When Compliments Fail to Flatter:
American Individualism and Responses to Positive Stereotypes

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Five studies show that being the target of a positive stereotype is a negative interpersonal experience for those from individualistic cultures because positive stereotypes interfere with their desire to be seen as individuals separate from their groups. U.S.-born Asian Americans and women who heard a positive stereotype about their group in an intergroup interaction (e.g., "Asians are good at math," "women are nurturing") derogated their partner and experienced greater negative emotions than those who heard no stereotype. Negative reactions were mediated by a sense of being depersonalized, or "lumped together" with others in one's group, by the positive stereotype (Studies 1–3). Cross-cultural differences (Study 4) and an experimental manipulation of cultural self-construal (Study 5) demonstrated that those with an independent self-construal reacted more negatively to positive stereotypes than those with an interdependent self-construal. By bringing together research on stereotypes from the target's perspective with research on culture, this work demonstrates how cultural self-construals inform the way people interpret and respond to being the target of positive stereotypes.

Keywords: positive stereotypes, depersonalization, cultural self-construal, gender, race

Are compliments flattering? People generally like those who compliment them (Gordon, 1996) and want their traits and characteristics viewed in a positive light by others (Schlenker, 1980). Yet when these same compliments are directed to a social group, they are not always received positively by group members (e.g., Garcia, Miller, Smith, & Mackie, 2006). In 2006, *The New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof published an article titled "The Model Students" in which he praised Asian Americans for their hard work, ambition, and academic successes, concluding that, "increasingly in America, stellar academic achievement has an Asian face" (Kristof, 2006a, para. 4). Despite Kristof's glowing portrayal, Asian Americans were quick to reject these positive depictions of their group, with Asian American readers accusing Kristof of making "sweeping generalizations" (Kristof, 2006b, para. 2) and "rampant assumptions" (Le, 2006). Kristof, surprised by the hostility, noted a week later that he was "still getting indignant e-mails from Asian Americans" who were upset about being the target of positive stereotypes (Kristof, 2006b). While the connotations associated with negative stereotypes provide a clear

reason for resistance, motivations for denouncing positive stereotypes are less intuitive.

In this article, we argue that positive stereotypes impose a social identity onto their targets and cause them to feel depersonalized, or "lumped together" with others in their social group, by the stereotyper. We suggest that in individualistic cultures, or those cultures that define the self as unique and separate from others (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, & Tipton, 1985; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989), being depersonalized is threatening because it denies targets their sense of individuality from their groups. Positive stereotypes can thus constitute a form of categorization threat (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999) because the imposition of a social identity can cause targets to feel that their individual characteristics and merits are being overlooked or unacknowledged.

Responses to Positive Stereotypes

Positive stereotypes are defined as positively valenced traits (e.g., intelligent, cooperative) that are ascribed to a social group (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Ho & Jackson, 2001). In contrast to the relatively large body of work on the perils of negative stereotypes (see Fiske, 1998, for a review), the smaller body of work that has investigated positive stereotypes has by and large found that activating positive stereotypes has beneficial effects on targets, particularly when those positive stereotypes are self-endorsed or subtly activated (Biernat, Vescio, & Green, 1996; Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady, 1999; Sinclair, Hardin, & Lowery, 2006; Walton & Cohen, 2003; but see Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2000; Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman, & Stone, 2008).

However, as observed in the Kristof (2006b) controversy, those on the receiving end of a blatant positive stereotype may not find them as positive. Similar episodes of a public figure complimenting a group—such as when presidential candidate Tommy Thomp-

son referred to Jews as "outstanding business people" (Associated Press, 2007, para. 3)— have also been met with fierce resistance by those in the target group. In an empirical demonstration of how people respond to being the target of a positive stereotype, Czopp (2008) found that African Americans who overheard a White male declare that African Americans are "unbelievable natural athletes" concluded that he was more prejudiced and less likeable than those who did not hear such a statement. Although expressing positive stereotypes may be intended to acknowledge group successes, those on the receiving end may fail to take them as compliments.

