Discomfort in LGBT Community and Psychological Wellbeing for LGBT Asian Americans: The Moderating Role of Racial/Ethnic Identity Importance

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Abstract

While past research has examined the deleterious effects of racism on Asian Americans, fewer studies have investigated lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Asian Americans' unique experiences of oppression and unbelonging within the broader LGBT community. Guided by intersectionality and minority stress theoretical frameworks, the present study examined the effect of discomfort due to one's race/ethnicity within the LBGT community on psychological wellbeing in a national sample of 480 LGBT Asian Americans from the Social Justice Sexuality Project. The moderating role of how important one considered their race/ethnicity to their identity was also examined. Regression analyses revealed that greater discomfort due to one's race/ethnicity within the LGBT community was associated with reduced psychological wellbeing for LGBT Asian Americans who viewed their racial/ethnic identity as moderately or highly important, whereas this association was not significant for LGBT Asian Americans who considered their racial/ethnic identity as less important. These findings highlight the necessity of examining the role of racial/ethnic discomfort in relation to LGBT Asian Americans' psychological wellbeing, as well as the extent to which LGBT Asian Americans consider their race/ethnicity as important.

Keywords

LGBT Asian Americans; racial/ethnic discomfort; racial/ethnic identity importance

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LGBT[1] Asian Americans face unique stressors as a result of their membership in multiple marginalized groups in American society. For instance, LGBT Asian Americans report reduced psychological wellbeing and greater anxiety and depression compared to heterosexual, white populations (Santos & VanDaalen, 2016). More specifically, LGBT Asian Americans have a higher prevalence of depressive disorders and suicide attempts than heterosexual Asian Americans (Cochran, Mays, Alegria, Ortega & Takeuchi, 2007). LGBT

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[1]We use the acronym "LGBT" throughout this manuscript based on the sampling and labeling methods of the present dataset, which specifically targeted "LGBT people of color." We recognize that LGBTQ+ or SGM may act as more inclusive acronyms and recommend utilizing those acronyms in future research.

Asian Americans also experience higher rates of racial-ethnic stigma in LGBT spaces, and subsequently higher rates of stress than white LGBT individuals (McConnell, Janulis, Phillips, Truong & Birkett, 2018). LGBT Asian Americans experience both racism due to their marginalized racial status, as well as heterosexism due to their marginalized sexual and gender identity status. In addition to the stressors stemming from either of these minority statuses considered separately, LGBT Asian Americans encounter unique experiences and stressors borne from experiencing these statuses concurrently. While a burgeoning research literature has begun to examine the experiences of LGBT Asian Americans, more research that takes into account both of their marginalized statuses is necessary.

The harmful effects of racism and homonegativity on mental and physical health are well documented (Han et al, 2015; Meyer, 2003; Puckett, Levitt, Horne & Hayes-Skelton, 2015). Minority stress theory suggests that individuals with minority identities are exposed more often to adverse experiences, and these adverse experiences often contribute to negative health outcomes given the salience of one's social identities and discrimination that targets them (Meyer, 2003). For example, increased discrimination has been shown to be associated with multiple negative mental health outcomes for Asian Americans, including depressive symptoms and anxiety, as well as negative physical health outcomes, such as cardiovascular and respiratory conditions (Nadimpalli & Hutchinson, 2012). Similar results have been found for LGBT people, for whom levels of minority stressors are positively associated with rates of depression, suicide and substance use (Mongelli et al, 2019).

Intersectional frameworks provide opportunities for greater insight on the experiences of LGBT Asian Americans. Intersectionality is a framework which examines the impact of interlocking systems of oppression on groups marginalized on various dimensions of identity (Crenshaw, 1989). While initially developed to examine interactions between race and gender specifically, the framework has since been extended for use along dimensions including class and sexuality (Ching, Lee, Chen, So & Williams, 2018). Intersectional frameworks are capable of considering the experiences and repercussions of holding both Asian American and LGBT identities simultaneously. In the context of psychological research, an intersectional framework has been used to examine how the effects of experiencing multiple minority identities in conjunction may affect mental health (Meyer, 2010). For example, recent research has examined the psychological impact of gendered racism on women of color (Lewis, Williams, Peppers & Gadson, 2017), as well as the effect of sexual racism on men of color (Bhambhani, Flynn, Kellum & Wilson, 2019), providing greater insight into the experiences of people of color with more than one marginalized identity.

Minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) provides one potential framework for interpreting the experiences of LGBT Asian Americans. Originally developed for use with sexual minority populations, the minority stress framework asserts that individuals' minority statuses increase exposure to distal stressors (e.g. discrimination, prejudice) and proximal stressors (e.g. shame, fear of prejudice, identity concealment), leading to experiences of stress and long-term health implications. Previous studies have found support for the minority stress framework with LGBT Asian Americans (for a review, see Choi & Israel, 2016). This research is crucial given that LGBT Asian Americans are exposed to unique

adverse experiences which are not shared by their heterosexual or White counterparts (Nadal et al., 2015) and are disproportionately impacted by minority stressors, even compared to other queer people of color (Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011). Furthermore, LGBT Asian Americans can be considered a doubly invisible group whose views and experiences are rarely documented and frequently erased (Choi & Israel, 2016), in which the intersectional mechanisms that underlie their oppression have not been fully explored, especially from a quantitative perspective.

The minority stress model, when integrated with an intersectionality framework, helps explain the origins and the effects of these adverse experiences. One intersectional stressor experienced by many LGBT Asian Americans is a sense of discomfort or disconnection in single-axis minority groups. For instance, LGBT Asian Americans may experience discomfort due to heterosexism perpetrated in Asian American communities, or due to racism in LGBT communities (Dang & Hu, 2005; Operario, Han, & Choi, 2008). Heterosexism from Asian American communities and race-related rejection in dating from the LGBT community are predictors of lower psychological wellbeing for LGBT Asian Americans (Kim & Epstein, 2018; Szymanski & Sung, 2010; Sandil, Robinson, Brewster, Wong & Geiger, 2015). Additionally, themes of obedience and sexual repression in traditional Asian families can encourage LGBT Asian Americans to conceal their sexual orientation to their families (Han, Proctor & Choi, 2014). Given these previous findings about the unique stressors experienced by LGBT Asian Americans, one important avenue to further examine includes whether LGBT Asian Americans experience psychological distress as a result of discomfort surrounding their race within the context of LGBT communities (henceforth referred to as racial/ethnic discomfort).

Previous studies suggest that LGBT Asian Americans encounter and are affected by stressors in a manner unique to other LGBT people of color. For example, Asian American men who have sex with men report more experiences of racism in the gay community than other men of color who have sex with men, but experience fewer instances of racism within the general community (Han et al, 2015). These Asian American men's experiences of racism are associated with multiple negative health outcomes, including higher rates of anxiety and unprotected sex (Choi, Paul, Ayala, Boylan & Gregorich, 2013; Han et al, 2015). Studies of LGBT Asian American women have identified additional health risks including substance use, unhealthy body weight, child abuse and intimate partner violence (Choi & Israel, 2016). LGBT Asian American women report that LGBT networks are unreliable sources of support for relationship issues, heightening racial tensions (Kanuha, 2013). For example, a common tactic for abusive partners of LGBT Asian American women was threatening to "out" them, threatening Asian cultural values of preserving family reputation and interpersonal relationships. While these studies highlight the effects of racism on LGBT Asian Americans, no studies have yet examined the specific impact of racial/ethnic discomfort.

There are multiple reasons why LGBT Asian Americans may feel uncomfortable in the LGBT community. Researchers have examined how the construction of the gay community as a white group serves to render invisible the experiences of LGBT persons of color (Ro, Ayala, Paul and Choi, 2013). The lack of visibility for Asian Americans in the LGBT

community creates conditions under which stereotypes and discrimination spread easily. The mainstream gay community feels little obligation to understand the experiences of Asian Americans, resulting in frequent misportrayal (Han, 2008). In many LGBT spaces, Asian American individuals are seen as undesirable partners in comparison to white individuals, and are often dismissed as potential partners due to their ethnicity (Han, 2008; Ro, Ayala, Paul and Choi, 2013). In addition, cultural stereotypes surrounding Asian Americans create the pervasive belief in LGBT communities that Asian Americans are quiet and submissive partners. This stereotype contributes to the fetishization of Asian Americans, and further marginalizes and devalues Asian Americans who do not meet the submissiveness stereotype (Drummond, 2005). These factors contribute to a loss of agency in partner selection for LGBT Asian Americans, which has been connected to negative health outcomes such as higher rates of sexual risky behaviors (Han, 2008; Han et al, 2015), as well as a more general sense of discomfort in the LGBT community overall.

