

# An Assessment of the Past and Present Depictions of the Asian Male in Western Media Through Social Media Comments

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## ABSTRACT

This research was intended to explore attitudes towards Asian men on social media through the investigation of comments under posts throughout the years. By viewing different timeframes, a basis of comparison is created in order to analyze how these ideations change and manifest throughout the years with social influences. The goal of this research was to first identify the shift in racial attitudes towards Asian men within American media, and then identify specific factors that have played a role in this change. A content analysis was utilized, in which comments under pictures, videos, texts, and other forms of media regarding Asian men were investigated, with keywords and search parameters integrated to collect posts. The content analysis was conducted on popular social media apps within the United States, including Instagram, Reddit, X, and Facebook. Fifty posts created within the years of 2020-2024 as well as fifty posts from 2000-2019 were selected randomly for each tag. The comments for each post were then analyzed. The aim of this study was not only to better understand the strengths and weaknesses regarding the representation of the Asian community, but also to help find ways to better protect them from prejudice online.

## Introduction

A stereotype can be defined as a fixed, overgeneralized belief targeting specific groups of people (McLeod, 2023). Whether these ideas concern certain abilities, characteristics, or features a person belonging to a specific group has, stereotypes are often misleading and can lead to prejudiced attitudes and beliefs. Research indicates that increased media consumption is associated with the fostering of racial stereotypes since it provides a steady stream of models that people tend to rely on when formulating ideas regarding people outside of their race (Ward, 2023). Since the twentieth century, Asians in Hollywood films have been subjected to underrepresentation and the utilization of stereotypes within their roles (Richards, 2021). These roles featuring Asian characters often exaggerate or reinforce negative stereotypes that were mostly derived from World War II, a time when the sexual exploitation of young Asian prostitutes was prevalent among American soldiers (Paner, 2018). This type of representation formulated many negative ideas regarding Asian women, often being depicted as hypersexual, submissive women, which can be seen in popular franchises, movies, and films such as *Kill Bill* (2003) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) which serve as examples of this trend (Roby, 2021). In contrast to Asian women, the portrayal of Asian men is a much more complicated systemic issue.

Throughout the years, Asian men have often been illustrated as characters who are emasculate, socially inept, and undesirable men who lack sex appeal, which can be seen through characters such as Long Duk Dong, played by Gedde Watanabe in *Sixteen Candles* (1984), and Leslie Chow, played by Ken Jeong in *The Hangover* (2009) trilogy (Liu, 2015). In recent years, however, there has been a rather positive light shown on Asian culture, arguably as a result of the recent growth in popularity. This can be seen through Asian music, TV

shows, and other forms of entertainment expanding within American media, which help to better represent Asians in a way that is more authentic and less fueled by the inaccuracy of old Western stereotypes (Ju & Lee, 2015). This begs the question of how Asian men are portrayed in American media and how this depiction has shifted since the 2000s.

## Literature Review

### The History of Anti-Asian Racism Within the United States

The history of prejudice against Asians within the United States is not a new topic. This prejudice spans back centuries, with the enforcement of repressive immigration laws, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Page Act of 1875, and the Immigration Act of 1924; all of which prevented Asian immigrants from entering the country (Fong, 1997). Furthermore, after the formal abolishment of slavery, Chinese immigrants were brought into the United States to work in industries such as railroads, sugar plantations, and mining (Ispahani & Nandini Ramdas, 2021). As job opportunities were limited, both Asian men and women would often work jobs that were traditionally limited to women, such as laundry and cooking, which later contributed to the idea that Asian men were effeminate (Lau, 2015). The first attempt to exclude Asian immigrants began with Congress passing the Page Act of 1875, which denied the entry of East Asian women into the country due to being considered “lewd and immoral,” as it had been written into law (Administration at Wake County Bar Association, 2021). Just seven years later, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was passed, which further prevented the entry of Chinese men into the United States (Administration at Wake County Bar Association, 2021). These laws were not repealed until 1943, which happened to be during World War II, a time when President Roosevelt was establishing Japanese-American internment camps around the country (Ispahani & Nandini Ramdas, 2021). Furthermore, the spread of the United States military presence into the Asian Pacific region during World War II played a large role in the formation of negative stereotypes regarding Asian Americans today. White military men would engage in the sexual exploitation of Asian prostitutes, or “comfort women,” to “blow off steam,” even going as far as to establish camp towns, which were essentially licensed bars and clubs by military bases where sex work was a prevalent form of entertainment (Lang & Cachero, 2021). All the aforementioned historical events and developments helped to reinforce existing ideas that Asian women were subservient objects of pleasure, which later became the basis for most depictions of Asian women in film, while on the contrary, men were seen in a much less desirable light.

### The Emasculation of the Asian Male in Media

Asians have a long history of both underrepresentation and the utilization of harmful stereotypes within roles in Hollywood films (Richards, 2021). While Asian women are often presented as seductive and alluring temptresses, men more so embody an effeminate image, especially compared to other races. This can be seen with characters such as Mr. Chow from *The Hangover Part II* (2009), who reinforces the idea of the emasculated Asian male through cliché of penis jokes: “His naked man-handle is mistaken for a Shiitake mushroom,” (Park, 2013). Even in other forms of media, Asian men are stereotyped as effeminate and stripped of their male qualities. In 2012, after he had just been signed, Taiwanese-American NBA player, Jeremy Lin, played the biggest game of his career, setting a career-high in points and winning against the Lakers. Several minutes after the win, FOX Sports writer Jason

Whitlock posted to X (formerly known as Twitter) regarding the athletic 6’3” Lin: “Some lucky lady in NYC is gonna feel a couple inches of pain tonight,” an overtly racist and misogynistic jab at Lin, who had already become accustomed to casual racism since the debut of his professional career (Hanstock, 2012). Not

only does this statement reestablish ideas regarding the emasculation of Asian men regarding stereotypes that they lack sex appeal and desirability, but it also shows how normalized racism toward Asian men has become in the media.

