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Article

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Abstract
This study was an initial qualitative exploration to (a) capture varied experiences of racial microaggressions directed at Chinese immigrant women before and during Covid and (b) investigate different forms and levels of microaggressions based on socioeconomic status, age, and other characteristics. Racial microaggressions were examined by interviewing 12 foreign-born, Chinese immigrant women aged 23 to 80 years old, with most of the participants identified as middle class or above. Building upon previous scholarship on racial and gendered microaggressions, an analytical framework was developed using 12 major themes to identify and interpret discriminatory behaviors. Our main findings suggest that the research sample encountered more blatant hate incidents and expressed heightened concern over their physical safety in the post-Covid period. Young women, compared to their older counterparts, were more inclined to report microaggression episodes and distinguish more subtle forms of discrimination. These findings could serve as preliminary evidence for future research.

Issue
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1. Introduction

1.1. Problem Area and Significance

Since the outbreak of Covid, reports of xenophobic and racist incidents directed at Asians, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) have raised substantially. A total of 10,370 anti-Asian hate incidents were documented from March 2020 to September 2021, according to two national reports published by Stop AAPI Hate (2021). Verbal harassment (62.9%) and shunning (16.3%) were the most common types of discrimination, followed by physical assault (16.1%) and online harassment (8.6%).

Against this backdrop, many studies have been conducted since March 2020 with a specific focus on the impact of stigmatization of people of Asian descent during Covid. Past research such as Haft and Zhou (2021) saw an increased perceived discrimination and consequently

a rise in self-reported anxiety symptoms among Chinese American college students during Covid. However, these measures on discrimination and racial microaggression examined the AAPI communities as a broad racial group and, as a result, dismissed the gendered aspects unique to Chinese immigrant women. These studies were also restricted to Asian Americans born in the US, who are relatively well-educated and work as young professionals. This study, thus, aimed to address the gaps in the current literature by exploring and assessing racial microaggressions experienced by an even more invisible subgroup of Chinese population in America—foreign-born, Chinese immigrant women.

The research population was specific to foreign-born, Chinese immigrant women in Greater Boston for a number of reasons. Firstly, Chinese nationals are particularly vulnerable in the context of Covid, largely because of former President Trump's rhetoric concerning the "Chinese

virus." His remark has reignited the historical scapegoating and othering of the Chinese communities during a public health crisis such as the 2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic, and channeled fear of and rage against East Asian-appearing persons (Eichelberger, 2007). Secondly, a disproportionate number of microaggressions or attacks have been directed at Asian women: Reports published by Stop AAPI Hate (2021) show they reported more than twice as many anti-Asian hate incidents as men. Lastly, this study exclusively focused on immigrant women born outside the US because they might possess different interpretations of microaggression incidents, emotional responses, and coping strategies when compared to native-born. It is therefore crucial to capture the experiences and narratives of this subgroup of the Chinese population during Covid.

1.2. Research Questions and Working Propositions

This study was an initial qualitative exploration utilizing ethnographic research and in-depth interviews to investigate if Chinese immigrant women living in Greater Boston experience an increase in racial microaggressions as a result of Covid. Thus, an analytical framework was developed to identify and compare different types and levels of experiences in microaggressions before and during Covid. Similarly, perception of safety and changes in behaviors during Covid are relevant to understanding how Covid-related anti-Asian discrimination might impact the day-to-day life of the affected population.

Additionally, this study also explored how microaggressions vary among Chinese immigrant women based on socioeconomic background, age, and other contributing factors. Even though the sample size was too small to allow for intergroup comparison, information gathered could serve as preliminary evidence to document the subject's experience with microaggression, the emotional impact it had on them, and the strategies they employed to deal with it before and during Covid. Hence, this part of the research held lightly the conceptional framework, leaving room for participants to report and interpret their experiences attributed to gender, race, etc., or the intersection of any of these characteristics.

Furthermore, the research population was specific to foreign-born, Chinese immigrant women aged 18 years old or older who had lived in the US for at least five years (to allow for comparison before and during Covid). Based on previous studies and recent data, two research questions and a working proposition were formulated:

RQ1: To what extent, if any, do Chinese immigrant women in Greater Boston experience an increase in racial microaggressions as a result of Covid?

