

“You’re Asian; You’re Supposed to Be Smart”: Adolescents’ Experiences With the Model Minority Stereotype and Longitudinal Links With Identity

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Asian Americans are frequently perceived as a model minority, which encompasses a multifaceted and stereotyped portrayal of hard work and success. This study examines developmental trends in adolescents’ experiences with the Model Minority Stereotype (MMS) during adolescence, the valence of feelings about the MMS, and the associations between experiences, feelings, and ethnic identity. Survey data were collected annually from 159 Asian American adolescents throughout high school. Results revealed that MMS experiences increased over time, but feelings remained consistent in valence. Experiences and feelings predicted ethnic identity both concurrently and longitudinally, but ethnic identity predicted experiences only concurrently and did not predict the valence of feelings. Discussion focuses on how adolescents’ attitudes toward a complex ethnic stereotype may evolve as they establish—or fail to establish—a connection to their cultural background.

Keywords: adolescence, ethnic identity, model minority, racial/ethnic stereotyping

In America, adolescence is a time for both fitting in and standing out. In their quest for personal identity and integration (Erikson, 1968), teens may be particularly interested in identifying social categories and determining where they and their peers fit among such frameworks (Fuligni, Kiang, Witkow, & Baldelomar, 2008). With such social pressures, adolescence constitutes a veritable breeding ground for ethnic stereotyping (Aronson & Good, 2002). Although all ethnic groups are associated with a diverse set of characteristics, Asian Americans are unique in that their group stereotypes tend to involve many features that could be interpreted as positive. Individuals from Asian backgrounds are portrayed as hardworking, intelligent, and successful (Suzuki, 2002)—an image of a model minority that first surfaced with early Chinese immigration in the 1850s (Hurr & Kim, 1989) and one that persists today.

The well-known, “positive” Model Minority Stereotype (MMS) may seem benign or less worthy of urgent scrutiny compared with the negative characterizations encompassed by ethnic discrimination. However, simply because a stereotype involves conceivably favorable characteristics does not guarantee its association with favorable outcomes or that it will be received as a compliment by the stereotyped community (Ho, Driscoll, & Loosbrock, 1998;

Hurr & Kim, 1989; Smith & Johnson, 2006). In fact, given the paradoxical nature of the stereotype, it is no surprise that research on the MMS has produced complex results. For example, being exposed to the MMS has been shown to produce both beneficial and detrimental effects for youth in academic outcomes (Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2000; Shih, Ambady, Richeson, Fujita, & Gray, 2002; Toupin & Son, 1991), psychological well-being (Lee, 1996; Shih, 1989), and social adjustment (Brown, Herman, Hamm, & Heck, 2008; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Wing, 2007). Despite growing empirical interest in the MMS, such mixed past findings suggest that the stereotype and its sequelae are not yet fully understood, and that more work is necessary.

Our goal for the current study was to systematically explore adolescents’ experiences of the MMS, both in terms of changes in youths’ perceived prevalence of the stereotype as well as changes in their feelings about the experiences. Focusing on how youth actually feel about the stereotype is a novel approach that can illuminate the diverse ways in which adolescents might react to the MMS and how these attitudes might evolve over time. Given the interplay between ethnic stereotyping and ethnic self-views, we also examined how the MMS is associated with adolescents’ ethnic identification concurrently and over time. Our aim in exploring these links was to contribute to a fuller understanding of how the MMS takes shape and interacts with other culturally relevant constructs that may be unique in the lives of Asian youth.

What Is the MMS?

Although early Asian immigrants were initially praised for their strong work ethic in the gold mining and railroad industries in the 1800s, it was not until the Civil Rights era that sociologist William Peterson (1966) coined the term “model minority” to describe the

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image of Asian immigrants as those who had prevailed despite racial prejudice and won success in the U.S. based on personal determination. Although the stereotype has certainly evolved over the last few decades, the present-day version has retained the same essence as the original, portraying Asian Americans as “super-bright, highly motivated overachievers” (Suzuki, 2002, p. 26).

Recent empirical work has corroborated the existence of the modern MMS. Interview, adjective listing, and factor analysis studies of college students revealed that Asian Americans are perceived by their peers as being intelligent, soft-spoken, reserved, hardworking, pleasant, friendly, artistic, and high in academic motivation and performance (Cabrera, 2014; Ho & Jackson, 2001; Niemann, Jennings, Rozelle, Baxter, & Sullivan, 1994; Wong, Lai, Nagasawa, & Lin, 1998). Similarly, teachers from a range of grade levels have been found to view their Asian American students in terms of positive ethnic stereotypes, characterizing them as industrious, intelligent, compliant, and quiet (Bannai & Cohen, 1985; Chang & Demyan, 2007). Taken together, different social groups surrounding Asian Americans appear to hold stereotypic beliefs about them along several dimensions, including intellect, work ethic, and social demeanor.

How Do Asian Youth Perceive the MMS?

The MMS is also pervasively perceived by Asian Americans themselves. Past work has shown that Asian American college students feel stereotyped in ways consistent with the MMS (Oyserman & Sakamoto, 1997; Wong, Owen, Tran, Collins, & Higgins, 2012). In such studies, characteristics have tended to fall into two major domains: academic (e.g., smart, overachieving, likely to pursue prestigious careers) and interpersonal (e.g., humble, quiet, stoic, interpersonally deficient). Students appeared able to easily identify the MMS as a stable set of attributes often imposed upon them by others. Likewise, Thompson and Kiang (2010) found that these experiences are nearly universal, with 99.4% of sampled Asian American youth having had at least some encounter with the MMS. The implications of such encounters are widespread, with past studies showing that Asian American youth often experience pressure to conform to expectations of academic success and motivation (particularly in math and science), to pursue a prestigious or lucrative career, or to be emotionally reserved relative to other racial or ethnic groups (Kim & Lee, 2014; Shen, Wang, & Swanson, 2011; Wong et al., 1998; Yoo, Burrola, & Steger, 2010).