## Research Gap

This descriptive research study aimed to explore how Asian men are portrayed in American media and how this depiction has shifted since the 2000s. The gap addressed in this research related to the identification of the shift in the representation of Asian men within American media and the cause of it. Research conducted by Alice Huang (2011) investigated whether or not there were changes in the representation of Asian Americans in popular media outlets through the utilization of content analysis and surveys: The results suggested a decrease in the number of Asian American stereotypes in the media, which she believes to be a result of better representation within newer movies and television shows. Furthermore, in the article “From ‘Unassimilable’ to ‘Exceptional’: An Evolution of Asian American Stereotypes,” author Eric Fish (2017) discusses the changing perceptions and stereotypes relating to Asian Americans. Once seen as filthy and uneducated aliens, the depiction of Asian Americans today has since drastically shifted, with them earning the title of the “model minority,” (Huang, 2011). In summary, both of these sources support the fact that there has been an evident change in the West's perception of Asian Americans throughout the decades, but do not trace back a cause for this. To find an answer to this, a content analysis was carried out on popular media apps within the United States, such as Instagram, Reddit, X, and Facebook. Comments under posts relating to Asian men were studied to identify trends and patterns relating to specific portrayals and their relevance throughout the years since 2000. This research was intended to first identify the shift in perception, and then identify factors that have played a role in the shift in racial attitudes towards Asian men within American media. The aim of this study was not only to better understand the strengths and weaknesses regarding the representation of the Asian community, but also to help find ways to better protect them from prejudice online.

## Methods

### Data Collection: Content Analysis

The main method of data collection utilized was content analysis, in which comments under pictures, videos, texts, and other forms of content regarding men of Asian heritage were investigated. This was to identify different patterns, such as the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts relating to the topic (Busch et al., 2005). Through the utilization of content analysis, researchers can further quantify and analyze the presence, meanings, and relationships of such words, themes, or concepts (Authors at Columbia University, 2023). This method was selected because this research was conducted to discern how the portrayal of Asian men in American media has shifted since the 2000s and the factors that influenced it; content analysis allowed for the collection of relevant data. Additionally, it provided a basis for comparing data sets regarding the representation of Asian men in American media today in contrast to the 2000s through the relevancy of different themes and keywords. Furthermore, it allowed for different factors playing into this phenomenon to be identified and broken down. A content analysis was conducted on popular social media apps within the United States, such as Instagram, Reddit, X, and Facebook. Keywords, hashtags, and other search parameters were used to find posts across all platforms, then further gather data through the comments (refer to Table 1).

**Table 1.** Keywords and Hashtags Being Investigated

Keywords/Hashtags
■ Asian American men
■ Asian boy
■ Asian boyfriend
■ Asian couple
■ Asian culture
■ Asian dating
■ Asian identity
■ Asian man
■ Asian male
■ Asian masculinity

By searching these keywords on each social media platform, posts were collected. Fifty posts created within the years of 2020-2024 as well as fifty posts from 2000-2019 were selected randomly. The comments for each post, regardless of what type of media (thread, picture, video) were then analyzed. If the post exceeded fifty comments, only the fifty comments with the highest engagement (likes, replies, etc.) were selected. This was due to the fact that higher engagement signals higher resonance amongst audiences. This, in turn, helped to avoid data dumps and only collected what was necessary. Additionally, since tags such as Asian culture, Asian dating, and Asian identity are not limited to just men, posts that featured or pertained to only Asian men were analyzed.

### Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was utilized to further organize and understand the data sets, along with the interpretation of the most prevalent themes seen throughout the data (Dawadi, 2020). Following the content analysis, data from each forum was grouped and analyzed. Initially, the data from each platform was grouped in sets based on the dates in which they were posted and what forum they were derived from. Comments posted within the years of 2020-2024 represented “today’s time,” and those from 2000-2019 represented the past. Then, the data from both groups was further categorized based on whether they can be perceived as negative, positive, or neutral. To do this, the type of post was identified, then the comment was evaluated for the utilization of signal words. Negative signal words in comments contained racial stereotypes, generalizations pertaining to race, exoticization, microaggressions, or cultural insensitivity. Positive signal words presented Asian men in a way that was empowering, inclusive, humanizing, and/or viewed them in a favorable light. These comments were exempt from any stereotypes or prejudices. Lastly, neutrals featured general commentary regarding Asian men and

could be seen through the use of objective language. Afterward, the groups of data resulting from the different social media platforms were then compared and contrasted, with similar themes and patterns among them being sought out.

In similar studies within this field of research, other researchers have also implemented this data analysis method, as seen in Alice Huang's (2011) "Broken English and Fixed Stereotypes: The Portrayal of Asian Americans," where the relevancy of online prejudices towards Asians today is investigated through the usage of keywords and identification of different themes. Because this data analysis method has been successfully utilized in the past by other researchers in the field, it serves as further justification for the fact that thematic analysis is the best approach to this study, as it allows for the exploration and comparison of the different attitudes directed towards Asian men within American media from a qualitative perspective.