Our first working proposition (WP1) is that Chinese immigrant women living in Greater Boston experience an increase in racial microaggressions as a result of Covid. Whilst the stigmatization during Covid is not limited to Chinese immigrant women, this subgroup of the Asian population is facing a potentially greater risk of marginalization. Among a total of 10,370 anti-Asian hate incidents documented by Stop AAPI Hate from March 2020 to September 2021, Chinese people were the most frequently targeted group, accounting for 42.7 percent of the total incidents (Stop AAPI Hate, 2021). On top of that, Asian women were more than twice as likely as men to report incidents. Sadly, the 2021 Atlanta shootings that led to the death of eight people, including six women of Asian descent working at massage parlors, have further exposed the marginalization and violence against Asian immigrant women involved in low-wage work (Jeong, 2022).

RQ2: How do racial microaggressions vary among Chinese immigrant women based on socioeconomic background, age, and other contributing factors?

We don't present a working proposition, but keep it open to generate and explain the intersectional experiences of Chinese immigrant women based on their demographic background.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Historical Context

Sinophobia has emanated from a historical resentment against Chinese immigration since the California Gold Rush in the late 1840s. Chinese workers would later come to be exploited for cheap labor, most notably in the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad (Kaur, 2021). Anti-Chinese sentiment continued to rise when the US underwent an economic depression in the 1870s and Chinese immigrants were blamed for taking away jobs traditionally held by White Americans (Zhang, 2021). This belief was eventually translated into a racist metaphor of "yellow peril" that perceives Chinese as dishonest, diseased invaders, viewed culturally and politically inferior to Whites, and framed as a great threat to Whites (Del Visco, 2019). As a result, the "yellow peril" discourse played a significant role in justifying the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882—the first restrictive immigration law that prohibited Chinese nationals from emigrating to the country for ten years (Gover et al., 2020).

Against this backdrop, Chinese communities, alongside other minority groups, have long been subjected to scapegoating and othering when a public health crisis erupted. Muzzatti (2005) argued that fear often drives the public to place blame on some "other," or "some group external to their own national, religious, or ethnic identity." For instance, in an ethnographic study carried out during the 2003 SARS epidemic, Eichelberger (2007) indicated that people living in New York City's Chinatown experienced heightened anxiety and fear of stigmatization. The community was identified as a site of contagion and risk, which subsequently resulted in

a tremendous drop in business and tourism even without a single reported SARS case. This study also determined that fears that recent immigrants would spread the disease represented a larger othering discourse that blamed SARS on Chinese cultural practice, which was in line with media reports at the time. While this article recorded a sum of individual narratives during the SARS epidemic, the author recognized language barriers and distrust of researchers as obstacles to recruiting participants from a wider socioeconomic background. The current study addressed this limitation since the author was fluent in the target population's native languages and encountered fewer trust issues due to her identity as a female Hong Konger. Additionally, the sampling strategy was designed to diversify the informants' socioeconomic status and age group to produce a more nuanced account of microaggressions toward Chinese immigrant women from all walks of life.

2.2. Analytical Framework: Racial Microaggressions Toward Asian Women

This study developed an analytical framework based on pioneering research on racial and gendered microaggression. Broadly speaking, Sue et al. (2007, p. 72) defined microaggressions as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group" because they belong to a racial minority group. This group of psychology scholars proposed a taxonomy of racial microaggressions that divided these experiences into three types: microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation. Microassaults are "explicit racial derogation characterized primary by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 73). In other words, it is more deliberate and conscious, and close to our understanding of old-fashioned racism such as telling people of color to go back to their country.

Microinsult and microinvalidation, on the other hand, are often unintentionally committed by the perpetrator, but they generate a negative experience in the eyes of the recipient. Microinsults are indirect behaviors or communications that "convey rudeness, insensitivity, or demeans a person's racial identity or heritage" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 73). For example, when a student of color is told that their parents must be very proud of them for attending a prestigious college, the speaker might suggest that they must have been admitted through some affirmative action instead of their ability. Microinvalidations are actions that "exclude, negate or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 73). When people say "All Lives Matter" in response to the Black Lives Matter movement it has the effect to negate the systematic racism imposed on Black Americans. Figure 1 in Supplementary File 2

explains the categories of and relationships among racial microaggressions.

In addition, in an in-depth qualitative study, Sue et al. (2009) summarized eight microaggressive themes experienced by Asian Americans specifically: (a) alien in their own land, (b) ascription of intelligence, (c) exoticization of Asian women, (d) invalidation of interethnic differences, (e) denial of racial reality, (f) pathologizing cultural values/communication styles, (g) second class citizenship, and (h) invisibility. This study was the first of its kind that detailed the hitherto-neglected Asian American experience and had the strong implication that the types of microaggressions faced by Asian Americans might be different from other minority groups. Yet, it mainly focused on native-born Asian American and was therefore not general to all Asian groups, and especially not applicable to first-generation immigrants.