Depersonalization From the Target's Perspective

A sense that one is being depersonalized, or seen as interchangeable with others in one's social category by the stereotyper, may be one reason targets react negatively to positive stereotypes. Positive stereotypes may signal to targets that the stereotyper's judgment of them is based solely on their group membership rather than on their individual traits and attributes. For people who define the self as unique and distinct, such disregard for one's individuality constitutes a threat (Branscombe et al., 1999; Brewer & Pickett, 1999; Lynn & Snyder, 2002). Like with other intergroup threats, the sense that one is being reduced to one's group membership may lead to the derogation of those who instigate the threat and provoke negative emotions such as anger (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Shelton, Richeson, & Vorauer, 2006; Van Zomeren, Fischer, & Spears, 2007).

Note that we do not argue that there is something inherently threatening about depersonalization. On the continuum from being completely individuated to being completely subsumed under one's social category (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990), *placing oneself* closer to the category side can be a highly positive experience. Social identity theorists have shown that those who are highly identified with their group, defined as perceiving themselves as "interchangeable exemplars of a social category rather than as unique personalities" (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987, p. 50), experience positive outcomes such as higher self-esteem and a greater sense of belonging (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). However, we investigate what happens when one's social category is *imposed* by someone else, rather than claimed for oneself. Our conceptualization of depersonalization is therefore closer to Tajfel's (1978) original use of the term depersonalization in which "members of one group act toward members of another in complete disregard of the individual differences between them" (p. 42).

While the sense that one is being depersonalized may also explain negative responses to negative stereotypes and other group generalizations (e.g., "all Asians look alike"), the current article focuses on positive stereotypes for two reasons. First, whereas it has increasingly become the norm to not endorse or state negative stereotypes, positive stereotypes continue to be expressed in society (Bergsieker, Leslie, Constantine, & Fiske, 2012). Members of groups that are associated with positive stereotypes report being the targets of positive stereotypes in their everyday interactions with others (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007). Second, positive stereotypes present targets with an interesting dilemma that is not present with these other group generalizations. Whereas resisting a negative stereotype can fulfill a need to individuate oneself and simultaneously satisfy the desire to convey a positive image of oneself and one's group (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, &

Broadnax, 1994; Steele & Aronson, 1995), responding negatively to a positive stereotype pits these two goals against one another. On the one hand, resisting a positive stereotype allows targets to express their individuality from others in their group. On the other hand, doing so may interfere with a desire to have oneself and one's group portrayed in a positive light. How this dilemma is resolved, we suggest, depends on how targets of positive stereotypes construe the self.

Cultural Self-Construal and Positive Stereotypes

Cultures differ in how they define the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). In individualistic cultural contexts, prominent in America and Northern Europe, people believe in an "inherent separateness of distinct persons" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 226). The self is thought of as an independent and autonomous entity that is distinct from others (Bellah et al., 1985; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). As a result, people who engage in individualistic cultural contexts see themselves as unique and separate from others in their groups (H. S. Kim & Drolet, 2003; H. S. Kim & Markus, 1999; Triandis, 1989). When this sense of individuality is usurped or impinged upon, people in individualistic contexts respond negatively and try to compensate to reestablish personal distinctiveness (Brewer & Pickett, 1999; Y.-H. Kim, Cohen, & Au, 2010; Lynn & Snyder, 2002). For those who engage in individualistic cultures, being the target of a stereotype— even a positive one—may be in direct conflict with the desire to define one's core self as a separate and distinct entity.