## Consent and Selection of Participants

Since this study analyzed social media content, it is important to have an understanding of rules concerning copyright and fair use when using content from other creators. Even if a photo is shared on social media, it is not considered public domain, meaning that it is copyrighted, and permission to use that content must be granted by the creator (Newberry, 2023). With comments, however, all content is released into the public domain to the general public, meaning permission does not need to be granted by the creator if used or referenced (Authors at the National Archives, 2021). As this study analyzed comments solely, the issue of consent forms was not required.




## Findings and Products



### Data & Analysis

After conducting the data analysis, the following results were obtained from each of the specified social media platforms. Before viewing the data, however, it is important to understand the following terms in the context of the study, as definitions often overlap. The most frequently seen terms throughout the negative categories on all social media platforms are presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2.** Definitions of Terms in Context of the Study

Term	Definition	Example
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Objectification	Reducing Asian men to mere stereotypes and/or objects rather than recognizing individuality and personal identity.	 <p>Carol Marie Teal Many Women think Asian Guys or People are attractive. (Asian women are beautiful.) Thick, shiny, dramatic black hair, exotic eyes, symmetrical features, often lean, polite, and surprisingly light ❤️ hearted. Some of my people who are Jealous thought they could spoil the attractive image of Asian men by attacking their masculinity. My question to those protruding forehead white guys is how many Asian men have they checked out in one way or another to prove this attack. 100? at least in order to achieve a percentage? Or did Dr. Kinsy do the research? Even if this was true, there are just so many other good Asian qualities that White men would never be able to "measure up to."</p> <p>I'm sure you could say this in a more humorous manner.</p> <p>2y Like Reply 6</p>
Fetishization	The objectification and sexualization of Asian men based solely on their race and ethnicity.	 <p>mugennyamayama · 3y</p> <p>On the flipside I have had women approach me simply because I was Asian and they wanted someone to fill that ideal K pop K drama stereotype for them and soon as I didn't they would leave. Idont want to be completely avoided but I hate being fetishized as well .To all the white girls intent on calling Asian guys Oppa and having half Asian kids simply because "they look cuter than white babies" Fuck you. I'm lucky to have found a partner who loves me for who I am</p> <p>... ↩️ ⬆️ 54 ⬇️</p>
Exoticization	Perceiving Asian men as different or fascinating solely because of their race or ethnicity. This often involves romanticization or fetishization.	 <p>evy ☆ @iYgemini</p> <p>Follow</p> <p>his pretty melanin skin, oh my pretty southeast asian man</p> <p>0:11</p> <p>From am •</p> <p>12:46 AM · 3/11/24 From Earth · 6.1K Views</p>

Emasculation	Removing the masculine qualities of Asian men and instead portraying them as feminine.	
Overgeneralization	The formation of broad statements or assumptions based solely on race or ethnicity.	

## Instagram

The following tables present the comments analyzed on Instagram during the years of 2020-2024 and 2010-2019. It is important to note that one tally is equivalent to five comments. The utilization of tallies facilitates quick visualization of frequency and variation amongst categories.

**Table 3.** Instagram (2020-2024)

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Asian American men	II	II	0
Asian boy	IIII IIII IIII II	IIII IIII II	II
Asian boyfriend	IIII	II	I
Asian couple	IIII IIII IIII III	IIII II	I
Asian culture	IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII II	IIII IIII IIII	III
Asian dating	IIII	IIII	I
Asian identity	II	III	0
Asian man	IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII	IIII IIII IIII IIII III	0
Asian male	IIII IIII III	IIII I	0
Asian masculinity	IIII IIII	IIII I	II

**Table 4.** Instagram (2010-2019)

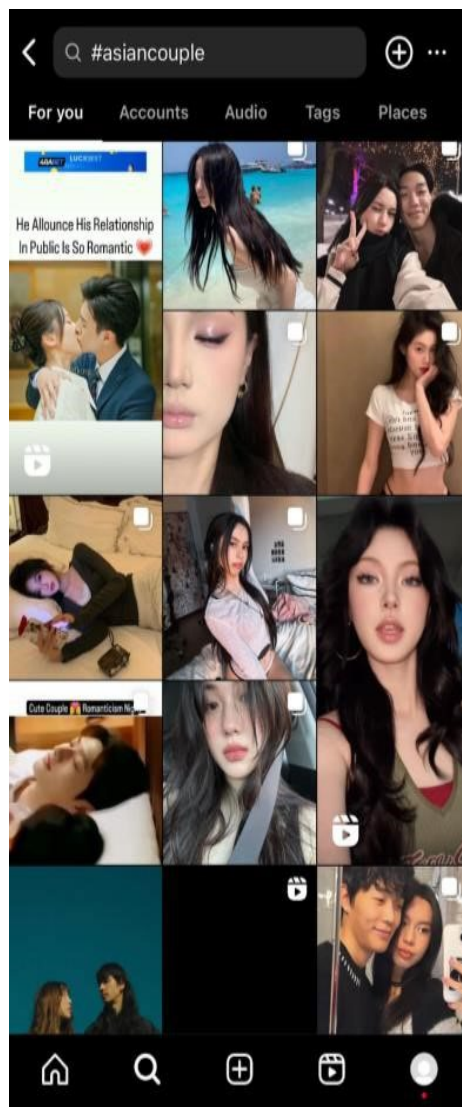
	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Asian American men	I	III	0
Asian boy	IIII IIII I	IIII IIII IIII	III
Asian boyfriend	III	IIII	I
Asian couple	IIII IIII II	IIII	0
Asian culture	IIII IIII IIII IIII III	IIII IIII I	IIII IIII



Asian dating	II	IIII	0
Asian identity	I	II	0
Asian man	IIII IIIII IIIII IIIII	IIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIII I	II
Asian male	IIII II	IIII IIIII	I
Asian masculinity	III	IIII	0