While studies in the past have examined the impact of experiences of racism in the LGBT community on psychological wellbeing for LGBT Asian Americans, few have examined how this relationship may be affected by how important these individuals view their racial/ethnic identity to be. Within the broader research literature, ethnic/racial identity is defined both as an individual's feelings towards their membership in a racial/ethnic group, and as a sense of overall importance that ethnic/racial identity (ERI) membership has to one's identity (Yip, 2017). The development of an individual's ERI is linked to their experiences of discrimination, but findings on the effects of this relationship are mixed. Some adolescents with ethnic/racial minority identities will see discrimination from the dominant group as an impetus to identify with their minority group more strongly, while others will downplay their ethnic/racial identity in attempt to fit in with the majority culture (Brittian et al, 2015; Cheryan & Monin, 2005). Given the scarcity of studies that examine ethnic/racial identity within Asian Americans with marginalized sexual identities, it remains unclear whether commitment to ethnic/racial identity minimizes or exacerbates the risk to psychological wellbeing posed by racial/ethnic discomfort for LGBT Asian Americans.

Furthermore, the effects of the relationship between ERI and wellbeing are mixed. Past findings have indicated that ERI can both protect against discrimination's effects or exacerbate them (Yip, 2017). In studies with a significant portion of Asian Americans in their samples, ERI commitment was found to be a stronger protective factor, but private regard for ERI was found to have a more exacerbating effect (Yip, 2017). In studies of Asian Americans specifically, ERI has been found to reduce the effects of experiencing racial discrimination (specifically, foreigner objectification) on psychological distress, although it did not moderate the negative association between foreigner objectification and self-rated wellbeing (Wu, Pituc, Kim & Lee, 2020). Our study intends to paint a clearer picture of the potential moderating effect of racial/ethnic identity importance within the understudied population of LGBT Asian Americans.

Current Study

To account for these gaps in the literature, our study examined the following two research questions for LGBT Asian Americans: 1) to what extent is racial/ethnic

discomfort associated with psychological wellbeing and 2) to what extent is racial/ethnic identity importance a moderator of the association between racial/ethnic discomfort and psychological wellbeing. Based on past findings indicating a negative effect of discomfort in ethnic/racial communities on wellbeing, we hypothesized that increased racial/ethnic discomfort would be associated with lower psychological wellbeing. Given that there are mixed findings in regard to the effects of ethnic/racial identity on the discrimination-distress link, and that no studies have examined this interaction in populations of LGBT Asian Americans, we did not approach our second research question with a firm hypothesis regarding the potential moderating effect of racial/ethnic identity importance.

Method

Participants

The present study analyzed publicly available data from the Social Justice Sexuality Project (SJSP) to answer the above research questions (Battle, Pastrana, & Daniels, 2010). Data collection for the SJSP was conducted from January to December 2010 in all 50 states, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico, via a self-administered 150-item survey that focused on the lived experiences of LGBT people of color. Data were collected through a variety of offline and online nonprobability sampling methods, including community partnerships with LGBT groups and organizations, snowball sampling, political and cultural events, and the internet. The SJSP dataset was selected for this study given that it is one of the largest national surveys that examines the experiences of LGBT people of color, with over 5,000 participants and 4,953 completed surveys. Furthermore, the survey examines experiences related to intersectionality, such as LGBT people of color's experiences in the LGBT community related to race.

From the overall pool of participants, the current study's sample only included Asian American LGBT individuals. This resulted in a sample of 480 participants. Demographic information including age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nativity status, educational attainment, and household income are presented in Table 1.

Measures

Racial/Ethnic Discomfort.—Racial/ethnic discomfort was measured by a single SJSP item, ("How often have you felt uncomfortable in your LGBT community because of your race or ethnicity?"), and participants responded on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*always*).

Psychological wellbeing.—Psychological wellbeing was assessed using four items from the positive affect subscale of the Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977). Each question began with the prompt "Over the past week, how often have you felt…" and was concluded by the following: "hopeful about the future," "happy," "that you were just as good as other people," and "that you enjoyed life." Participants responded to each item on a Likert scale of 1 (*never*) to 4 (*most of the time*). Responses to each item were summed and then divided by the total number of items, such that a higher score indicated greater psychological wellbeing. The CES-D, from which the items in this study originated, is the most commonly used self-report psychological

wellbeing scale for Asian Americans and has shown strong psychometric properties in Asian American samples with diverse ethnic subgroups (Chau, Bowie, & Juon, 2018; Kim et al., 2015). Cronbach's alpha for this sample was .88.

Racial/ethnic identity importance.—Participants' racial/ethnic identity importance was assessed by a single SJSP item, ("Do you feel that your racial or ethnic status is an important part of your identity?"), and participants responded on a scale from 1 (*Not important at all*) to 6 (*Extremely important*).

