College Way, Claremont, CA 91711. They can be reached at (909) 621-8202 or (909) 607-2000 (after hours emergency).

Benefits of Participation: The direct benefits to participating are contributing to the knowledge about this under researched subject in the field of sociology and the information gathered has the potential to benefit Asian American student athletes in general. Although, there won't be immediate benefit from the interview itself, the data collected from the study hopes to provide information about the topic at hand. This study hopes to increase the understanding of

the experiences of Asian American women in relation to the model minority myth and how that has impacted their involvement in collegiate athletics.

Voluntary Participation: Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with your college. During the interview, you may skip any questions you don't feel comfortable answering or ask to omit any information from the data that you don't feel comfortable being included. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason without it being held against you.

Confidentiality: Research records will be kept in a password protected computer and only be accessed by the principal investigator – Anna Ponzio and her faculty advisor, Azamat Junisbai. Any recordings of the interviews will be kept for transcription purposes only and will not be shared and will be maintained in a locked file. Your individual privacy will be protected in all papers, books, talks, posts, or stories resulting from this study. To protect the confidentiality of your participation, I will be using pseudonyms for all the individuals involved in the study as well as no mention of collegiate affiliation. We may use the data collected for future research and to share with other researchers, but your personal identity will not be revealed in any way. Research records must be kept for at least 3 years after completion of the project.

Sponsorship: This study is sponsored by Pitzer College.

The Pitzer College Institutional Review Board has approved this project. If you have any ethical concerns about this project or about your rights as a human subject in research, you may contact the head of the Pitzer College IRB at irb@pitzer.edu

Consent: Checking “yes” and providing your signature means that you have understood the information on this form, that someone has answered all the questions that you may have about this research project, and that you voluntarily agree to participate in the study. You must be 18 years or older to participate.

Yes No

Signature: _____

Additionally, select the yes box if you consent to the interview being recorded so that the investigator can make a transcription after its completion.

I agree to be interviewed

Yes No

⁶Dear (Name of Participant),

Thank you for participating in this research study. I greatly appreciate your time, effort, and vulnerability in sharing your personal experiences. The goal of the study was to examine the effects of the model minority myth on Asian American women in collegiate sports and I am hoping to use this information to learn more about this under researched area of knowledge. All participants partook in an interview and the goal of this study is to learn more about the intersectional experiences of Asian American women. I hope to use this research to provide insight about the impact of the model minority myth on Asian American women in relation to collegiate sports, but also highlight the need for additional research on this topic. Ultimately, this project is personal to me, and I hope to learn more about the diversity of experiences that other Asian Americans have felt through their lives as athletes.

Additionally, I encourage you to reach out to other teammates or Asian American women athletes who might be interested in participating in my study and fit my ideal criteria. I would prefer if you did not disclose the information discussed during our interview with them, as I will provide any information needed, but I want to be able to ask them about their firsthand experiences through my study. Given this information and the desired outcome of this study, do you have any additional questions for me?

Thank you once again for your time and willingness to share about your personal experiences as a collegiate athlete. If you have any further questions, please contact the primary investigator Anna Ponzio (aponzio@students.pitzer.edu)

The risks for participating in this study were minimal. During or after the interview, if any experiences of emotional discomfort came about, we encourage participants to seek assistance from one of the following resources (or another of their choice):

Monsour Counseling Center. They can be reached at:

Phone (909) 621-8202

After hours emergency (909) 607-2000

Address: Tranquada Student Services Center, 1st floor

757 College Way

Claremont, CA 91711

Thank you,

Anna Ponzio

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