For both of the allotted time periods, neutrals could be seen in the form of general commentary, questions directed towards the poster, and basic compliments. Positives included compliments regarding physical appearance, affirmations towards culture, and emojis that could be deemed as positive within the post's context (e.g. heart emojis, fire emojis, heart eyes emojis, thumbs up emojis). During the 2020-2024 time segment, negatives were seen in comments that utilized emojis that could be perceived as insulting regarding the context of the post (e.g. vomit emojis, clown emojis, skull emojis). Additionally, many of these comments reinforced stereotypes pertaining to the femininity of Asian men or displayed fetishization and/or exoticization. During the 2010-2019 period, negative comments more frequently targeted the femininity or sexualities of Asian men, along with the utilization of harmful cultural stereotypes. This was seen through users leaving comments calling posters gay or suggesting that the poster may be gay despite there being no apparent hints of the poster's sexuality displayed in the pictures.

Specific notices for both of the allotted time periods include much more content featuring Asian women compared to Asian men regardless of the tags utilized (refer to Figure 1). Additionally, much of this content was posted by Asian fetish pages, which was most apparent under tags such as "Asian couple" and "interracial relationships." The comments left under these types of posts seem to condone the content, which can be seen through leaving comments with emojis that signal affirmation, such as hearts, fire, heart eyes, drooling emojis, or by posting suggestive and sexual comments.



**Figure 1.** (Instagram, 2024.)

## Reddit

The following tables present the comments analyzed on Reddit during the years of 2020-2024 and 2005-2019. It is important to note that one tally is equivalent to five comments.

**Table 5.** Reddit (2020-2024)

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Asian American	IIII IIII IIII	IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII	0

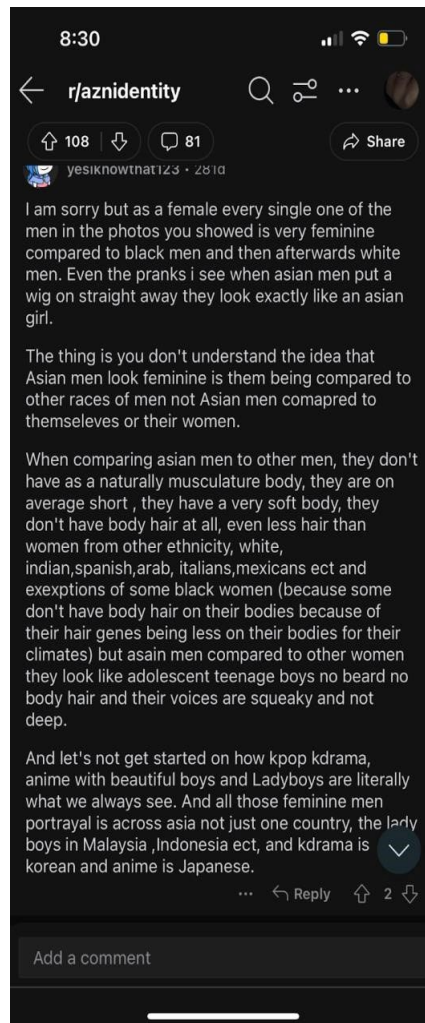
Asian boy	III	IIII	III
Asian boyfriend	III	IIII	II
Asian couple	0	IIII III	II
Asian culture	IIII III	IIII IIII IIII II	II
Asian dating	IIII IIII III	III	IIII I
Asian identity/Azn identity	IIII IIII IIII IIII III	IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII III	I
Asian man	IIII IIII	IIII IIII IIII	IIII I
Asian male	IIII I	IIII IIII II	IIII
Asian masculinity	IIII IIII III	IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII II	IIII II

**Table 6.** Reddit (2005-2019)

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Asian American	IIII IIII III	IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII	I
Asian boy	II	III	IIII
Asian boyfriend	III	III	I
Asian couple	0	IIII IIII	II
Asian culture	II	IIII IIII IIII	II
Asian dating	IIII IIII II	IIII II	IIII III
Asian identity/Azn identity	IIII IIII IIII III	IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII III	II

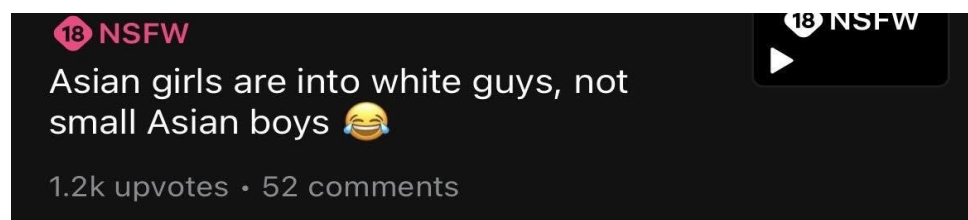
Asian man	IIII III	IIII IIII III	IIII III
Asian male	IIII II	IIII IIII	IIII
Asian masculinity	IIII IIII II	IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII	IIII IIII

A specific overall notice regarded the fact that, unlike most social media platforms, Reddit almost functions as a discussion-based platform, with many users posting writing entries, to which others can interact with and reply to. As a result, more nuanced discussions and threads of conversation amongst Redditors, rather than just singular comments, were left under posts. This helped to provide more insight into the perceptions of Asian men, along with reasoning and other perspectives from anyone who decided to reply. In turn, the basis of some of the neutral, positive, and negative comments encountered was changed as a result. Neutrals for both allotted time periods featured many objective discussions regarding racism shared amongst Asian users, whether it be online or in real life. Furthermore, there were many multifaceted discussions pertaining to topics such as culture, identity, and Asian representation in the mainstream media. Conversation regarding Asian media was especially prevalent in the years of 2020-2024, with the release of shows and movies featuring Asian leads, including *Shōgun* (2024), *Mulan* (2020). Positives for both time periods could be seen through Asian users connecting, sharing, and appreciating different aspects of one another's culture. Other positive comments complimented physical appearances and affirmed different cultures. Negative comments for both time periods often reinforced ideations of femininity in Asian men, along with stereotypical tropes (e.g. geeky tech guys, awkward foreigners, nerds). Furthermore, oftentimes, users would paint Asian men out to be inferior to other races, especially lacking in aspects such as dating and appearance, as presented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** (Reddit, 2023.)