Given that the MMS has such a powerful presence in adolescence and young adulthood, it seems important to know how awareness of the stereotype might initially develop. Theoretical models of “stereotype susceptibility” suggest that youth first become vulnerable to stereotyping during early adolescence (Aronson & Good, 2002). Research also suggests that Asian American youth perceive increasing discrimination (i.e., negative stereotyping) from teachers and consistently high peer discrimination over the high school years (Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006). However, research examining how the unique experiences of the MMS might change over time is scarce (Thompson & Kiang, 2010). Thus, the first goal of the present study was to track reports of model minority stereotyping longitudinally as they emerge during the adolescent period. Considering normative variation in the prevalence of the MMS will allow for greater knowledge on the salience of such per-

ceptions during different points in adolescents’ lives which, in turn, could have key implications for knowing when intervention or prevention efforts to minimize the impact of the MMS would be most effective. Given Greene et al.’s (2006) finding that discrimination increases over time, we hypothesized that MMS experiences would also increase across the high school years.

How Do Asian Youth Feel About the MMS?

When presented with the statement, “I think you’re smart because you’re Asian,” an adolescent might hear anything from a compliment to a back-handed compliment to an insult to an unmanageable expectation. Most existing studies have focused on negative reactions to positive stereotyping. For example, in an experimental paradigm, Black college students rated a White speaker expressing a positive racial stereotype (i.e., Black people are athletic) as less likable, more prejudiced, and less knowledgeable about diversity than a control White speaker (Czopp, 2008). Such a finding suggests that, even if a stereotype has “positive” intentions, it may be still unwelcome in the eyes of the target.

Targets of model minority stereotyping have evidenced varied reactions. In Wong et al.’s work (2011), social characteristics, in particular, tended to be perceived as more negative than favorable. Asian American high school students have reported that they feel the MMS is restrictive, inaccurate, and damaging to social relationships (Lee, 1996; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004), certainly challenging the notion of the MMS as a wholly positive stereotype. In more in-depth, qualitative research by Oyserman and Sakamoto (1997), 51.7% of a college student sample reported feeling negatively about being labeled as a “model minority” because the MMS forcibly tied them to a social identity, because it was simply not accurate, and because all stereotypes are undesirable regardless of their connotation. However, another 15.9% reported feeling mixed about the model minority image. These students felt that, if they had to be stereotyped, at least Asian Americans’ stereotypes were “good” and emphasized proud cultural roots. Perhaps surprisingly, a final group (26.3%) expressed wholly positive views of the MMS. They regarded the model minority label as a reputation to be appreciated given that it highlighted the accomplishments of their group and their ancestors, that it showed respect for Asian Americans, and that it guaranteed positive perceptions of the self by others. Percentages that reflect similar views were found in the first wave of the present study when open-ended responses of Asian American youths’ feelings were coded for valence (Thompson & Kiang, 2010).

Thus, Asian American youth appear to respond to the MMS in a variety of ways for diverse personal reasons. However, it is also possible that there are developmental trends in terms of adolescents’ overall views. As mentioned, perceptions of ethnic stereotyping seem to increase over the adolescent period (Greene et al., 2006). Furthermore, adolescents become increasingly aware of the broader social context of stereotyping, realizing that a group’s image might lead to differential opportunities or treatment (Aronson & Good, 2002). It is conceivable that greater experiences of stereotyping and/or gains in cognitive sophistication may accordingly lead to changing feelings about an experience like the MMS. Feelings become more negative over time, perhaps, as adolescents’ experiences cumulate and become more difficult to handle or more

frustrating to face. Alternatively, feelings could shift toward more positivity with greater maturation, awareness, or development of strategies to deal with these experiences. Because no study to date has measured or directly investigated how adolescents' feelings about the MMS might develop or evolve, the second goal of the present research was to provide an initial picture of how such feelings might change over time. Although our analyses were largely exploratory since there is little precedent in the literature regarding such possible developmental trends, examining how feelings might change over time has the potential to contribute to our overall understanding of the different ways that adolescents cope with being stereotyped, and of the meaning that such experiences have in their lives.

How Does Ethnic Identity Relate to the MMS?

Specific conceptualizations have varied, but most researchers agree that ethnic identity is a developmental and multidimensional construct that refers broadly to one's sense of self as a member of an ethnic group (Phinney, 2003). Different conceptions have identified various subcomponents to a person's ethnic identity. For instance, according to Phinney (1992), affirmation and belonging refers to feeling proud and connected to one's ethnic group; exploration reflects devoting time to understanding the meaning of one's ethnic membership; and ethnic behaviors refer to socializing with one's group and upholding cultural traditions (Phinney, 1992). From a social identity perspective, dimensions of ethnic centrality (i.e., how important ethnic group is to an individual) and private regard (i.e., how positively an individual feels about his or her ethnic group) have been also examined (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). Across multiple operational dimensions, developmental models and empirical evidence tend to indicate generally linear increases in ethnic identity from childhood through adulthood (Phinney, 1990; Yip, Seaton, & Sellers, 2006). Youth presumably progress from a state of little thought of themselves as ethnocultural beings to increasing awareness and exploration, culminating in a state of integrated, achieved, or positive cultural identity (Phinney, 2003).

Ethnic identity thus appears highly developmentally relevant, particularly given its links with various aspects of adolescents' behavioral, cognitive, and emotional outcomes, which can include their experiences with, perceptions of, and reactions to stereotyping and discrimination (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Indeed, there is theoretical and empirical support for intricate links between experiences of stereotyping or discrimination and ethnic identity. Social identity theory suggests that one must self-identify with a group to be affected by the consequences for that group (Tajfel, 1982). Reactive identity models similarly suggest that group membership becomes more salient in the context of perceived group threat (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Empirical work has backed these perspectives in that Asian, Latino, and African American young adults with high ethnic identity report more racism and discrimination than those with low ethnic identity (Operario & Fiske, 2001; Oyserman & Sakamoto, 1997; Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, & Zimmerman, 2003). In support of multiculturalism, Dion and Phan (2009) also present strong conceptual and empirical arguments that negative intergroup relations, such as discrimination, are associated with greater ethnic self-identification.