Demographic variables.—Of the various demographic variables assessed, gender, nativity, and educational attainment were analyzed as potential confounders. Gender was measured with female as the reference category (44% of the sample), male (47% of the sample), and gender variant (4% of the sample). For analyses that involved gender, we only included women and men and excluded gender variant individuals given that they constituted a small percentage of the overall sample. Nativity was assessed by asking participants if they were born outside of the United States. Educational attainment was assessed via a single SJSP item, "What is the highest level of schooling that you have completed?" Participants responded on a scale of 1 (*Less than high school*) to 7 (*Graduate/professional degree*). Income was also assessed via a single SJSP item, "Including all income sources, what do you estimate was your total household income last year?" Participants responded on a scale of 1 (*under $8,500*) to 12 (*$100,000 or over*).

Data Analytic Plan

We tested our two research questions with the following analyses. To first examine non-directional associations between our main variables of interest as well as demographic variables, we conducted bivariate correlations. Then, to investigate how racial/ethnic discomfort is directly associated with psychological wellbeing, as well as the potential moderating effect of racial/ethnic identity importance, we conducted a hierarchical moderated regression analysis, in line with recommended practices (Hayes, 2013). In Step 1 we entered our control variables. In Step 2, we entered our racial/ethnic discomfort variable, as well as our racial/ethnic identity importance variable, to test for the main effect of racial discomfort in LGBT community on psychological wellbeing. In Step 3, we entered the interaction term between racial/ethnic discomfort and racial/ethnic identity importance, to examine if the effect of racial/ethnic discomfort on psychological wellbeing differed between participants with varying levels of racial/ethnic identity importance. Any significant moderation effect was then further analyzed through a simple moderation analysis with bootstrapping using the PROCESS Macro for SPSS, to explore associations between our main independent variable and dependent variable at different levels of our moderating variable.

Results

Data Screening and Preparation

Excluding demographic variables, the range of missing items within our variables of interest ranged from 1.5% (CES-D; racial/ethnic discomfort item) to 2.3% (CES-D items 1 and 2).

No item had more than 2.3% missing data and 457 participants (95.21%) were missing no data. Little's Missing Completely at Random analysis (Little, 1988) was conducted and an insignificant chi-square statistic $\chi^2(31) = 33.13$, $p = .364$ was found, suggesting that data were missing at random. Following recommended practices (Parent, 2013), given the small amount of missing data and that the missing data were missing at random, we used pairwise deletion to account for missing data, such that the available data was used for analyses and missing data points were excluded only for analyses that directly involved those missing data points.

Correlational Analyses

Correlations and descriptive statistics among the study's main variables of interest are reported in Table 2. As expected, racial/ethnic discomfort was significantly and negatively correlated with psychological wellbeing. Interestingly, educational attainment and income were both significantly and positively correlated with psychological wellbeing. No other variables were significantly correlated with psychological wellbeing.

Regression Analysis

To test our two research questions, we conducted a regression analysis that explored (a) the association between racial/ethnic discomfort and psychological wellbeing and (b) if the importance of one's racial/ethnic identity moderated the association between racial/ethnic discomfort and psychological wellbeing. Before executing this regression analysis, we analyzed the data for univariate normality and outliers. The range of values for our main study variables were within the acceptable range for both skewness (−.81 to .48) and kurtosis (−1.03 to −.47) (Gravetter and Wallnau, 2014). No cases had a Cook's distance greater than 1, so we concluded that our analyses were not overtly influenced by multivariate outliers (Cohen et al., 2003). Additionally, a test of multicollinearity showed that all tolerance coefficients were > .20 and all variance inflation factors were < 10, revealing that there was no significant multicollinearity between our main variables of interest.

We then conducted a multiple hierarchical regression analysis to examine our primary research questions. In Step 1 of the regression analysis, participants' educational attainment and income were both entered as covariates, given that these demographic variables were significantly correlated with the outcome variable, psychological wellbeing. In Step 2, mean-centered racial/ethnic discomfort and racial/ethnic identity importance variables were both entered. These variables were mean-centered to increase interpretability of results (Aiken & West, 1991). In Step 3, the interaction term between racial/ethnic discomfort and racial/ethnic identity importance was entered.