In contrast, in collectivistic cultural contexts, prominent in many Asian countries, emphasis is placed on the "fundamental connectedness of human beings to each other" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 227). An interdependent view of the self is the cultural ideal, and people are taught to see themselves as similar and connected to others. People who uphold an interdependent view of the self prefer to maintain their sense of harmony and similarity with others in their groups and consider distinguishing themselves from close others a violation of social norms (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; H. S. Kim & Drolet, 2003; H. S. Kim & Markus, 1999). Positive stereotypes may be less problematic for those who engage in collectivistic cultures because being seen as connected to others in their group is more compatible with how they see themselves. Although people who engage in both individualistic and collectivistic cultures may recognize that a positive stereotype is reducing them to their group membership, this realization should be particularly threatening for those who desire to see themselves as independent and differentiated from their social groups.

Is there evidence that people differ in how they respond to positive stereotypes of their group? Oyserman and Sakamoto (1997, p. 445) asked Asian Americans how they felt about being portrayed as a "model minority," or a minority group that is perceived as having achieved academic and financial successes. They found that 51.7% of respondents had a negative reaction (e.g., "Once again it creates biases. Not everyone is a perfect example"), 26.3% had a positive reaction (e.g., "It depicts success in my ethnicity, and I take great pride in it"), and 15.9% were ambivalent (e.g., "Better than being associated with crime, laziness, stupidity, etc."). The authors noted that those with negative reactions to positive stereotypes cited feelings of being depersonalized (e.g., "It is STILL a STEREOTYPE . . . I try with all my

ability to avoid being labeled"), while those who embraced the stereotype provided explanations involving self-definitions that included the group (e.g., "It's nice because due to stereotypes, this will be associated with me"). The ways in which people define the self may play a central role in determining reactions to positive stereotypes.

Overview

In the current work, we examine how the presence of a positive stereotype in an intergroup interaction influences targets' interpersonal and emotional responses. Our studies investigate responses among two groups that are known targets of positive stereotypes: Asian Americans and women. Asian Americans are positively stereotyped as competent while women are positively stereotyped as warm (Fiske et al., 2002). Examining two groups not only tests the generality of the theory but establishes whether effects are consistent across positive stereotypes with different stereotype content. In Part I, we investigate—using both real intergroup interactions (Study 1) and vignettes that test an array of positive stereotypes (Studies 2–3)—whether those who engage in individualistic cultural contexts respond negatively to being the target of a positive stereotype and the role that being depersonalized plays in explaining these responses. Then, in Part II, we turn to investigating cultural self-construal as a moderator of responses to positive stereotypes (Studies 4–5). Along the way, we consider and test potential alternative explanations, such as targets' negativity to having the self-defined by someone else (Y.-H. Kim et al., 2010) and perceptions that those who state a positive stereotype also hold negative attitudes toward their group. Together, our studies seek to demonstrate *whether*, *why,* and *for whom* being the target of a positive stereotype is a negative experience.

Part I: Negative Responses to Positive Stereotypes

The first three studies examine how U.S.-born Asian Americans (Studies 1 and 3) and women (Study 2) react to being the target of a positive stereotype. We hypothesize that being the target of a positive stereotype will be a threatening interpersonal experience for those who engage in individualistic cultural contexts, causing them to derogate the stereotyper and experience stronger negative emotions, compared to those who are not the target of a positive stereotype. Negative responses, we further hypothesize, will be mediated by a sense of being depersonalized by the positive stereotype—a state that should be threatening to those who engage in individualistic cultural contexts.

Study 1: Asian Americans React Negatively to Being Called Good at Math

U.S.-born Asian Americans participated in an interracial interaction with a White student confederate who either stated a positive stereotype about Asian Americans' math ability (Ho & Jackson, 2001) or stated no positive stereotype. Similar to those investigating negative stereotypes (e.g., Shelton et al., 2006; Tropp, 2003), we were interested in how being on the receiving end of a positive stereotype influences interpersonal responses. Although Asian Americans have both individualistic and collectivistic cultural mindsets available to them (Hong, Morris, Chiu, &