Although it is relatively clear that ethnic identity and ethnic stereotyping experiences are intrinsically linked (Armenta, 2010; Thompson & Kiang, 2010), the precise directionality of these links are not yet conclusive. It is possible that identity increases the salience of perceiving group threat, and it is also possible that more experiences with stereotyping might affect the course of ethnic identity development. For instance, stage models of identity, including those developed specifically for Asian Americans, often pinpoint social encounters with stereotypes, discrimination, or full-blown racism as catalysts for ethnic identity exploration and formation (Kim, 2001). Yet, no empirical study of which we are aware has examined links between ethnic identity and the MMS longitudinally. This is a substantial oversight given the dual importance of both identity formation and stereotyping experiences during this crucial developmental period (Aronson & Good, 2002; Fuligni et al., 2008). Identifying the possible interrelatedness of these constructs could illuminate the role of perceiving others' portrayals of the self in the processes of self-formation and vice versa. Another goal of the current study, therefore, was to investigate how experiences with the MMS are linked over time with ethnic identity, as defined by Phinney's (1992) conceptions of affirmation/belonging and exploration/search. Given competing directional hypotheses, we did not make specific predictions about causality due to a lack of longitudinal research precedent in this area.

An additional area of interest was the relationship between ethnic identity and the valence of feelings about the MMS. Although Thompson and Kiang (2010) assessed feelings about the MMS, they did not include an examination of the association between such feelings and ethnic identity. The study by Oyserman and Sakamoto (1997) did include measures of both feelings about the MMS and ethnic identity and found that ethnic identity had differential relations to MMS feelings depending on how ethnic identity was defined. For example, Asian American college students with high "connectedness" (similar to Phinney's [1992] concept of "ethnic behaviors") viewed the MMS more positively. However, students with high "private self-esteem" for their group or high "importance" of group membership (similar to Phinney's concepts of affirmation and exploration, respectively) viewed the MMS more negatively. Although this preliminary work has shown that ethnic identity and feelings about the MMS may be related, more research is required to replicate these results, to explore other facets of ethnic identity, and to measure links between feelings and ethnic identity over time. We target these unexplored areas and, based on Oyserman and Sakamoto's work, expected that higher levels of ethnic affirmation/belonging and exploration would be associated with more negative views about the MMS. Recognizing how feelings about the stereotype and ethnic identification might be potentially linked could provide meaningful information on how to best intervene in helping youth cope and react to these portrayals, perhaps buttressing ethnic identity in the process and using it as a source of resilience in the face of group threat.

The Current Study

As illustrated, the existing literature presents an interesting, but underdeveloped, picture of how youth perceive, feel about, and are impacted by the model minority image. Having identified inconsistencies and gaps in the field, the current paper targets the

following aims: (a) tracking experiences of the MMS over time across the high school years, (b) investigating the valence of and developmental trends in Asian Americans' feelings about the MMS, and (c) exploring how these two variables relate to ethnic identity development over time. We predicted that experiences of stereotyping would increase over time and that changes in ethnic identity would be intricately tied to such experiences. Given the lack of previous research suggesting firm a priori hypotheses, our examination of the directionality of associations between the MMS and identity and normative changes in adolescents' feelings about the MMS were largely exploratory. Based on preliminary work by Oyserman and Sakamoto (1997), we expected that ethnic identity would be linked with more negative feelings about the MMS. In examining all of these associations, we considered and controlled for key demographic variables (e.g., gender, generational status) given prior research pointing to variation in normative patterns of ethnic identity development based on generation and gender (Dion & Dion, 2001; Phinney, 1990). In summary, by addressing these empirical questions, we can begin to gain a sense of how a pervasive ethnic stereotype is understood and experienced by youth at a crucial time in their identity development. The experiences that occur during the adolescent period of identity formation (Erikson, 1968) can have potentially enduring influences on youth outcomes and health well into adulthood.

Method

Participants

Data were collected from 178 Asian American adolescents (at T1) residing in the Southeastern U.S. For the current paper, we included all participants who had at least two waves of data, which resulted in a final sample of 159. When first contacted for the study, students were either freshmen (48.3%) or sophomores. The average age of the freshman cohort was 14.42 years ($SD = .64$), and the average age of the sophomore cohort was 15.56 ($SD = .74$) at the initial wave of recruitment. They completed yearly surveys for four consecutive years (average time elapsed between waves was approximately 12 months). Retention rates at Wave 2 were 91% of the original sample, 87% at Wave 3, and 67% of the original sample at Wave 4.

The MMS has a strong academic component (Lee, 1996; Suzuki, 2002), and its salience likely depends on the diversity of the social context. Both peer diversity and academic or professional demands likely changed as our students transitioned to college or the workforce. Thus, to keep our observations and interpretations relatively uniform, we chose to focus exclusively on the high school period and dropped Wave 4 data from the tenth grade cohort given that they were no longer in high school at the time. Those who started in the ninth grade, who were in the study for four possible waves, ultimately completed 3.75 waves ($SD = .46$) on average. Those who started in the tenth grade, and thus could only have up to three waves, participated in an average of 2.84 waves ($SD = .37$).

The sample was 58% female and 75% second-generation (U.S.-born). At initial recruitment, participants were identified as Asian American according to each school's definition, and the resulting sample represented several self-reported Asian heritage groups. Approximately 26% of the sample reported a panethnic back-

ground (e.g., Asian, Asian American), and 28% were Hmong. Remaining responses were grouped broadly by region: 13% Southeast Asian (e.g., Laotian, Cambodian), 12% South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani), 11% East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Korean), 3% Pacific Islander or Filipino, and 6% multiethnic or did not fall into one of these categories. In preliminary analyses, we examined whether the groups that were large enough for comparisons differed in average levels of key study variables, and few differences were found. One exception was ethnic exploration, in which South Asian adolescents reported significantly higher levels ($M = 4.21$, $SD = .51$) compared with those who reported a panethnic Asian background ($M = 3.41$, $SD = .76$), $F(4, 136) = 4.74$, $p < .001$.

Participants were drawn from eight public high schools, varying in socioeconomic status and ethnic diversity. Substantial portions of the sample came from suburban and rural regions, which is important because ethnic and immigrant research is rarely conducted outside of large urban centers with ethnically diverse schools. Thus, the present study brought data to bear on the experiences of Asian American youth in schools where they were a "true" minority (i.e., 4% to 6% of the overall school population). Adolescents' families represented a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. Consistent with prior work (e.g., Kiang & Fuligni, 2009), an index of socioeconomic status (SES) was created after coding, standardizing, and averaging adolescents' reports of their mother's and father's education and employment. In preliminary analyses, this proxy to assess SES was not correlated with any MMS or identity variables across all waves of the study (r range = $-.05$ – $.15$, ns).