Furthermore, Mukkamala and Suyemoto (2018) captured two types of experiences unique to Asian American women: (a) type one was the racism against Asian Americans shared by Asian American women that included, for example, tokenist representation of all Asian Americans, mislabeling, and so forth; (b) type two included gendered racism, including assumptions and expectations for Asian American women to be "exoticized" and fetishized, invisible and silent. This finding is pivotal to the framework due to its robust intersectional analysis of microaggression experiences directed at Asian women based on gender, geographical location, professional identities, and age groups. However, similar to Sue's study, this article had restrictions on diversifying the study sample, which largely excluded older Asian immigrant women who are not born in America.

To address the gaps in the literature, this study developed an analytical framework using the taxonomy presented in Figure 1 (Supplementary File 2) as the basic structure and modifying it to incorporate different themes proposed in the other two studies—one is more pertinent to the unique experiences of Asian Americans, while the other focuses on Asian American women. The new framework illustrated (see Supplementary File 2, Figure 2) removes two original themes—"assumption of criminal status" and "myth of meritocracy"—that are left out in the study of Asian Americans specifically and are thus deem as irrelevant to this group. Secondly, under microinsult, "exoticization of Asian women" is added as a new theme and amalgamated with the other two themes derived from the Asian American women study, which are "cute and small" and "assumptions and expectations for Asian American women to be exoticized and fetishized." In addition, "pathologizing cultural values/communication styles" and "culture-based discrimination," alongside "ascription of intelligence" and "smart and inevitably successful," have merged respectively due to similar denotation. Thirdly, microinvalidation is expanded with an additional theme of "invisibility" which is supplemented by subtopics such as "submissive and passive." Like microinsult,

themes under microinvalidation that share close meanings are combined or utilized as sub-themes. The original theme of "color blindness" is replaced by "invalidation of interethnic differences" as the latter one is more relevant to Asian Americans. Lastly, four new items are added to supplement microassault, which are verbal harassment, physical assault, online harassment, and shunning respectively. These themes are informed by Stop AAPI Hate data and match the definition of microassault. In short, this framework aimed to better analyze and understand the interlocking forms of microaggressions faced by Chinese immigrant women due to their foreign-born, Chinese, and female identities. Figure 2 in Supplementary File 2 indicates the analytical framework used in this study through modification of the original taxonomy structure.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Method

This study drew on a qualitative method to (a) capture varied experiences of subtle racism directed at the target population before and during Covid and (b) explore different forms and levels of racial microaggressions based on socioeconomic background, age, and other characteristics. Between November 2021 to February 2022, 11 semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted with 12 Chinese immigrant women in Greater Boston, including two local NGO workers. One interview involved two participants, as the interviewees felt more comfortable sharing experiences in the presence of their peers. The rest were individual interviews. An interview protocol was developed and modified from the above-mentioned study conducted by Columbia University on racial microaggressions toward Asian American. A copy of the interview protocol can be found in Supplementary File 1 (Appendix A).

3.2. Sampling Strategies

Due to a lack of a sampling frame of the target population, a respondent-driven sampling was applied, as Chinese immigrant women often relied on networks to find work and accommodation. To build trust and relationships with the Chinese immigrant communities, the author volunteered at a Boston-based Chinese elderly center once a week for two months prior to the data collection phase. Additionally, a brief text message and a posted flyer were created in both simplified and traditional Chinese for recruitment purposes. The recruitment materials are enclosed in Supplementary File 1 (Appendix B).

3.3. Procedures

Ten out of a total of 12 interviews had to be carried out on Zoom due to the surge of Omicron cases in early 2022. Each interview lasted for at least 45 minutes and was conducted in Chinese-Cantonese, Mandarin, or/and English to minimize misinterpretation and ensure that this study covered individuals who had relatively lower English proficiency. No interpreters were present in the interviews since the author was native in both languages, which also averted confidentiality issues. Throughout the interview, the author took notes and used a recorder simultaneously to ensure accurate transcripts and thorough data analysis. A field note template is enclosed in Supplementary File 1 (Appendix D). Finally, the author revised the field note by using the recordings for precise quotes and missed details, and eventually generated the field note write-up (see Supplementary File 1, Appendix E) for further analysis.