Benet-Martínez, 2000; Oyserman, Sorensen, Reber, & Chen, 2009; Rhee, Uleman, Lee, & Roman, 1995), U.S.-born and Canadian-born Asian Americans endorse American notions of individualism more than foreign-born Asians (H. S. Kim & Drolet, 2003; Ross, Xun, & Wilson, 2002; Tsai, Ying, & Lee, 2000) and have been found to embrace an independent self-construal as much as European Americans (H. S. Kim & Sherman, 2007). Because of their engagement with American individualism, we hypothesized that U.S.-born Asian Americans who heard an outgroup member state a positive stereotype about their group would derogate this person more than U.S.-born Asian Americans who did not hear the outgroup member state a positive stereotype. We also measured negative emotions such as anger to assess whether being the target of a positive stereotype is a threatening experience (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Van Zomeren et al., 2007).

Method.

Participants. Forty-one U.S.-born Asian American undergraduates (46% women) participated in exchange for partial course credit in a psychology course. Funneled debriefing (Bargh & Chartrand, 2000) revealed that no participants expressed suspicion about the confederate or procedures.

Procedure. Participants were told that the purpose of the study was to assess work styles. They were brought into lab along with a White confederate who was posing as another participant. Participants and confederates learned they would complete a set of exercises for five minutes. These exercises came in the form of two packets, one containing math problems and the other containing English problems, and they were labeled and described as such by the experimenter. The experimenter tossed a coin to decide who would be responsible for distributing the packets. In every session, the coin toss was rigged such that the confederate would always be responsible for distributing the packets.

Once the experimenter left the room, the confederate flipped through both packets. In the positive stereotype condition, the confederate said, "I know all Asians are good at math, how about you take the math packet. I'll work on this one." In the control condition, the confederate said only, "How about you take this packet, I'll work on this one." In both conditions, the confederate then handed the math packet to participants.

The experimenter returned after five minutes, gathered the packets, and separated the confederate and participant. The participant then completed a computer-based questionnaire. Evaluations of their partner were measured using three items: "My partner seems like he/she would be easy to get along with," "My partner seems considerate," and "My partner is insensitive" ($\alpha = .68$), rated on a scale with endpoints 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*). The first two items were reverse scored such that higher scores corresponded to more negative evaluations.

A preliminary measure of the sense of being depersonalized was assessed with the question, "To what extent does your partner see you only for your racial group," on a scale with endpoints of 1 (*sees me as an individual*) to 7 (*sees me only for my racial group*). To avoid raising suspicion, participants were asked the same question as it related to other social groups, including their gender and socioeconomic status, and were also asked other questions about their partner (e.g., "My partner seems task oriented"). Negative emotions were measured by asking participants how angry, annoyed, and offended they felt on a scale with endpoints 1 (*not at all*) and 7 (*very much*; $\alpha = .86$). These emotions have been

used previously to assess feelings of threat in interpersonal contexts (Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Davis & Stephan, 2011; Van Zomeren et al., 2007). Negative emotions were intermixed with four filler emotion questions (e.g., relaxed). Demographic information was collected at the end.

Results.

Evaluation of partner.   Asian Americans who heard a positive stereotype about their group evaluated their partner more negatively ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.27$) than Asian Americans who did not hear a positive stereotype ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 0.60$), $t(39) = 2.70$, $p = .01$, $d = 0.89$.

Negative emotions.   Positively stereotyped Asian Americans experienced greater negative emotions ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.77$) than Asian Americans who were not positively stereotyped ($M = 1.74$, $SD = 0.93$), $t(39) = 2.49$, $p = .03$, $d = 0.76$.

Sense of being depersonalized.   Positively stereotyped Asian Americans reported a greater sense of being depersonalized ($M = 5.48$, $SD = 1.24$) than Asian Americans who received no positive stereotype ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.51$), $t(39) = 3.31$, $p = .002$, $d = 1.03$. Interestingly, control participants' sense of being depersonalized was at the midpoint between complete depersonalization and complete individuation, $t(17) = 0.16$, $p = .88$. This finding suggests that even in the control condition, participants did not feel that their individuality was fully recognized, a point we return to in the discussion.