Procedure

Students were invited to participate in the study as part of a larger project on Asian American adolescents' purpose and meaning in life. Students were initially recruited via a brief in-school meeting, where they were informed of the purpose and nature of the study. Students returned signed parental consent and adolescent assent forms to participate. Participants were given a packet of questionnaires, which they completed at school in areas such as a media center or empty cafeteria. The measures took 30 to 60 min to complete. Data were collected in a similar fashion for waves 2 and 3. In Wave 4, because the older cohort of participants were no longer in school, questionnaire packets were mailed to all participants, who completed and returned them through the postal mail using prepaid envelopes. Students received \$25 as compensation upon return of all study materials at Wave 1 (which also included a daily diary component not reported on here), \$15 at Waves 2 and 3, and \$20 at Wave 4.

Measures

MMS experiences. This study utilized the model minority stereotyping measure originally created in Thompson and Kiang (2010), which was modeled after a measure by Greene and colleagues (2006). The MMS measure assessed the extent to which Asian American participants perceived that other people assumed that they possessed certain characteristics based on their ethnicity. Students were given nine descriptions commonly associated with Asian Americans and were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *all the time*) how often people assumed

that they possessed each characteristic. The characteristics included the following: intelligent, quiet/reserved, ambitious, courteous/polite, family oriented, industrious/hardworking, talented in classical music, likely to pursue a prestigious career, and good at math/science. Higher scores on this measure indicate higher perception of stereotyping overall. For ease of interpretation, responses were recoded to reflect a 0 to 4 scale. Coefficient alphas across waves ranged from .76 to .84.

Feelings about the MMS. Feelings about the MMS were assessed via an open-ended question following up on MMS experiences: "Please briefly describe the situation: what happened, who was involved, how did you feel?" Written responses were coded into categories of feelings—negative, positive, mixed, neutral, and no mention. Further information on the descriptions of these categories as well as illustrative examples can be found in Table 1. For the current analyses, responses were arranged into three groups in a linear fashion. The group of negative responders was coded "–1"; the mixed, neutral, and no mention responders were merged into one group coded as "0;" and the group of positive responders was coded as "1."

Ethnic identity. The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992) was used to measure two primary components of ethnic identity: affirmation/belonging and exploration. Affirmation/belonging reflects feeling a sense of pride and affiliation with one's ethnic group (e.g., "I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group") and consists of five items. Exploration, consisting of seven items, reflects devoting active time and thought to understanding the meaning of and learning more about one's ethnic group membership (e.g., "I have spent

time trying to find out more about my own ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs"). Each scale's items were originally rated on a 5-point, Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*), but were recoded to a scale of 0 to 4 for ease of interpretation. Coefficient alphas ranged from .75 to .83 for affirmation/belonging, and .89 to .92 for exploration.

Demographic information. A brief questionnaire inquired about participants' backgrounds, including gender and generational status. Past research has shown that experiences of Asian American stereotypes, sensitivity to racial cues, and ethnic identity may differ according to these key demographic variables (Greene et al., 2006; Wong et al., 2012; Yip & Fuligni, 2002; Yoo et al., 2010); thus, they were included as controls in all analyses.

Results

Bivariate Correlations

Table 2 lists the range of bivariate associations among key study variables (i.e., MMS experiences, valence, affirmation/belonging, exploration) across grades. As shown, more experiences with the MMS were positively and significantly correlated with higher ethnic identity, and both identity subscales were positively and significantly correlated with other.

Developmental Trends in Asian Americans' Experiences With the MMS

The first goal of this study was to examine change over time in adolescents' experiences of the MMS. Hierarchical Linear Mod-

Table 1
Coding of Open-Ended Responses Regarding Feelings About the MMS

Category	Description	Example	% codable responses by grade			
			9	10	11	12
Negative	Adolescents felt sad, angry, frustrated, annoyed, offended, made fun of.	"Whenever I get a good grade, everyone says it is because I am Asian. It makes me feel judged and people don't really know me for who I am as an individual." "It is frustrating when people assume I am intelligent as soon as they see me, rather than observing my potential and work."	15.6	16.1	16.8	12.5
Positive	Feelings of happiness, pride, confidence, hard work, good reputation.	"Everyone will say that I'm smart, a geek, or very quiet just because I'm Asian. It happens often, but it's a positive thought." "I take it as a compliment. I'm proud of who I am."	13.3	7.5	7.4	8.3
Mixed	Expressed mix of both negative and positive feelings.	"People assume I play violin, am smart, and that I like rice. Even my friends at school make fun of it. It's in good spirits, but gets annoying." "I kind of felt happy and sad that I was being judged."	2.2	5.4	5.3	8.3
Neutral	Adolescents did not care, did not bother him/her, or took it as a joke.	"In class this guy was like, 'just ask one of the Asians, they're smart.' It wasn't really offending, it just shows [what] others think about Asians." "I don't mind them most of the time."	6.7	10.8	11.6	16.7
No mention	Student described the situation but did not mention how they felt.	"Everybody thinks that Asians are super smart." "During a class game review, the teacher splitted up all the Hmong students, because they said Asians were too smart."	62.2	60.2	58.9	54.2

Note. All examples are direct quotations.