Specific notices for both time periods on Reddit include the fact that due to the platform's more lenient post guidelines and restrictions, a lot of the seemingly innocent tags (e.g. Asian boy, Asian boyfriend, Asian couple) were linked to fetish pornography. Many videos pertained to homosexuality, in which Asian men were often the ones being emasculated. Additionally, "bucking" was prevalent, in which Asian men were typically being portrayed as inferior to their white counterparts, as depicted in Figure 3. Posts like these, along with the amount of interaction they receive via views, likes, and comments propose a concerning message regarding how Asian men are portrayed and perceived in the media, further inciting ideations of the femininity and inferiority of these men.



**Figure 3.** (Reddit, 2022.)

### Twitter/X

The following tables present the comments analyzed on Reddit during the years of 2020-2024 and 2006-2019. It is important to note that one tally is equivalent to five comments.

**Table 7.** Twitter/X (2020-2024)

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Asian American men	I	IIII I	III
Asian boy	III	IIII	0
Asian boyfriend	II	IIII III	0
Asian couple	0	IIII IIII II	0
Asian culture	IIII	IIII IIII III	III
Asian dating	0	IIII IIII IIII II	I
Asian identity	I	IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII II	0
Asian man	II	IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII	I
Asian male	I	IIII IIII II	I
Asian masculinity	III	IIII III	I

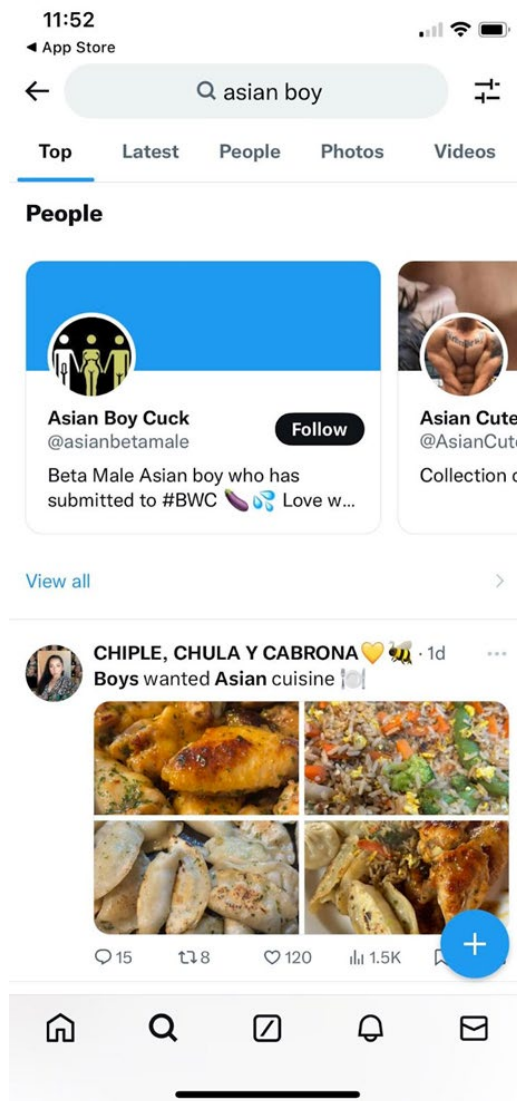
**Table 8.** Twitter/X (2006-2019)

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Asian American men	I	IIII III	II
Asian boy	I	IIII II	0

Asian boyfriend	I	IIII III	I
Asian couple	0	IIII IIII	0
Asian culture	II	IIII IIII III	I
Asian dating	0	IIII IIII III	0
Asian identity	I	IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII III	0
Asian man	III	IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII IIII I	I
Asian male	0	IIII IIII IIII I	0
Asian masculinity	III	IIII II	II

For both of the allotted time periods, neutrals could be seen in the form of general commentary and discussion regarding the posts and their contents. Positives featured compliments directed toward physical appearances and displays of support towards cultures. Additionally, positives were also seen through comments that utilized emojis and GIFs that could be deemed positive within the context of the post (e.g. hearts, heart eyes, love, fire). Negative comments from the category of 2020-2024 could be seen through the reinforcement of negative stereotypes about Asian men regarding personality and appearance (geeky, shy, docile men who extrude feminine qualities, such as penis size and facial features (rounder faces, less toned bodies). Additionally, instances of objectification, fetishization, and exoticization were prevalent within this period of time, especially by users part of the Korean pop music (Kpop) fandom community. On the other hand, negative comments from the years of 2006-2019 featured offensive jokes about Asian culture along with stereotypes that reinforce the idea of femininity and emasculation of Asian men.

Specific notices for both time periods regard the number of fandoms prevalent on Twitter ranging from anime to Asian pop stars. Users a part of these fandoms tended to be the ones most displaying behaviors that exhibited the fetishization or exoticization of Asian men and Asian culture as a whole. With Asian media becoming increasingly popular within the West, users involved in these fandoms have become more common. Again, similarly to Reddit, because of Twitter's less strict post guidelines and restrictions, many of the searched keywords resulted in pornographic content that often painted Asian men as inferior to their white counterparts (refer to Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** (Twitter/X, 2024.)