At Step 1, the variables explained 3% of the variance, a significant amount ($F(2, 436) = 6.91$, $p < .01$). It was found that participants' income was significantly positively associated with participants' wellbeing ($b = .14$, $p < .01$), whereas participants' educational attainment was not significantly associated ($b = .07$, $p = .15$). Adding the variables at Step 2 increased the amount of variance explained by 6%, a significant increment ($F(4, 434) = 11.97$, $p < .01$). Within this step, racial/ethnic discomfort was significantly negatively associated with participants' wellbeing ($b = −.27$, $p < .001$), whereas racial/ethnic identity importance

was not significantly associated with psychological wellbeing ($b = .05$, $p = .30$). Finally, adding the interaction term at Step 3 increased the amount of variance explained by 2%, a significant amount ($F(5, 433) = 10.89$, $p < .01$). The interaction between racial/ethnic discomfort and racial/ethnic identity importance yielded a significant p value ($b = -.12$, $p < .05$). All results in this model are shown in Table 3.

To further understand this statistically significant interaction between racial/ethnic discomfort and racial/ethnic identity importance, we conducted a simple moderation analysis (PROCESS Model 1) in line with the procedures recommended by Hayes (2013). A bootstrapping procedure was used to generate a sample size of 10,000 to assess the moderation effect. The results of a 95 percent confidence interval (CI) revealed that the conditional effect of racial/ethnic discomfort was significantly different from zero for participants who scored both at the mean on racial/ethnic identity importance (95 percent $CI = [-.16, -.08]$) and for those who scored one standard deviation above the mean on racial/ethnic identity importance (95 percent $CI = [-.23, -.12]$). However, this conditional effect was not significantly different from zero for participants who scored one standard deviation below the mean on racial/ethnic identity importance (95 percent $CI = [-.13, .01]$). Thus, experiencing racial/ethnic discomfort was significantly associated with decreased psychological wellbeing for LGBT Asian Americans, but only for LGBT Asian Americans who considered their racial/ethnic identity as moderately or very important to themselves. Figure 1 depicts the conditional effect of racial/ethnic discomfort on psychological wellbeing at low, moderate, and high levels of racial/ethnic identity importance.

Discussion

To our knowledge, the present study is the first to examine the association between LGBT Asian Americans' experience of discomfort in the LGBT community due to their race/ethnicity and psychological wellbeing, as well as the first to examine how the importance of one's racial/ethnic identity may affect this association. In line with our hypothesis for our first research question, increased racial/ethnic discomfort was significantly associated with decreased psychological wellbeing. Furthermore, this association was moderated by the importance of one's racial/ethnic identity. LGBT Asian Americans whose racial/ethnic identity was of medium or high importance experienced a significant association between racial/ethnic discomfort and decreased psychological wellbeing, whereas LGBT Asian Americans whose racial/ethnic identity was of low importance experienced a nonsignificant association between racial/ethnic discomfort and psychological wellbeing.

Our main finding related to the association between racial/ethnic discomfort and psychological wellbeing builds upon past studies that have examined the experience of Asian Americans in the LGBT community. Asian American men who have sex with men report facing higher rates of racism in the queer community compared to other men of color who have sex with men, and these experiences of racism increase risk for negative health outcomes such as anxiety and unprotected sexual intercourse (Choi et al., 2013; Han et al., 2015). Furthermore, past qualitative studies have uncovered that LGBT Asian Americans are often made to feel invisible, lesser than, or fetishized by the mainstream white LGBT community (Han, 2008; Nadal & Corpus, 2013). The findings of our study

help to substantiate the distress reported by participants in these qualitative studies, such that the discomfort that LGBT Asian Americans feel within the mainstream LGBT community is indeed significantly associated with reduced psychological wellbeing. This association reinforces how minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) can be applied to the experiences of racial/ethnic minority groups within another broad minority culture (i.e., the LGBT community).

The moderating effect of ethnic/racial identity importance perhaps speaks to how valuing one's ethnic/racial identity may make the effects of racial/ethnic discomfort more salient and harmful. Past studies have revealed mixed findings related to the role of racial/ethnic identity in relation to discrimination, with some studies showing a protective effect and others showing an exacerbating effect (Yip, 2017). Previous research suggests that those in the process of exploring their racial/ethnic identity, as opposed to those who are more committed to their ethnic identity, may be more vulnerable to the effects of discrimination (Torres & Ong, 2010), which may help explain the results of the present study. Participants who rated their racial/ethnic identity as moderately or highly important may be in the process of negotiating what their racial/ethnic identity means to them in the context of a predominantly white LGBT community, thus decreasing their psychological wellbeing.