Table 2
Correlations Between Study Variables

Variable	MMS	Valence	Affirm./Belong	Exploration
MMS	—			
Valence	-.14-.15	—		
Affirm./Belong	.18*-.28***	-.07-.15	—	
Exploration	.22**-.35***	-.10-.18	.56***-.68***	—

Note. Values indicate the range of correlations between 9th and 12th grade. *N*s = 45–156.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

eling (HLM; Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992) was used given the nested structure of the data, with time points nested within participants. The specific estimated statistical model was as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{MMS}_{ij} &= b_{0j} + b_{1j}(\text{Year}) + e_{ij} & (1) \\ b_{0j} &= c_{00} + c_{01}(\text{Gender}) + c_{02}(\text{Generation}) + u_{0j} & (2) \\ b_{1j} &= c_{10} + c_{11}(\text{Gender}) + c_{12}(\text{Generation}) + u_{1j} & (3) \end{aligned}$$

As shown in Equation 1, adolescents' experiences with the MMS in a particular year (i) for a particular individual (j) was modeled as a function of the individual's average experience with the stereotype (b_{0j}) and the year of the study (b_{1j}). Year was coded such that ninth grade = 0, tenth grade = 1, eleventh grade = 2, and twelfth grade = 3. Equations 2 and 3 show how both the average levels of stereotyping experiences and the effect of study year were modeled as a function of gender and generational status. Gender was coded as females = 0 and males = 1. Generation was coded as foreign-born (first-generation) = 0 and US-born (second-generation) = 1. These Level 2 variables were grand-mean centered such that the models can be interpreted as average effects, rather than for a specific group. It should be noted that this and all additional models throughout the study were also rerun controlling for school at Level 3. However, this did not change any of the substantive results, so only original 2-level model results will be reported.

As shown in Table 3, adolescents reported increasing experiences of the model minority stereotype over the high school years. No gender or generational differences were found in either average levels of MMS experiences or their normative linear change over time.

Developmental Trends in the Valence of Adolescents' Feelings About the MMS

The second goal of the study was to examine change over time in the valence of adolescents' feelings about the MMS. Between 52.9% and 61.3% of participants provided valence information each year of the study. Given that a substantial proportion of participants did not report feelings about the MMS, an HLM model was first tested to examine whether experiences with the MMS, gender, or generation were associated with providing valence information. This model revised and expanded Equation 1, such that whether or not a participant provided valence information was the outcome variable, and MMS experiences and time were predictor variables. Equations 2 and 3 remained the same and a fourth equation was added allowing us to test gender and generation as moderators of all Level 1 associations. Given the dichotomous

nature of the dependent variable, an additional model was tested using a Bernoulli distribution. The substantive results remained the same. For ease of presentation and interpretation, results from the model without the Bernoulli distribution are presented. Neither gender nor generation was associated with whether or not valence information was provided. There was also no association between time and whether or not valence was reported ($b = -.02$, *ns*). However, in years in which participants reported higher levels of MMS, they were more likely to provide valence information ($b = .20$, $p < .001$).

To test for change over time in valence itself, Equations 1 through 3 were again revised, with valence replacing experiences with the MMS as the outcome variable. As described earlier, valence was linearly coded such that -1 = negative feelings, 0 = mixed, neutral, or no mention of feelings, and 1 = positive feelings.

As shown in Table 3, there was no linear change in the valence of adolescents' feelings about the model minority stereotype over time and this did not vary according to gender or generation.

Associations Between the MMS and Ethnic Identity

MMS experiences and Ethnic Identity. The final goal of the study was to explore concurrent and time-lagged associations between MMS experiences and feelings about the MMS, and ethnic identity. First, analyses were conducted in which ethnic identity (belonging and exploration in separate models) was predicted by concurrent MMS experiences and time. As before, gender and generation were included as predictors on the intercept only. The specific estimated statistical model was as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Ethnic Identity}_{ij} &= b_{0j} + b_{1j}(\text{MMS}) + b_{2j}(\text{Year}) + e_{ij} & (4) \\ b_{0j} &= c_{00} + c_{01}(\text{Gender}) + c_{02}(\text{Generation}) + u_{0j} & (5) \\ b_{1j} &= c_{10} + u_{1j} & (6) \\ b_{2j} &= c_{20} + u_{2j} & (7) \end{aligned}$$

As shown in Equation 4, ethnic identity (belonging or exploration) in a particular year (i) for a particular individual (j) was modeled as a function of the individual's average ethnic identity (b_{0j}), their experiences with the MMS that year (b_{1j}), and the year of the study (b_{2j}). MMS was uncentered and year was again coded such that

Table 3
Hierarchical Linear Models Predicting Change Over Time in Perceptions of the Model Minority Stereotype and Valence of Feelings About the Model Minority Stereotype

Model	Perceptions of MMS b (SE)	Valence of feelings b (SE)
Intercept	2.69 (.06)***	-.07 (.06)
Gender	.04 (.13)	.00 (.11)
Generation	-.02 (.18)	.03 (.02)
Year	.11 (.02)***	.00 (.03)
Gender	-.04 (.05)	.05 (.06)
Generation	.01 (.06)	-.01 (.08)

Note. Gender was coded as females = 0 and males = 1, and generation was coded as foreign-born = 0 and U.S.-born = 1. Year was uncentered with the intercept at ninth grade and both level two variables were grand-mean centered such that estimates were for the mean of the sample.
*** $p < .001$.

Table 4

Hierarchical Linear Models Predicting Concurrent Within-Person Associations Between MMS and Valence and Ethnic Identity

Model	Exploration predicted by MMS <i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	Belonging predicted by MMS <i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	Exploration predicted by valence <i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	Belonging predicted by valence <i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)
Intercept	2.26 (.11)***	2.88 (.15)***	2.78 (.08)***	3.25 (.09)***
Gender	-.10 (.11)	-.09 (.13)	-.12 (.13)	-.13 (.15)
Generation	-.10 (.12)	.18 (.14)	-.11 (.15)	.03 (.18)
MMS/Valence	.16 (.04)***	.13 (.05)**	.18 (.07)**	.17 (.07)*
Year	-.05 (.02) [†]	-.05 (.03) [†]	-.06 (.03)	-.02 (.04)

Note. Gender was coded as females = 0 and males = 1, and generation was coded as foreign-born = 0 and U.S.-born = 1. MMS, valence, and year were all uncentered, with the year intercept at ninth grade. Both level two variables were grand-mean centered such that estimates were for the mean of the sample.

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

ninth grade = 0, tenth grade = 1, eleventh grade = 2, and twelfth grade = 3. Equation 5 shows how average level of ethnic identity was modeled as a function of gender and generational status, both of which were coded and centered as before.

As shown in Table 4, MMS experiences were significantly concurrently associated with both exploration and belonging. The same results were found when the models were reversed, with MMS as the outcome variable and either exploration ($b = .18, p < .001$) or belonging ($b = .13, p < .001$) as the predictor.