4. Analysis

4.1. Participants

Between November 2021 to February 2022, a total of 12 individuals took part in the current study. All participants were Chinese immigrant women born outside the US and ranged in age from 23 to 80 years. Chinese immigrants referred to in this study are people of Chinese descent, and the study does not distinguish the nationality or country of origin of the participants. In terms of educational attainment, nine out of 12 participants had a college or graduate degree while two individuals had a secondary school diploma and one received primary education only. The majority of the sample identified as middle class or above with only one individual describing herself as lower class and residing in subsidized housing. Time spent in the US was varied: The sample included five recent immigrants (from five to eight years living in the US) and seven experienced immigrants (from 14 up to 58 years living in the US). All of them were native in Cantonese or Mandarin or/and a Chinese dialect, and only half of them spoke English fluently. Table 1 in Supplementary File 2 provides complete demographic information on the participants.

4.2. Analytical Approach

First, the author read the text line by line and color-coded the experiences into three major types of racial microaggressions according to the analytical framework illustrated in Figure 2 (Supplementary File 2): Microassault was coded in yellow, microinsult in blue, and microinvalidation in green. Second, each incident was further analyzed and coded with a theme of the respective microaggression such as "microassault—verbal harassment." During the coding process, two new themes under microassault emerged that were not previously identified when developing the analytical framework, i.e., staring and Covid-related incidents or other types of street harassments. As a result, these two themes were added to supplement microassault in

addition to the existing four themes i.e., verbal harassment, physical assault, shunning, and online harassment. Simultaneously, other initial codes relevant to the respondent's before-and-after perception of safety, changes in behaviors, emotional response, and coping mechanisms were identified through memoing in the field note write-up. The completed field note write-up must be kept confidential due to privacy and ethical reasons. Finally, the author compared the codes both before and after Covid and among different sub-groups to discover theoretical concepts and map the connections between the categories. Three tables were generated as a result: Tables 2 and 3 in Supplementary File 2 summarize the types of microaggressions documented before and after Covid respectively, and Table 4 in Supplementary File 2 contrasted discrimination experiences between older and younger Chinese women.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1. Findings Corresponding to RQ1

5.1.1. Main Finding 1: From Subtle Racism to More Overt Microaggressions During Covid

While the findings did not support a significant increase in anti-Asian discrimination, the types of racial microaggressions experienced by the informants changed from microinsult to a majority of microassault during Covid—which tends to be more overt and conscious with a deliberate intent to hurt the victim in comparison with the other two types of microaggressions (microinsult and microinvalidation), according to the definition proposed by Sue et al. (2007). Table 2 in the Supplementary File indicates that microinsult (19 of 41 total incidents) was the most common microaggression directed at the participants prior to Covid, followed by microassault and microinvalidation—each accounted for 11 pre-Covid incidents. On the contrary, 16 out of a total of 21 anti-Asian hate episodes reported during Covid were categorized as microassault. The antagonism toward the study sample was therefore found to be more explicit and intentional in the post-Covid era.

5.1.1.1. Narrative of Anti-Asian Discrimination Before Covid: Subtle and Confusing

The different levels and intensities of racial microaggressions before and after Covid could be illustrated through the informant accounts and narratives. Their names are pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. Anti-Asian prejudice was relatively subtle, indirect, and often confusing in the pre-Covid period. Two major themes categorized under microinsult were identified before Covid, namely (a) "pathologizing cultural values or communication styles" and (b) "invisibility." The former microaggression is defined as "the perception of cultural values and communication styles other than that of the White

majority as being less desirable or indicators of deficits" (Sue et al., 2007, pp. 76–77). This bigotry links to the deep-seated "yellow peril" trope that views Chinese as "uncivilized, barbaric others" who are the sources and spreaders of disease and have an appetite for dogs, cats, and other animals outside the norms of the Western worldview (Zhang, 2010). One Hong Kong woman's experience living in a predominately White neighborhood demonstrated a typical example of this biased discourse. Catherine was suspected of eating her neighbor's cat when she was living in Whitfield. She felt even more insulted when the neighbor looked through the trash outside her house to search for the missing cat:

> Not every Chinese person eats cat. If American parents are telling their kids that all Chinese eat cats, these children would grow up believing in harmful stereotypes of our communities.

Secondly, it is even more challenging to determine whether a microaggression with the theme of "invisibility" had occurred. This theme refers to a situation that involves "the experience of being overlooked without the conscious intention of the aggressor"—which is often harder to distinguish and address due to its ambiguity. Zhang (2010) pointed out that Asian Americans are the most likely to be neglected in the socialization process and rejected by peers due to their negative stereotype of lacking apt social and communication skills and having low levels of warmth. This perception about Asian Americans and immigrants partially explained a young Hong Kong informant's unpleasant social interactions during undergraduate studies. Cathy remarked that her American peers living in the same dormitory showed little interest in getting to know her but were eager to mingle with other non-Chinese students. She struggled to make sense of these encounters and discern the motives of the person:

> My roommate at the time was a half-Japanese American and half-French girl. Everyone would come to our room and ask her to hang out while nobody was giving me any attention. It was probably due to our appearances as well—she was a lot more attractive than me. But it was a different kind of treatment. They were still polite but never included me in their social circle.