## Facebook

The following tables present the comments analyzed on Facebook during the years of 2020-2024 and 2004-2019. It is important to note that one tally is equivalent to five comments.

**Table 9.** Facebook (2020-2024)

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Asian American men	IIII II	IIII IIII	0



Asian boy	IIII IIII II	IIII III	I
Asian boyfriend	IIII III	IIII II	I
Asian couple	IIII IIII IIII III	IIII IIII IIII II	0
Asian culture	II	IIII IIII IIII III	0
Asian dating	I	II	0
Asian identity	II	III	0
Asian man	III	IIII IIII III	II
Asian male	IIII	IIII IIII III	I
Asian masculinity	III	IIII III	I

**Table 10.** Facebook (2004-2019)

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Asian American men	IIII	IIII III	I
Asian boy	IIII IIII I	IIII II	II
Asian boyfriend	IIII II	IIII IIII	I
Asian couple	IIII IIII IIII III	IIII IIII IIII III	0
Asian culture	IIII I	IIII IIII III	0
Asian dating	I	I	0
Asian identity	II	IIII II	I
Asian man	III	IIII III	I
Asian male	IIII	IIII IIII IIII	II
Asian masculinity	IIII	IIII IIII	III

For both of the allotted time periods, neutrals could be seen as general discussion, questions, and commentary directed to the poster or content of the post in question. Positive comments featured compliments regarding physical appearance and culture, along with emojis, reactions, and GIF images that could be regarded positively within the post's context (e.g. hearts, heart eyes, love, etc.) Negatives for the category of 2020-2024 displayed emojis, reactions, and GIF images that could be regarded negatively within the post's context (e.g. vomit face, laughing face, clown face, etc.) Additionally, the utilization of stereotypes and overgeneralizations regarding Asian men that reinforce inferiority and emasculation (small penis jokes, stating most Asian men are feminine) were prevalent. For the category of 2004-2019, negative comments often oversexualized, fetishized, exoticized, or emasculated Asian men through the use of stereotypes (jokes about having a small penis, being undesirable, homosexuality, etc.). Additionally, emojis, GIFs, and reactions that could be perceived as negative within the context of the post were frequently used (e.g. laughing emojis, vomit emojis, disgust reaction).

Specific notices for both of the allotted time frames include the fact that when searching up tags such as Asian boy, Asian American men, and Asian couple, posts that appeared pertained mainly to Asian women instead; whether it be fetish posts, men of different races looking for a female partner of Asian descent, or sexual posts, a majority of the posts were catered toward Asian women (refer to Figure 5). This suggests that Asian women are viewed as much more desirable than Asian men, further reinforcing the idea that Asian women are overly sexualized by the media, while men lack appeal.

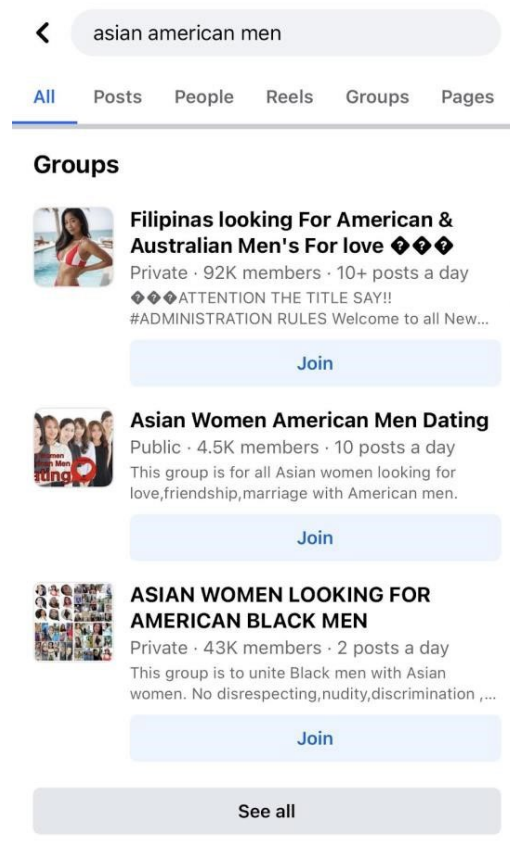


Figure 5. (Facebook, 2024.)

## Discussion of Prevalent Negative Themes

Although many of the same negative themes still exist throughout the differing time periods across all social media platforms, their faces and the ways in which they manifest have undoubtedly changed as a result of social influences. The following sections will analyze the most common themes and compare how they appear throughout the years, along with what influenced these shifts.

### Emasculation and Undesirability

Emasculation was by far the most common trend throughout the negative category during all years on each social media platform. Cultural and societal attitudes over the years, however, have shifted and evolved. The media's restrictive portrayals of Asian Americans have harbored these harmful stereotypes regarding the supposedly docile nature of these men and their lack of masculinity, which is more blatant within the years of 2004-2019. It was also during these years that movies such as *The Hangover* (2009) trilogy and *The Interview* (2014) were released, and featured male Asian characters who embodied stereotypes regarding their emasculation and undesirability (Liu, 2015). Researchers hypothesize that these stereotypical perceptions of Asian-American men as unattractive, asexual, effeminate, and having small penises play a large role in the ideations of their undesirability in contrast to men of other races (Lu & Wong, 2013). The cultivation and prolonged exposure to these stereotypes in the media can result to the acceptance of them as reality (Zhang, 2010). This can further be reflected in the negative comments left between the years of 2004-2019, as many of them reinforce the negative attitudes and stereotypes prevalent towards Asian men during that time period.