Depersonalization as a mediator of the relationship between positive stereotypes and interpersonal responses.   We investigated if the sense of being depersonalized by a positive stereotype explained Asian Americans' negative evaluations of their partner, using mediational procedures outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986) with the Preacher and Hayes (2004) macro and 5,000 bootstrap resamples. In Steps 1 and 2, as seen above, compared to participants who were not positively stereotyped, those who were the target of a positive stereotype evaluated their partner more negatively ($b = 0.88$, $SE = .33$, $p = .01$) and had a greater sense of being depersonalized ($b = 1.42$, $SE = .43$, $p = .002$). In Step 3, sense of being depersonalized predicted more negative evaluation of the partner upon controlling for being a target of a positive stereotype ($b = 0.29$, $SE = .11$, $p = .02$). In Step 4, controlling for sense of being depersonalized eliminated the previously significant relationship between being the target of a positive stereotype and negative evaluation of the partner ($b = 0.47$, $SE = .35$, $p = .18$; Sobel $z = 1.94$, $p = .05$); 95% confidence interval (CI) for the indirect effect [.08, .90]. The sense of being depersonalized by a positive stereotype offers a potential explanation for why Asian Americans judge outgroup members who state positive stereotypes in a negative manner.

Next, we examined if the sense of being depersonalized mediated Asian Americans' experience of negative emotions after being positively stereotyped using the same meditational procedures outlined above. In Steps 1 and 2, Asian Americans who were the target of a positive stereotype experienced greater negative emotions ($b = 1.07$, $SE = .46$, $p = .03$) and had a greater sense of being depersonalized (see above paragraph) than those who were not. In Step 3, there was a trend for the sense of being depersonalized to predict greater negative emotions upon controlling for being a target of a positive stereotype ($b = 0.28$, $SE = .17$, $p = .11$). In Step 4, the relationship between being the target of a positive stereotype and experiencing greater negative emotions

became nonsignificant upon controlling for a sense of being depersonalized ($b = 0.68$, $SE = .51$, $p = .19$), but the overall mediation model did not reach significance (Sobel $z = 1.42$, $p = .16$). We test this mediation again in Study 3 with a more robust measure of depersonalization.

Discussion.   A positive stereotype stated in an interracial interaction, in the form of a compliment about the math ability of Asian Americans, caused U.S.-born Asian Americans to negatively evaluate their interaction partner and experience stronger negative emotions compared to U.S.-born Asian Americans who did not receive a positive stereotype. Positive stereotypes can result in negative consequences for targets and for perceivers, to the extent that perceivers care about how they are evaluated by targets. These results are especially powerful because participants in the control condition did not feel particularly individuated, thus providing a conservative test of our hypothesis. This lack of individuation may have been due to feeling positively stereotyped by virtue of being handed the math problems rather than the English problems.

As a first attempt to assess a potential mechanism for negative responses to positive stereotypes, we included a one-item measure assessing the sense of being depersonalized by the stereotyper. We found, as predicted, that positive stereotypes caused their targets to believe they were being reduced to their racial group by the stereotyper. This sense of being depersonalized explained why Asian Americans who received a positive stereotype were more likely to negatively evaluate their partner. There was also a trend for the sense of being depersonalized to explain why U.S.-born Asian Americans who were the target of a positive stereotype experienced greater negative emotions. This mediation for negative emotions may have only trended toward significance because we used a one-item measure of the mediator that lacked an affective component. As a result, this measure may not have effectively captured potential feelings of threat. We therefore sought a stronger test of our mediator in subsequent studies by making two changes. First, we expanded our measure of depersonalization. Second, explicitly referring to "all" (i.e., "all Asians") in the manipulation may have triggered a sense of being depersonalized. We addressed this by no longer preceding the positive stereotype with the word "all." We also sought to extend the scope of this phenomenon in the next study by investigating a different set of positive stereotypes. Accordingly, we investigated how women react to positive stereotypes of their group.