5.1.1.2. Narrative of Anti-Asian Discrimination During Covid: More Overt and Aggressive

Microaggression targeting Chinese immigrant women has become more apparent and hostile during Covid, shifting from microinsult to overwhelmingly microassault, especially in the form of verbal harassment and Covid-related incident. Even though verbal and other street harassments were also common before Covid, several informants had never encountered explicit

racist comments directed at them on the street or public transportation until after Covid. For instance, a woman waiting in line asked one informant to move further away even though she was already standing six feet apart. The informant felt singled out due to her race as Chinese because the woman was standing close to other non-Asians in front of her.

This alarming rise in blatant forms of microaggression could stem from a growing tendency that prejudiced people will act upon their prejudices during Covid. Rather than reflecting an overall surge in anti-Asian hatred, a survey conducted in California suggested that Covid stigmatizations might cement xenophobia among individuals who already held biases toward Chinese and other Asian groups, and thus warrant their discriminatory actions acceptable (Daniels et al., 2021). The same informant recalled another troubling yet telling incident that demonstrated this trend. When Teenie moved away from a man on a train because he was not wearing a mask, the man started yelling at her: "You just don't like our people. You Asians never like us. If I have a gun, I will shoot you and we all bleed the same red blood." It is important to note that this incident occurred when Covid cases peaked in Boston and statewide mask mandate was strictly implemented on the train. Even though Teenie clarified that her avoidant action was only a preventive measure from getting Covid, the man did not stop the harassment and became more belligerent. She felt threatened and unsafe and eventually had to move to another cart:

> Everyone was sitting away from each other. Out of all these empty seats, he decided to sit right next to me. It's like he saw me and picked up on me as I was the only small Asian woman on the train.

5.1.1.3. Reasons Behind Increasing Microaggressions During Covid: "Yellow Peril," Mass Media, and Political Discourse

Similar to the stigmatization of Asians that occurred during the SARS pandemic, American society associated Covid with China and the Asian populations. Such narrative reignited the long-standing "yellow peril" stereotype mentioned above. Obsolete videos of Asian people consuming bats and mice resurfaced and went viral on social media in the early stages of the outbreak. Though those video footages were irrelevant to the origin of the virus and some did not even take place in China, it attracted massive scrolls of sinophobic comments and further dehumanized the Chinese communities and their culture (Li & Nicholson, 2021).

Furthermore, mass media and political leaders played a central role in exacerbating anti-Asian hostility. On one hand, mainstream liberal media such as *New York Times* and *Forbes* constantly propagated images of masked Asian figures in their news coverage of Covid, and therefore perpetuated the view of per-

ceiving Chinese or other Asians as the symbol of Covid (Zhang, 2021). Conservative media outlets such as *Fox News*, on the other hand, circulated popular conspiracy theories that Covid was designed as a bioweapon by the Chinese regime (Nerozzi, 2022). To conclude, this repeated visualization of Chinese bodies as "special vectors of disease transmission" (Wallis & Nerlich, 2005), coupled with the dissemination of conspiracy theories and false claims, served to reinforce existing prejudices against Chinese and the broader Asian communities (Li & Nicholson, 2021).

In addition to skewed media coverage, politicians have had an equally profound influence on "othering" Asians in the post-Covid period. President Donald Trump and other US officials deliberately referred to Covid as the "Chinese virus," "Kung Flu," "Wuhan virus," and other derogatory nicknames. An Anti-Defamation League study revealed that Trump's first tweet with the term "China virus," in March 2021, corroborated with a spike in anti-Asian languages on Twitter (Shalvey, 2021). Li and Nicholson (2021) noted that when the US authorities linked Covid with Chinese people, they conveyed the message that "Covid is a Chinese problem—the other's problem," explicitly permitting xenophobia against Chinese immigrants from the top down. In sum, the findings partially supported our WP1: While Chinese immigrant women in this sample did not report a substantial rise in anti-Asian hate incidents, they encountered more blatant racial microaggressions—mainly ==microassaults== in the form of verbal harassment and other Covid stigmatizations.