Furthermore, participants who view their racial/ethnic identity as important may be more apt to recognize racist or racialized experiences within the LGBT community, predisposing them to decreased psychological wellbeing. Discrimination and alienation within the LGBT community based on race may be experienced more strongly by these participants, such that because they view their racial/ethnic identity as important to them, attacks or exclusion based on those identities may feel additionally damaging. These participants may also recognize the white cultural dominance that manifests in places that purport inclusivity (e.g., LGBT spaces) yet still perpetuate exclusion of people of color (Jaspal, 2017), in this case Asian Americans specifically.

The lack of an association between racial/ethnic discomfort and psychological wellbeing for those with low racial/ethnic identity importance may speak to how LGBT Asian Americans feel pressured to assimilate to white hegemonic norms within the LGBT community to preserve a sense of wellbeing. For example, past qualitative studies have found that gay Asian men may try to reduce the extent to which they are perceived as Asian and assimilate to whiteness (e.g., distancing from other gay Asian men), in an attempt to cope with racism and the preferential treatment of white gay men (Han, 2008; Han, Proctor, & Choi, 2014). LGBT women of color have also reported a similar phenomenon of whiteness being privileged in LGBT spaces, such that white LGBT women receive more social support and feel less alienated within the LGBT community (Alimahomed, 2010; Logie & Rwigema, 2014). Taken together, these studies suggest that perhaps LGBT Asian Americans who do not view their racial/identity as important are able to rationalize or minimize the discomfort they feel in the mainstream LGBT community through assimilation, decreasing this discomfort's effect on psychological wellbeing. It may also be important for future studies to examine how racial/ethnic identity importance may be beneficial for LGBT Asian Americans in environments that affirm both their LGBT and their Asian American identity. The results of our moderation analyses and past literature about LGBT Asian Americans

(Choi & Israel, 2016) suggest that though racial/ethnic identity importance may exacerbate racism that occurs within the broad LGBT community, furthering one's connection to racial/ethnic identity may help LGBT Asian Americans resist racism and develop increased self-affirmation in contexts that are not predominantly white.

It is further possible that participants who do not view their racial/ethnic identity as important may possess internalized racism. Asian Americans with internalized racism may accept and agree with negative stereotypes and racist notions of Asian Americans' inferiority to other racial groups, especially white people (Castillo et al., 2020; Choi et al., 2017). Perhaps participants who do not view their racial/ethnic identity as important are protected from the distress engendered by racialized discomfort or discrimination, given that they may already agree with racist beliefs about themselves. Indeed, past studies of predominantly heterosexual Asian American women as well as sexual minority women of color show that increased critical consciousness about feminism and gender is correlated with increased psychological distress and emotion dysregulation, even if this increased consciousness buffers the effects of sexism and racism on health outcomes overall (DeBlaere & Bertsch, 2013; Le, Kuo, & Yamasaki, 2020). Perhaps LGBT Asian Americans who do not view their race or ethnicity as important lack this level of critical consciousness about race or have increased internalized racism, though this assumption is speculative given that we did not measure race consciousness nor internalized racism specifically.

Though this study is novel in that it examines the effects of racial/ethnic discomfort on LGBT Asian Americans' psychological wellbeing, it possesses limitations that future research should account for. First, we measured racial/ethnic discomfort and ethnic/racial identity importance using one item each, which may reduce measurement reliability, constrain the amount of variance explained, and decrease sensitivity to nuances that might be identified with more robust measures. For example, other ethnic identity measures could assess different forms of ethnic identity (e.g., commitment, exploration) (Sladek et al., 2020) and how they may potentially protect from experiences of racial discomfort. Researchers can also use more comprehensive measures to assess experiences of racism and its consequences, such as measures that capture intersectional forms of racism like gendered racism and sexual racism (Bhambhani et al., 2019; Liu, Wong, Maffini, Goodrich Mitts, & Iwamoto, 2018), as well as measures that highlight how Asian Americans can internalize racism (Choi et al., 2017; David & Okazaki, 2006).

Additional limitations include that our study was cross-sectional, nullifying any potential claims to causality. Future studies should incorporate different methods, such as longitudinal designs, that may allow researchers to examine how racial/ethnic discomfort may affect LGBT Asian Americans over time. Furthermore, the data for this study was collected about a decade ago in 2010, thus these results may not reflect the current experiences of LGBT Asian Americans post-marriage equality. For example, future studies could assess how LGBT Asian Americans are affected by heightened xenophobia both generally and as a result of the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic (Bajaj, Ghaffar-Kucher, & Desai, 2016; Gover, Harper, & Langton, 2020). Finally, our study did not examine within-group differences specific to Asian ethnic subgroups, sexual minority subgroups, or gender identity subgroups, given that we lacked adequate sample size to do so. Future studies should try

to examine the experiences of diverse LGBT Asian Americans, such as how Southeast and South Asian Americans may face increased discomfort in the LGBT community due to colorism and possessing darker skin than east Asian Americans (Hunter, 2013). Future studies may also seek to investigate the specific, unique experiences of bisexual Asian Americans within the LGBT community as well as transgender Asian Americans, given these sexual minority and gender minority subgroups are often additionally marginalized within research about the broader LGBT community (Barnett et al., 2019; Ghabrial & Ross, 2018).