Study 2: Women React Negatively to Being the Target of a Positive Stereotype

Study 2 builds on the previous study by examining a different set of positive stereotypes, namely, those associated with women. Stereotypes of women—for instance, as nurturing and cooperative (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989)—are categorized as high warmth, low competency as opposed to the low warmth, high competency stereotypes used in the previous study (Fiske et al., 2002). We assessed women's interpersonal responses by measuring dislike of the person who stated the stereotype (similar to Czopp, 2008; Shelton, Richeson, Salvatore, & Trawalter, 2005). We further tested whether being on the receiving end of these positive stereotypes causes women to sense they are being

depersonalized and reduced to their gender group by the stereotyper.

Method.

Participants. One hundred eleven U.S.-born female undergraduates participated in a mass testing session in exchange for participant pool credit.

Procedure. Participants were randomly assigned to be the target of one of two positive stereotypes ("cooperative" or "nurturing") or received no positive stereotype. In the positive stereotype condition, participants indicated their gender and read one of the two following scenarios:

> Imagine class is about to end when your teaching assistant allows a nonprofit representative to make an announcement. After getting everyone's attention, the representative began his announcement and says, "Our organization is looking for tutors to mentor high school students. I know [insert your gender] are very nurturing. We could use you in our programs. Please consider volunteering!"

> Imagine you are interning for a company and assigned a team project with four project members. On the first day, you send an e-mail to your team members to try and set up an introductory meeting. During lunchtime, a team member comes up to you and remarks, "I got your e-mail! I still have to check my schedule and then I'll get back to you. Wow, the project doesn't even start until 2 weeks from now! You [insert your gender] are so cooperative. I can't wait to get started! I'll e-mail you soon."

In the control condition version of the above scenarios, participants did not indicate their gender and did not receive the sentence with the positive stereotype.

After imagining themselves in the situation, participants filled out a questionnaire that assessed how much they liked the person in the scenario, measured with two items: "How much would you like this person" and "How much would you want to be friends with this person," $r(111) = .87$, $p < .001$, on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*; adapted from Czopp, 2008; Shelton et al., 2005). Ratings were reverse scored such that higher ratings corresponded to greater dislike.

Sense of being depersonalized was assessed with four questions: "To what extent does this person see you as more than just a member of your gender group" (1 = *sees me only as another member* to 7 = *sees me as more than just another member;* reverse scored), "To what extent does this person see you only for your gender group" (1 = *sees me as an individual* to 7 = *sees me only for my gender group*), "To what extent does this person make you feel identical to other members of your gender group" (1 = *not at all identical* to 7 = *very identical*), and "In your opinion, to what extent is this person's judgment based solely on your gender" (1 = *not at all based on gender* to 7 = *completely based on gender*; $\alpha = .79$).[1]

Results.

Dislike of the person. A 2 (Condition: positive stereotype vs. no stereotype) × 2 (Scenario: volunteer vs. team meeting) between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) on dislike revealed a main effect of Condition such that women who were positively stereotyped reported disliking the person more ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.34$) than women who were not positively stereotyped ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.22$), $F(1, 107) = 5.28$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$.[2]

Sense of being depersonalized. A 2 (Condition: positive stereotype vs. no stereotype) × 2 (Scenario: volunteer vs. team meeting) between-subjects ANOVA on sense of being depersonalized revealed a main effect of Condition, $F(1, 107) = 123.53$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .54$. Women who received a positive stereotype felt a stronger sense of being depersonalized ($M = 5.17$, $SD = 1.08$) than women who were not positively stereotyped ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.05$).