To test the directionality of this association, we modified Equation 5 by predicting ethnic identity by MMS from the previous year, rather than the same time, controlling for ethnic identity from the previous year. Because we had more Level 1 parameters than time points in the models, some of the Level 2 variances needed to be constrained to zero. A two-step process was used to select the most parsimonious models (see Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992). First, all Level 2 variance parameters were fixed to equal zero except that for the baseline. Additional freed parameters were kept only when a likelihood ratio test indicated a significantly improved overall model fit (i.e., $p < .05$; see also Nishina & Juvonen, 2005). Using this method, no addition parameters were freed in the model predicting exploration, while the variance for previous year belonging was freed for the model predicting belonging. As shown in Table 5, previous year MMS significantly predicted both exploration and belonging, controlling for the previous year's level of either exploration or belonging.

Next, we reversed the predictor and outcome variables and tested whether MMS was predicted by ethnic identity from the previous year, controlling for previous year MMS. For both mod-

els, variance for MMS from the previous year was freed. As shown in Table 6, exploration from the previous year marginally predicted MMS, while belonging from the previous year was not associated with MMS.

Feelings about the MMS and ethnic identity. All of the tests examining links between MMS experiences and ethnic identity were next repeated, substituting valence of feelings about the MMS for MMS experiences. As shown in Table 4, valence was significantly concurrently associated with both exploration and belonging. However, unlike the analyses with experiences, when the models were reversed with exploration or belonging predicting valence, neither ethnic identity variable was significant (exploration: $b = .05, ns$; belonging: $b = .05, ns$).

We next tested these models longitudinally. In all cases, no additional parameters were freed beyond baseline variance. As shown in Table 5, previous year valence significantly negatively predicted both exploration and belonging, controlling for the previous year's exploration or belonging. However, as shown in Table 6, neither previous year exploration nor previous year belonging significantly predicted valence, controlling for previous year valence.

Independent effects of MMS experiences and feelings on ethnic identity. Finally, we examined whether valence, in addition to MMS experiences, predicts ethnic identity in the same year. Ethnic identity was tested as the outcome variable in these analyses given the results of the time-lagged analyses above suggesting a stronger effect from MMS and valence to ethnic identity, rather than the reverse. We initially tested models in which an interaction term between valence and MMS was included. However, this was

Table 5

Hierarchical Linear Models Predicting Time-Lagged Within-Person Associations Between MMS and Valence and Ethnic Identity

Model	Exploration predicted by MMS <i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	Belonging predicted by MMS <i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	Exploration predicted by valence <i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	Belonging predicted by valence <i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)
Intercept	.66 (.17)**	.75 (.21)***	1.04 (.21)**	.74 (.17)***
Gender	-.01 (.06)	.03 (.07)	.03 (.08)	.00 (.08)
Generation	-.08 (.07)	.16 (.09)	-.13 (.11)	.12 (.13)
Previous Yr MMS/Valence	.13 (.04)**	.14 (.05)**	-.24 (.08)**	-.18 (.09)*
Previous Yr Eth ID	.62 (.05)***	.61 (.05)***	.63 (.05)***	.73 (.05)***
Year	-.02 (.04)	.06 (.04)	-.05 (.06)	.04 (.06)

Note. Gender was coded as females = 0 and males = 1, and generation was coded foreign-born = 0 and U.S.-born = 1. Previous year MMS, previous year valence, previous year Eth ID, and year were uncentered, with the year intercept at ninth grade. Both level two variables were grand-mean centered such that estimates were for the mean of the sample.

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

Table 6

Hierarchical Linear Models Predicting Time-Lagged Within-Person Associations Between Ethnic Identity and MMS and Valence

Model	MMS predicted by exploration <i>b</i> (SE)	MMS predicted by belonging <i>b</i> (SE)	Valence predicted by exploration <i>b</i> (SE)	Valence predicted by belonging <i>b</i> (SE)
Intercept	1.29 (.19)***	1.35 (.22)***	-.26 (.18)	-.09 (.18)
Gender	.00 (.06)	.00 (.06)	.15 (.07)*	.15 (.08)*
Generation	-.03 (.07)	-.05 (.08)	.04 (.10)	.04 (.10)
Previous Yr Eth ID	.08 (.04) [†]	.03 (.04)	.04 (.05)	-.01 (.04)
Previous Yr MMS/Valence	.47 (.06)***	.49 (.05)***	.02 (.07)	.03 (.07)
Year	.07 (.04)	.06 (.04)	.04 (.05)	.03 (.05)

Note. Gender was coded as females = 0 and males = 1, and generation was coded as foreign-born = 0 and U.S.-born = 1. Previous year MMS, previous year valence, previous year Eth ID, and year were uncentered, with the year intercept at ninth grade. Both level two variables were grand-mean centered such that estimates were for the mean of the sample.

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

never significant and was dropped from final models. Thus, the final models that were tested included only MMS, valence, and time as predictors. As shown in Table 7, both MMS and valence were significant or marginal independent concurrent predictors of both exploration and belonging.

Discussion

The model minority stereotype (MMS) is the image of Asian Americans as smart, hardworking, and successful. The construct is perplexing empirically given its oxymoronic status as a “positive stereotype.” Although a challenge for researchers, the MMS is likely even more complex to negotiate for the Asian Americans confronted with the image during the stereotyping primetime of adolescence. Given that extant research on the MMS has been relatively contradictory, further empirical work (particularly longitudinal) was needed to clarify the stereotype’s role in adolescents’ lives and development. The purpose of the current study was to investigate youths’ experiences with and feelings about the MMS over time, as well as how these factors related to the MMS can shape or be shaped by ethnic identity development.

In brief, findings suggest that stereotyping experiences increase across the adolescent years; however, feelings about such experiences tend to remain relatively constant on average. Experiences with stereotyping appear to have a concurrent, reciprocal link with

ethnic identity development: the more an individual reported experiencing stereotyping, the higher ethnic exploration and belonging he or she reported. The reverse was also true within the concurrent timeframe. However, this reciprocity was not found over time. Rather, it appears that the MMS is longitudinally associated with higher levels of ethnic identity, but not the other way around.