In 2012, PSY's "Gangnam Style" was released and went viral, becoming the first YouTube video to hit one billion views (Bove, 2013). From there, the international visibility of Kpop, or Korean pop, grew immensely, with a large rise in popularity of Korean boy groups such as BTS, EXO, Got7, and Stray Kids in the Western world (Ju & Lee, 2015). The male stars of these groups often challenge the norms of masculinity and adopt a more feminized alternative, which can be seen in their embracement of makeup, bright-colored hair, and stylish clothing (Bennett, 2021). Although some believe that this challenges traditional norms and reshapes them, others believe that this alternative to typical masculinity puts Asian men at risk of being further stigmatized and demeaned (Liu, 2015). This divergence is heavily reflected by the mixed opinions on Asian masculinity from users on the internet during the years of 2020-2024 (refer to Figure 6). Although Kpop has catalyzed the popularity of Asian media in the West and called for the redefinition of traditional masculinity norms, it has also led to an increase in the fetishization and exoticization of Asian men.



**Figure 6.** (Facebook, 2020.)

## Fetishization and Exoticization

Although Kpop and other forms of Asian media have undoubtedly promoted Asian representation worldwide, new, different challenges arise as a result of this increase in popularity. While there was much less blatant fetishization and exoticization of Asian men during the years of 2004-2019, this direct contrast to 2020-2024. Many of the negative comments displayed a romanticization of Asian ethnicity or culture, which can be directly attributed to the rise in popularity of Asian pop culture, such as television shows, movies, and music, in the Western media.

While appreciating Asian culture is not an issue, harm arises when this glorification takes away from one's individuality, and instead binds them to the ideas and norms of a stereotypical trope based solely on race (Park, 2013). While some commenters displayed fetishization towards Asian men (refer to Figure 7), others shared their experiences with this phenomenon (refer to Figure 8). It is also noted that since the beauty standards of East Asian countries most align with those of the West (e.g. fair skin, slender figures, youthful faces, etc.), Eastern Asians (Japan, China, Korea, Philippines, etc.), who typically conform to these standards, tend to be more fetishized in contrast to Southern Asians (India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Maldives, etc.) as stated by a Reddit user in Figure 9. Additionally, fetishization and exoticization can play a role in the reinforcement of negative stereotypes as they attach stereotypical ideations to a person based on race.

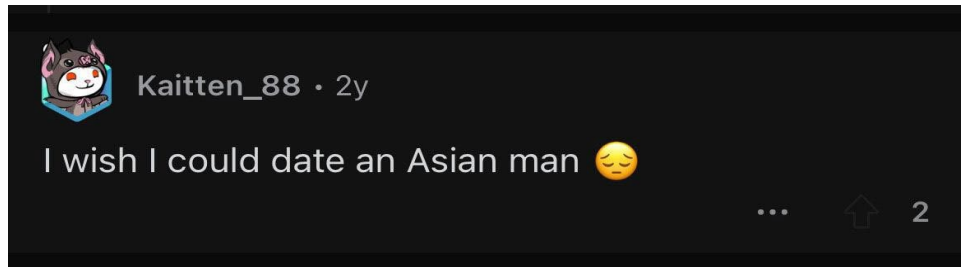


Figure 7. (Reddit, 2022.)

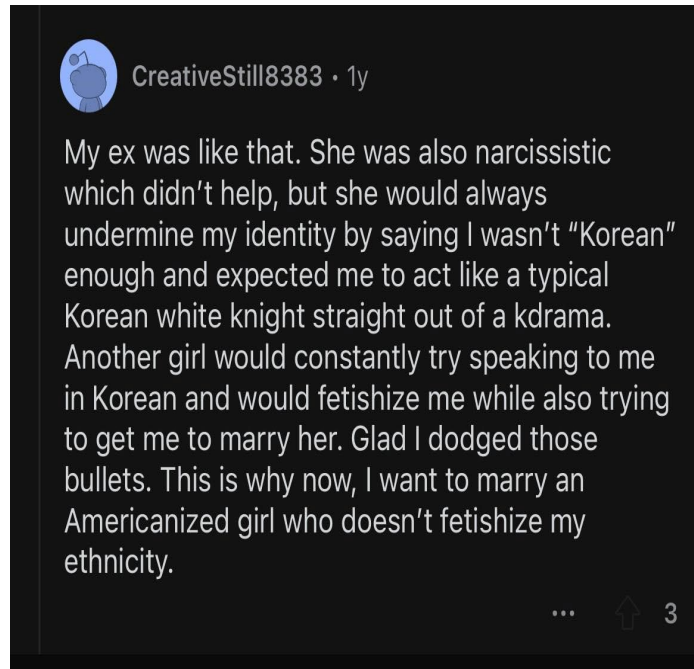


Figure 8. (Reddit, 2023.)