5.1.2. Main Findings 2: Intensified Fear for Physical Safety During Covid

Nine out of 12 participants expressed heightened concerns for their safety compared to the pre-Covid period, even though some of them have not encountered any Covid-related discrimination events. The informants attributed the newfound fear of their lives to widespread reports of anti-Asian assaults on social media and news coverage, as well as their personal accounts of overt racism. This shared reaction of fear is consistent with other studies on the impact of Covid stigmatization, confirming that these hate incidents have exacerbated the anxiety of Asians and Asian Americans during uncertain times (Tessler et al., 2020) and might even have deleterious effects on their mental health (Williams, 2018). One elderly participant remarked that she felt terrified after reading massive coverage of violent attacks against Asian senior citizens in California and was deeply disturbed by the Atlanta spa shooting:

> It wasn't that scary before Covid. Since Covid hit the country, I've had to pay attention to my surroundings and observe if people are staring at me almost every second and every minute when I am walking down the street.

Many of them are now self-conscious about "coughing while Asian" (Eichelberger, 2007), a reference to "driving while Black," and are worried about being targeted for attacks and direct discrimination. All of these reactions resembled that of SARS stigmatizations against Asian communities back in 2003. This apprehension also immobilized older informants from leaving home for everyday chores and using the subway in fear that they may encounter violence. In conclusion, almost all participants described how Covid stigma imposed an additional burden on feeling unsafe and subsequently changed their behaviors in public spaces. The strategies they adopted to cope with this heightened risk of safety ranged from being alert to their surroundings and avoid walking alone at night to staying home, particularly among elders. More examples of the informants' coping strategies are as follows:

> Teenie: I've become more cautious on the street since the Covid outbreak. I feel more guarded when interacting with people and try to distance myself from strangers to prevent similar incidents from happening again [referring to the above-mentioned train incident]. I definitely feel more insecure now.

> Catherine: I'm scared of coughing or sneezing in public as Americans blame Chinese for bringing the virus to the country. Like, one time after coughing at a dental clinic, I immediately apologized and explained to people around me that I didn't have Covid.

5.2. Findings Corresponding to RQ2

5.2.1. Main Finding 3: Different Interpretations of Discrimination Between Younger and Older Women

In-depth interviews showed that there was an abyss between younger and older Chinese informants concerning their microaggression experiences and perceptions of those encounters. Table 4 in Supplementary File 2 reflects that younger women reported more anti-Asian incidents than older women in both pre- and post-Covid periods. Additionally, younger informants also tended to identify and describe more indirect forms of microaggressions, while their older counterparts were more sensitive to blatant racism only.

5.2.1.1. Older Informants' Approach to Microaggressions: Avoid Troubles At All Costs

One possible explanation is that older women might be less aware of the negative climate that Chinese immigrants are confronted with in the context of Covid. Both NGO informants witnessed that most Chinese elderlies were oblivious to racial tension in the US and prejudices against them. When Cathy was using a common room at an elderly center with a Chinese resident, a White woman kept staring at them outside the room.

The Chinese resident then asked Cathy to ignore her and even apologized to the aggressor when they got out of the room. This case reflected a common response to microaggressions among older immigrants—to avoid troubles at all costs—a phrase repeatedly came up during the interviews. Rather than speaking out, the older generation usually opted for approaching inequity with "a positive and understanding mind" and "denying being racially discriminated against" (Zhou & Yang, 2022, p. 928). Three middle-aged immigrants, for example, described several incidents that could be interpreted as racially motivated. Yet, all three of them denied being discriminated against on the basis of their race or gender and seemed to normalize those behaviors. One of them argued that prejudice against minorities was almost inevitable in any country and sinophobia was understandable because of cultural differences and the uncivilized manner of some Chinese immigrants. Another older participant noted that many of her Asian peers were unwilling to speak up against workplace discrimination. When Tung and her Asian colleagues faced persistent wage gaps compared to other non-Asian employees holding the same position, they were reluctant to engage in a conversation with the supervisors and chose to accept this unfair treatment.

Moreover, older generation expressed more confusion when a suspicious event took place largely due to language barriers. An 80-year-old participant who spoke little English recalled an incident when a passenger yelled at her on a platform. She was perplexed about what happened until a Chinese bystander told her that she was verbally assaulted. All in all, it is plausible that older women were less likely to recognize a discrimination incident as a result of their lack of awareness of this topic, avoidant coping mechanisms, and language barriers.