Regarding valence of feelings, there was a positive association between the valence of feelings and ethnic identity concurrently, with those feeling positively about the stereotype reporting higher exploration and belonging. Interestingly, as time went on in the study, the relationship between valence of feelings and ethnic identity shifted: as adolescents’ feelings about the MMS became more positive, their reported ethnic identity decreased (or vice versa). Ethnic identity variables were not found to predict feelings, either concurrently or over time. Overall, when entered simultaneously, MMS experiences and feelings were both significant, concurrent predictors of ethnic identity in a regression model; thus, they both predicted unique variance in ethnic identity.

Looking closer at the first set of results, our prediction that MMS experiences would increase over time was confirmed. This result is consistent with expectations based on broader past research suggesting that the cognitive capacity for “stereotype susceptibility” grows into adolescence (Aronson & Good, 2002) and that experiences of negative stereotyping increase with age for Asian American adolescents (Greene et al., 2006). An alternative interpretation of these results could be that participating in this study during earlier waves primed students to notice stereotyping, thus increasing their reports of the MMS at later waves. Future research and replication would be beneficial to rule out such an explanation. If stereotyping does indeed increase over the adolescent years, this is a vital trend to explore further. Positive stereotyping has been linked to both positive (e.g., Thompson & Kiang, 2010) and negative (e.g., Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2000) adjustment outcomes in previous studies. Future studies could thus address whether any correlates or effects of the MMS are magnified over time as awareness or perceived experiences of these stereotypes increase.

Our second finding indicated that adolescents’ feelings about the model minority stereotype remained consistent over time. Past research has reported that Asian American adolescents and young adults report a variety of feelings about the MMS—the majority negative, but other distinct smaller groups reporting positive,

Table 7

Hierarchical Linear Models Predicting Ethnic Identity From Both MMS and Valence.

Model	Exploration <i>b</i> (SE)	Belonging <i>b</i> (SE)
Intercept	2.26 (.19)***	2.87 (.23)***
Gender	-.12 (.13)	-.11 (.15)
Generation	-.09 (.14)	.04 (.17)
MMS	.18 (.06)**	.13 (.07) [†]
Valence	.17 (.07)*	.17 (.07)*
Year	-.07 (.04) [†]	-.03 (.04)

Note. Gender was coded as females = 0 and males = 1, and generation was coded as foreign-born = 0 and U.S.-born = 1. MMS, valence, and year were uncentered, with the year intercept at ninth grade. Both level two variables were grand-mean centered such that estimates were for the mean of the sample.

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

mixed, or neutral feelings (Oyserman & Sakamoto, 1997; Thompson & Kiang, 2010). The current study found results essentially similar to these past groupings, which did not show significant change longitudinally. The latter result should be interpreted with caution because of the relatively small sample size for the feelings variable and also its categorical nature. Regarding sample size, as shown in Table 1, across all waves of the study, a portion of the overall sample tended not to respond to the open-ended feelings question. Also, the feelings measure was initially scored categorically, not reflecting differing levels of intensity within those categories. Given that our results suggested growth in other areas for the adolescents over time (i.e., stereotype perceptions, ethnic identity), it is possible that a change in valence or intensity of feelings was also occurring, but was not detected due to underreporting or the lack of a feelings variable that was rated on a continuum.

Another potential explanation is that adolescents' feelings about the MMS fluctuate in erratic or nonlinear patterns that the current analyses were not able to identify. Some past research suggests that certain aspects of the MMS, such as interpersonal stereotyping, may be more objectionable than academic stereotyping (Oyserman & Sakamoto, 1997), which could potentially obscure definite trends in overall feelings. Also, although adolescents in this study appeared to be growing in ethnic identity, past research suggests that only 27% of ethnic minority adolescents have reached a state of mature ethnic identity relative to older college students and adults, and that ethnic identity development is not necessarily linear, undergoing stages of ebb and flow (Yip, Seaton, & Sellers, 2006). As such findings apply to this study, the majority of teenagers may still be recursively grappling with their feelings about their ethnicity and their feelings about the MMS. Further research would likely help to clarify whether the current findings hold if inquiry is extended to larger samples, older samples, and exploration of nonlinear models.

The next set of analyses revealed a positive relationship between stereotyping experiences and ethnic identity. As experiences increased, affirmation/belonging and exploration variables increased. The reverse directionality (i.e., ethnic identity variables predicting MMS) was also significant, but only concurrently. The positive associations between these variables are generally in line with past work in the discrimination literature showing that those with high ethnic identity also perceive more negative ethnic stereotyping (Operario & Fiske, 2001; Oyserman & Sakamoto, 1997; Sellers et al., 2003). However, only MMS experiences predicted ethnic identity variables longitudinally—and not vice versa—suggesting that the causality of the association runs from stereotype to ethnic identity. In other words, greater stereotyping predicts that adolescents will develop more integrated ethnic identity over time.

These longitudinal links are consistent with studies reporting that those who experience stereotyping tend to develop stronger identification with their ethnic group (e.g., Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). Perhaps the experience of being stereotyped increases the salience of individuals' ethnic group membership and creates opportunities for them to explore connections with their same-ethnic peers and cultural background. Stage models of identity development (e.g., Kim, 2001) support the idea that certain events or interactions, such as stereotyping, could boost awareness of one's ethnicity and trigger changes in ethnic identity. Additionally, findings in this direction align well with social identity theory

(Tajfel, 1982), which suggests that stereotyping experiences (particularly those imposed by the majority group) evoke greater identification with one's own group. Although such theories are founded on precepts of negative stereotyping experiences, it is plausible that positive stereotyping (often from ethnic out-group members) similarly exposes adolescents to ideas that spur better understanding and alignment with their ethnic heritage. However, we do not imply that MMS experiences are the only pathway to catalyzing positive ethnic identification, as there are likely other, healthier experiences that also promote positive exploration.