Despite these limitations, our study extends the literature by examining LGBT Asian Americans' psychological wellbeing in relation to experiences of discomfort surrounding their race/ethnicity within the LGBT community. Practitioners working with this population in a mental health setting may want to pay keen attention to how LGBT Asian Americans feel about their race in the context of the LGBT community as this may impact their mental health. Practitioners may also seek to develop strategies such as mindfulness and connecting with relevant social supports with LGBT Asian Americans to help them cope with their racial/ethnic discomfort. However, the burden of preventing or coping with racial discomfort should not fall on LGBT Asian Americans themselves, but rather, those who design LGBT spaces or non-Asian Americans who inhabit LGBT spaces. Racial/ethnic discomfort may not originate from LGBT Asian Americans themselves, rather these negative feelings could be caused by racism in the LGBT community. LGBT spaces should seek to educate other members of the LGBT community to prevent anti-Asian racism. More specifically, white LGBT advocates and allies should challenge the glorification and maintenance of whiteness in these spaces, to help build coalitions across racial/ethnic communities (Hinkson, 2019). The results of this study highlight the necessity of examining LGBT Asian Americans' specific experiences within the broader LGBT community, as well as how these racialized experiences indeed impact their psychological wellbeing.

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Public Significance Statement:

This study uses a national sample of LGBT Asian Americans to show that experiencing discomfort due to one's race/ethnicity within the LGBT community is associated with reduced psychological wellbeing. The effect of racial/ethnic discomfort for LGBT Asian Americans may also depend on how important they consider their race/ethnicity.
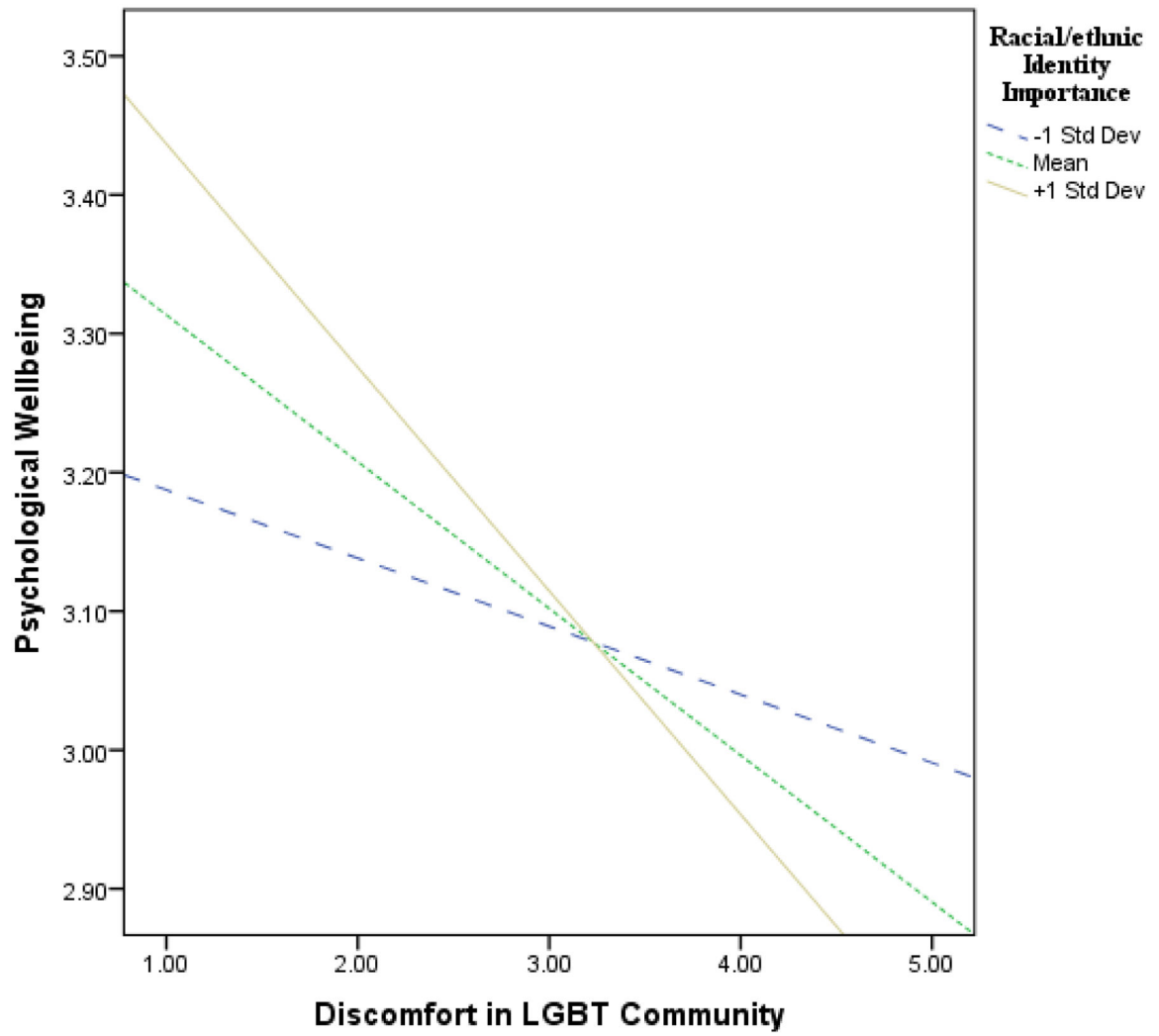
Figure 1.
The moderating effect of racial/ethnic identity importance on the relationship between racial discomfort in LGBT community and psychological wellbeing