5.2.1.2. Contrasting Worldview Shared By Younger Informants: Active Engagement

In contrast to the older generation, young participants might be more informed and vocal about racial justice given their university education in the US. In a similar study conducted in Germany, Steinmann (2019) revealed that higher-educated immigrants had a greater chance of reporting discrimination events compared to the lower-educated. Their interpretation is that higher-educated migrants usually acquired a better understanding of the destination country's language, absorbed more information from mainstream media, and were more engaged in local politics, which in turn made them more aware of unequal treatment. The same explanation could be applied to this group of highly educated young women who, too, were more exposed to American media and generally displayed greater interest and knowledge on this topic. Consequently, having a higher education, combined with possessing stronger awareness of racial issues, rendered the possibility to distinguish more subtle yet equally unacceptable forms of microaggressions.

On the positive side, a few young informants saw this heated debate on anti-Asian sentiment as an opportunity to educate themselves and turned their negative experiences into positive changes to advance diversity and inclusion. One Taiwanese postgraduate student showed unwavering support for the Black Lives Matter movement and was curious to learn more about systematic oppression against Asian and Black communities in the US. As a prospective urban planner, she strived for incorporating racial equity lens in zoning policies and housing programs to eliminate ongoing residential segregation.

5.2.2. Main Finding 4: Internalized Racism and Anti-Blackness Among Older Chinese Immigrants

One recurring theme that emerged in numerous interviews was internalized racism and anti-Black attitudes deeply ingrained among older informants. First of all, most middle-aged and elderly participants faulted the Black communities for a spate of assaults against Asian elders—a popular belief based solely on widely-circulated online news reports and social media posts. Those sensational images and videos perpetuated the idea that anti-Asian hate crimes were committed mostly by Black men (Lee & Huang, 2022), which has no factual basis. For example, an analysis conducted by the University of Maryland indicated that the majority of offenders in anti-Asian hate incidents were Caucasian (Wong, 2021). This inaccurate narrative, however, led to a common perception among older informants that Asians were targeted by Black people. One Hong Kong immigrant woman refrained from going to Dorchester, which is a predominately Black community, after Covid because she was scared of being assaulted there. Tung, another Mainland Chinese informant, shared the same concern and considered all Black Americans inherently violent and dangerous:

> I am particularly scared to see a Black person on the street now. I recently saw a young Black man smashing a window in my neighborhood. Ever since that incident happened, I've always brought a crutch with me for self-defense in case a Black person attacks me.

5.2.2.1. Reasons for Higher Levels of Anti-Blackness Among Older Chinese Immigrants

These anti-Black prejudices reflected an age-old racial division between Black and Asian immigrant communities, stemming from the model minority myth that serves as a legitimizing ideology to uphold White supremacy by pitting Asians and Blacks against each other and discounting the existence of structural racism (Kim, 1999). Building upon this theory, Yi and Todd (2021) found that Asians who internalized the model minority myth were more likely to hold anti-Black attitudes and discourage affirmative action. Asians who embraced the model minority myth also tended to minimize their own disad-

vantages and were more inclined to believe the world is fair and overlook institutional discrimination against minority groups. In this sample, a highly-educated and accomplished Chinese informant embodied this form of pervasive internalized racism. While Fang recognized the glass ceiling faced by herself and other Asians throughout her career at several international firms, she still adamantly opposed the use of racial quota for college admission and recruitment for senior positions. In her perspective, people should not see race and focus only on ability. As predicted in the mentioned theory, it is not surprising that Fang harbored anti-Black attitudes by assuming that most Black people are not friendly to East Asians and condemning the Black Lives Matter movement for disrupting law and order. She saw the growing call to defund the police as the primary reason of increased hate-fuelled crimes against Asians:

> Without the police presence, we are basically defenseless….I struggle to understand why they [Black Lives Matter activists] would demand the defunding of the police force. These Americans are too liberal, and it crosses our line!

Another possible explanation is that stigmatized communities might resist discourses that put them at risk of discrimination and instead redirect these same discourses toward other marginalized groups to prevent themselves from further prejudices (Eichelberger, 2007). These findings are backed by the fact that three older informants mentioned, who did not report any hate incidents in both pre- and post-Covid periods, exhibited signs of model minority myth and attempted to undermine a discrimination experience if it was coming from a White person. The same thought process, however, did not apply to a Black aggressor. Although Fang affirmed that Blacks bore malice toward Chinese immigrants, she was uncertain about the true intention of White Americans. She noted that even if White people held negative views of the Chinese communities, they would not be forward about it. Another participant described some overt racist episodes perpetrated by Whites, though she interpreted their discriminatory actions as more subtle compared to Black Americans.