Consistent with this idea, Dion and Phan (2009) found that, while discrimination experiences boosted the salience of ethnic self-identification, so too did positive group experiences and strong social bonds. Hence, although our data support the view that stereotyping experiences precede adolescents' ethnic identification, it is important to note that other variables are likely involved in the formation of one's identity, and that our results only illustrate a snapshot of adolescents' lives. It is possible that stereotyping experiences and factors such as social support, which was not measured in the current study, exert dual or even interactive effects on identity development. Or, perhaps in the earlier processes of developing a sense of ethnic identity, individuals become more sensitive to ethnicity-related experiences which, in turn, increase ethnic identity even further. Clearly, more longitudinal work could be done to replicate our results and speak to the precise directionality of effects with greater certainty over the span of development.

In terms of feelings about the MMS, our results suggested a positive association between the valence of feelings and ethnic identity concurrently: those adolescents who felt more positively about the stereotype reported greater exploration and belonging than those who felt negatively about it within a single timepoint. These findings align with the past research by Oyserman and Sakamoto (1997), which found positive feelings about the MMS to be associated with higher ethnic identity. In following up with their participants, Oyserman and Sakamoto learned that those endorsing positive feelings express pride in their ethnic group for having a "model" image and also a certain degree of credence in the stereotype. Thus, the association between valence of feelings and ethnic identity in the current study may be partially related to the internalization of the MMS by Asian American adolescents, which a growing body of research demonstrates (Kim & Lee, 2014; Shen et al., 2011; Yoo et al., 2010).

However, this study's unique contribution was the analysis of variables longitudinally. Over time, it was shown that valence negatively predicted exploration/belonging, such that those who felt more negatively over time about the stereotype went on to develop higher ethnic identity and those who felt more positively developed lower identity. Although this finding contradicts that of Oyserman and Sakamoto (1997), it does align theoretically with stage models of ethnic identity development. For instance, using Sue and Sue's (2008) Racial/Cultural Identity Development Model, those who feel positively about the MMS may fall in the preliminary stage of Conformity to majority group standards and opinions. Being content with the status quo, they do not feel compelled to explore their identity further. From an Eriksonian perspective, these individuals could be content with a foreclosed or diffuse sense of ethnic identity, and engage in little ethnic exploration (Phinney, 2003). In the current study, those who felt progressively more positive about the MMS may have decreased in

exploration due to feelings of safety and complacency, or they may have decreased in ethnic belonging due to alignment with a majority group who assigned them positive status.

On the other hand, those who feel negatively about the MMS likely move into more mature Dissonance or Resistance stages over time (Sue & Sue, 2008), wherein they feel a clash with their stereotypes and reject their ideas. Indeed, Chavira and Phinney (1991) found that those who tended to refute stereotyping against themselves had higher ethnic identification than those who ignored similar situations. In the current study, those who progressively felt more negative about the MMS were likely more compelled to make meaning of MMS experiences, which they appeared to achieve via closer identification with other Asian Americans. Generally, more research involving larger sample sizes would help to verify the current findings and explore any further downfalls to the MMS in terms of adolescent outcomes.

Limitations and Significance

Several factors have limited the current research and should be noted. First, the ethnicity of participants was panethnically defined (i.e., “Asian American”) because our sample was not large enough to statistically differentiate the experiences of diverse Asian American cultural groups. Different subgroups may be associated with MMS images to differing degrees (e.g., Ngo & Lee, 2007), so further work is necessary to examine whether experiences and attitudes toward the MMS may vary based on adolescents’ distinct ethnic backgrounds. Second, as with all longitudinal studies, some attrition of the sample occurred across study waves. Hence, processes that were found to differ over the waves of the study could, in part, be attributed to some kind of selective sample erosion. However, HLM is well-equipped to handle missing data and, overall, there were very few participants who did not have at least two waves of data.

Third, the current study did not inquire about the sources of stereotyping. Past studies have suggested that the effects of stereotyping on adjustment may differ based on the identity of the stereotyper (e.g., teachers vs. peers; Greene et al., 2006). Thus, a possible extension for future studies could involve differentiating experiences of the MMS according to the perpetrators. A final limitation of the current study was adolescents’ underreporting of MMS feelings. Future research could lend support to the utility and appropriate revisions of the relatively new measures used in the current study. In particular, a revised prompt for open-ended responses may be desirable to encourage greater participation.

In spite of the above limitations, the present study extends existing work on the basic nature and effects of positive ethnic stereotyping during adolescence in several ways. The findings help to refine understanding of the unique MMS phenomenon—its manifestations over time, how feelings about it may change over time, and its interassociations with ethnic identification. Furthermore, we set out to understand this stereotype within a unique and understudied demographic. Asian Americans and adolescents have both received relatively little attention in psychological research, particularly among those living in new immigrant destinations such as the Southeastern and more rural areas of the U.S.; hence, the present study helped to explore the experiences of a triply neglected group. As Asian American adolescents, these participants likely encountered a great deal of stereotyping that may be

specific to their ethnic group, the developmental period of adolescence, and the context of new immigrant communities that tend to lack institutional and social resources to assist in newcomers’ success and integration (Bailey, 2005). Indeed, recent research with Latino youth suggests that there are broad, regional differences in not only the prevalence of their perceived discrimination experiences, but also in the consequences of such experiences (Perreira, Fuligni, & Potochnick, 2010). Thus, it was important to investigate the experiences of Asian American youth in new immigrant contexts in particular versus simply generalizing from studies on other ethnic and age groups recruited from large cities and metropolitan areas. That said, our focused approach also has inherent limitations for generalizability, and more work replicating our results in similar geographic contexts or comparing other contexts for similarities will be important to conduct.

Conclusion

Overall, our findings indicate that model minority stereotyping experiences may be an inevitable player (among many others) in the normative development of ethnic identity for Asian American youth. Given that healthy ethnic identity is integral to positive emotional and academic adjustment (Worrell, 2007), understanding its complex antecedents is important for promoting positive youth outcomes. Researchers, counselors, teachers, and parents versed in the MMS phenomenon can more explicitly address stereotyping and foster positive identity versus leaving youth to cope alone. Indeed, across all waves of this study, Asian American high-schoolers seemed to be the experts—as intimately familiar with others’ preconceptions about their group as any researcher. Given that such stereotypes are so salient at a key time in personal identity development, it is likely that the MMS plays an enduring role in shaping the way Asian Americans come to think about themselves and their lives. Hence, it is important to continue to scrutinize the role of the MMS, as a perhaps heretofore overlooked determinant of adolescent development and well-being.

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