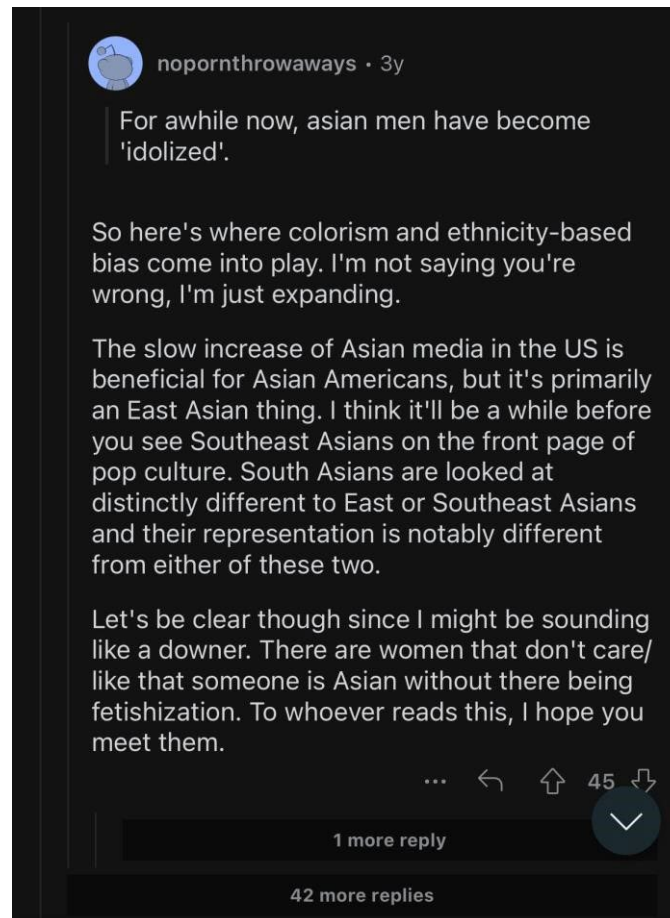


Figure 9. (Reddit, 2021.)

## Overgeneralizations and Stereotypes

Many of the negative comments from both of the allotted time periods featured stereotypes and generalizations regarding Asian men. During the years of 2004-2019, this could be seen in the form of associating Asian men with stereotypical archetypes, such as the geeky nerd, the awkward foreigner, or the shy tech guy. It was also during these years that movies such as *The Hangover* (2009), *2 Broke Girls* (2011), and *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* (2015) were released- all of which featured heavy-accented Asian foreigners who were ironically played by Asian Americans without accents. Mainstream media featuring poor Asian representation at the time helped to accentuate these harmful tropes depicting the men as emasculate, passive, and unassertive.

This can be reflected in the negative comments from the years of 2004-2019, which are a direct mirroring of the prejudices present within mainstream American media at the time. While instances of utilizing stereotypes and generalizations to define Asian men still exist today, they have since lessened in severity. This, again, can be traced back to sociocultural influences, such as the growing popularity of Asian pop culture in the West, along with the release of new movies and television shows that better represent Asian leads including *Shōgun* (2024), *ShangChi* (2021), and *Mulan* (2020).

The shift in societal norms and the rise of social media activism, best highlighted through movements such as Black Lives Matter and Stop Asian Hate, can also be attributed to this change (UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent, 2021). Through social media, people of color are able to share their personal experiences regarding racism and discrimination, along with call-out social justice issues. In addition, newer features

on platforms like Instagram allow its users to utilize resources, such as the fundraiser feature to donate to various causes and organizations (UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent, 2021). This, in turn, brings more awareness to societal issues and further calls for change.

## Conclusions

This study concludes that while the utilization of stereotypes and generalizations to define Asian men still exists within today's media, their faces and the ways in which they manifest adapt with change in time. Many of these negative themes in comments are direct reflections of the prejudices present within mainstream media at the respective time periods. Research indicates that increased media consumption is associated with the fostering of racial stereotypes since it provides a steady stream of models that people tend to rely on when formulating ideas regarding people outside of their race (Ward, 2023). Furthermore, prolonged exposure to these stereotypes in the media can result in the acceptance of them as reality (Zhang, 2010). With these facts in mind, it is important to recognize Asians and their long history of both underrepresentation and the utilization of harmful stereotypes within roles in Hollywood films (Richards, 2021). These restrictive portrayals of Asian Americans in mainstream media have harbored harmful stereotypes regarding the supposedly docile nature of these men and their lack of masculinity, which becomes evident in other media outlets. In more recent years, however, researcher Alice Huang (2011) found a decrease in the number of Asian American stereotypes in the media, which she believes to be a result of better representation within newer movies and television shows. The same can be confirmed with a specific focus on Asian men, with significantly less blatant racism shown towards them within recent years. Better media representation in addition to the shifting sociocultural factors and societal norms in more recent years can be attributed to this change. In essence, comments left by social media users tended to reflect portrayals in mainstream media, which is why proper representations are extremely important when depicting minority groups.

## Limitations

Before conclusions are expanded upon, it is important to discuss the potential limitations of this study. To begin, algorithms, or the filtration and selection of posts recommended to users based on previous engagement, could have impacted the data collected as a result. In an attempt to combat the influence of algorithms on the content appearing in my feed, I created new social media accounts solely dedicated to investigating my keywords. Another limitation includes comments potentially being removed by the poster or taken down due to violating certain guideline restrictions on social media platforms. This issue could have greatly impacted the frequency of the different categories of comments viewed, especially those of the negative section. Lastly, while most tags and keywords contained a sufficient number of posts that could be analyzed, others were not as popular and contained far fewer posts. This could have affected the overall representativeness of the study, as themes were derived from the data resulting from the investigated tags and keywords.

## Future Directions

Furthering this point with the results of this study in mind, in a world where media holds an immense influence on public opinions and perceptions, assuring that men of Asian descent are represented accurately is necessary in order to dismantle prejudices rather than reinforce them. On platforms such as Reddit, it was observed that men of Asian descent often sought out one another's advice on forums such as "Asian masculinity." Applying this and the results of this study, future research in this area should consider creating support groups and other



initiatives in which men of Asian descent and other marginalized groups can reach out and connect to combat discrimination in the media.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my advisor for the valuable insight provided to me on this topic.

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