5.2.2.2. Reasons for Lower Levels of anti-Blackness Among Younger Chinese Women

On the flip side, it is reasonable to associate lower levels of anti-Black sentiment among younger women with their active socialization in American schools and mainstream society (Tokeshi, 2021). All of the younger informants received higher education, even postgraduate degrees, in the US. It is plausible that given their exposure to liberal values and a more diverse social environment, not a single young informant showed a clear indicator of model minority myth and therefore may be less likely to possess anti-Black prejudice and more

inclined to engage in solidarity-building across racial lines (Liu, 2018). Nancy, one of the young informants, despite having to deal with anti-Asian animosity both at work and in her daily life, demonstrated the openness to rally for the Black communities and denounced biases coming from her own community:

> Actually Chinese people are pretty racist too, especially toward other racial minorities….If we want to build a community that is fair and free from discrimination, we should start [by] educating and deprogramming ourselves.

Nevertheless, many of the young participants felt betrayed, frustrated, and unrecognized as racially-motivated incidents aimed at Asians were put aside compared to discussing anti-black racism. Two young informants, both frontline workers serving Chinese elders, were disheartened by the US government's indifference to the growing hostility toward Asians. And they did not anticipate any follow-up actions taken to ensure the safety of Chinese elders:

> Nancy: It isn't fair. We stand in solidarity with BLM, yet anti-Asin hate crime is severely overlooked. My feeling is hurt. It just isn't fair!

> Cathy: We are actually doing work for Chinese senior citizens. It is ironic that nobody is reaching out to us and providing support and resources to keep our elderly safe.

6. Conclusion

This study sets out to record and understand varied experiences of racial microaggression targeting foreign-born, Chinese immigrant women before and during Covid, and how age and socioeconomic background might impact their perception of racially-motivated incidents and coping strategies. In particular, one of the major findings shows that Chinese immigrant women in this sample encountered more blatant hate incidents in the post-Covid time. In addition to the historical scapegoating of Chinese and Asian communities during a public health crisis, inaccurate media coverage and politicians blaming China as the source of Covid might cause an increase in anti-Asian discrimination during Covid. These same anti-Chinese discourses could also incite fear among Chinese immigrants: this partially explains why almost all informants, regardless of their demographic background or personal experiences of stigmatization, expressed heightened concern over their physical safety during Covid. Moreover, the intersectional analysis of microaggression experiences reveals contrasting views between different age groups: Young women, compared to their older counterparts, were more inclined to report microaggression episodes and distinguish more subtle forms of discrimination. The oblivious reaction shared by

older informants might stem from the lack of understanding of racial tension in the US and the prejudice against them, as well as their more reserved approach to dealing with any kind of conflicts, microaggressions included, by avoiding trouble "at all costs." Younger participants, however, were generally more exposed to the topic of racial justice through socialization and their higher educational attainment. They, therefore, held a more nuanced interpretation of discrimination and lower levels of anti-Black biases. Similarly, internalized racism and anti-Blackness were found more widespread among older informants. This observation reflected different coping mechanisms employed by these two age groups: That is, older participants tend to redirect racial hatred toward Black communities as a strategy to protect themselves from further stigmatization.

Nevertheless, several limitations in this study serve as cautions for future research. First, this study consisted of only 12 participants living in the Greater Boston area and was limited to participants with a relatively high level of education and socioeconomic status, which likely means that experiences of microaggression that intersect with social class were not well represented. The findings, therefore, can in no way be generalized to Chinese immigrant women across the US and other Asian ethnic groups. Second, the more vulnerable subgroups of Chinese immigrant women such as undocumented migrants were unlikely to have access to health care during the Covid pandemic and that might have discouraged them from engaging in any in-person community events. It could be the explanation as to why this study did not capture the experiences of undocumented immigrant women who might be the most impacted by Covid. Despite these drawbacks, this exploratory study provides anecdotal evidence and indication for future research with a larger sample size and a wider range of socioeconomic status, especially for undocumented immigrants and other marginalized groups. A diverse account of microaggression experiences and multifaceted analysis of the impact of anti-Asian prejudice could inform meaningful intervention programs and policies that best serve the Chinese and broader AAPI communities.

grandmother whose resilience has continued to inspire me every single day; my strong-minded mother who has taught me to work hard for the things that I aspire to achieve; and my sweet little sister who is not only my best friend and biggest champion, but also brings me warmth and joy when I am far away from home.

Conflict of Interests

The author is employed at the non-profit organization Chinese for Affirmative Action, which is the fiscal sponsor of Stop AAPI Hate. Research data and reports from Stop AAPI Hate are mentioned in this article as the basis for formulating research questions.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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