Table 1

Sample demographics

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Age		
18–24	159	33.1
25–49	259	58.1
50 or older	31	6.5
Gender		
Cisgender man	225	46.9
Cisgender woman	209	43.5
Transgender man	5	1
Transgender woman	12	2.5
Other	21	4.4
Multiple genders	1	.2
Sexual Orientation		
Gay	194	40.4
Lesbian	112	23.3
Heterosexual	1	.6
Queer	60	12.5
Bisexual	58	12.1
Two spirit	8	1.7
Other	45	9.4
Ethnicity [*]		
Chinese	45	15.6
Filipino	30	10.2
Indian	29	10
Japanese	22	7.7
Nativity		
Born inside the U.S.	332	69.2
Born outside the U.S.	148	30.8
Education		
Less than high school	9	1.9
High school diploma/GED	60	12.5
Some college	127	26.5
Associates degree	45	9.4
Bachelor's degree	112	23.3
Some graduate school	29	6.0
Graduate/Professional degree	86	17.9
Household income		
Under $15,000	109	22.7
$15,000–$29,999	62	12.3
$30,000–$49,999	99	20.6

Variable	Frequency	Percent
$50,000–$74,999	87	18.1
$75,000–$99,999	40	8.3
$100,000 and above	63	13.1

*
Note. 290 out of 480 participants reported their ethnicity. Given the large number ethnic identifications in this sample, we opted to provide the four most common ethnicities for clarity of presentation.

Table 2

Correlation matrix of psychological well-being, nativity, racial/ethnic identity importance, and racial/ethnic discomfort

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Psychological wellbeing	---						
2. Gender	−.04	---					
3. Nativity	.01	.21*	---				
4. Educational attainment	.11*	.12*	.21**	---			
5. Income	.18**	.03	.07	.33**	---		
6. Racial/ethnic identity importance	.02	.01	.05	.20**	.01	---	
7. Racial/ethnic discomfort	−.24**	.16**	.07	.16**	−.03	.18**	---
Mean	3.13	1.52	.29	4.33	7.62	4.42	2.72
Standard Deviation	.74	.50	.45	1.73	3.66	1.61	1.62
Range	1–4	1–2	1–2	1–7	1–12	1–6	1–6

Note.

*
$p < .05$,

**
$p < .01$.

Table 3

Multiple regression with psychological wellbeing as the outcome variable and racial/ethnic discomfort and ethnic/racial identity importance as predictor variables

Variable	B	T	P	R	R²	R²
Step 1				.18	.03	.03**
Educational attainment	.07	1.46	.15			
Income	.14	2.76	<.01			
Step 2				.32	.09	.06**
Racial/ethnic discomfort	−.27	−5.75	<.001			
Racial/ethnic identity importance	.05	1.05	.30			
Step 3				.34	.12	.03**
DiscomfortXImportance	−.12	−2.46	.01			

Note.

*
p<.05,

**
p <.01.