Sense of being depersonalized mediates the relationship between positive stereotypes and dislike. We examined whether women's negative interpersonal reactions to the positive stereotypes were explained by a sense of being depersonalized, using the same procedures as Study 1. In Steps 1 and 2, as seen above, compared to women who were not positively stereotyped, women who were targets of positive stereotypes disliked the person more ($b = 0.61$, $SE = .25$, $p = .01$) and reported a stronger sense of being depersonalized ($b = 2.23$, $SE = .20$, $p < .001$). In Step 3, sense of being depersonalized continued to predict dislike upon controlling for receiving the positive stereotype ($b = 0.36$, $SE = .11$, $p = .002$). In Step 4, the relationship between positive stereotypes and dislike was no longer significant ($b = -0.18$, $SE = .34$, $p = .59$; Sobel $z = 3.08$, $p = .002$), 95% CI [.34, 1.32]. Sense of being depersonalized significantly mediated women's negative reaction to positive stereotypes.

Discussion. Women who heard someone state a positive stereotype of their group disliked this person more than women who did not hear a positive stereotype. Not only did negative effects of positive stereotypes extend from Asian Americans to women in this study, it also held for two different positive stereotypes of women as nurturing and cooperative. Taken together with the previous study, these results suggest that receiving a positive stereotype can be a negative experience whether the positive stereotypes invoke competency or warmth. This study also provided additional support for our proposed mediator. Women who were targets of positive stereotypes sensed that they were being

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[1] Gender identification was also measured by asking how strongly identified participants were with their gender on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). There was no difference in gender identification between women who were positively stereotyped ($M = 5.77$, $SD = 1.08$) and those who were not ($M = 5.84$, $SD = 1.10$), $F(1, 106) = 0.13$, $p = .72$. Thus, we do not believe that being asked to indicate gender in the positive stereotype condition influenced results, but we eliminated this procedure in our subsequent studies. We also used this measure of gender identification to examine two hypotheses. First, we investigated whether those who identify more strongly with their gender respond differently to positive stereotypes than those who are less gender-identified. We did not find support for this hypothesis, perhaps because highly identified group members have competing motivations when it comes to positive stereotypes. They may desire to see their group positively (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) yet also be more sensitive to what they see as prejudice toward their group (Operario & Fiske, 2001). Second, we were curious whether positive stereotypes would cause women to distance from their female identity as a way to individuate themselves. That women reported similar levels of gender identification across conditions could be an indication that it is possible to desire individuality above and beyond one's group membership while at the same time feel identified with one's group (see also General Discussion).

[2] There were theoretically irrelevant main effects of Scenario in Studies 2–5 such that participants disliked the person and felt a stronger sense of being depersonalized in some scenarios more than others (effects differed across studies). However, there were no interactions between Condition and Scenario on any of our dependent measures in all four studies, all Condition by Scenario interactions (Fs < 1.70, ps $> .18$). Thus, we collapsed across scenarios in our analyses.

depersonalized, or "lumped together" with others in their gender group. Variations in how people respond to being depersonalized may help to explain why some women find it problematic to have their group characterized through the lens of positive stereotypes while others appreciate such characterizations (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

The positive stereotype conditions in this study and the previous study included a positively valenced trait not mentioned in the control conditions (i.e., "good at math"). This method makes a powerful point about positive stereotypes because they evoke negative reactions even compared to hearing a statement that lacks such a positively valenced characteristic. That is, it may be better to say nothing complimentary at all than to pay a compliment in the form of a positive stereotype. However, one could also argue that the positive stereotypes in these two studies were not actually positive. Perhaps being perceived as good at math is not perceived as desirable because it suggests a lack of sociability. Additionally, the warmth-based traits used in the current study may be devalued compared to more agentic traits (Eagly & Karau, 2002). In the next three studies, we address this potential limitation in two ways. First, we include traits that are objectively more desirable (e.g., intelligent, hardworking). Second, we include a control condition in which the same positive trait is directed at the self. This latter change also allows us to investigate an alternative explanation that the current effects are due to people in individualistic cultures disliking having their self defined by others or "fenced in" (Brehm, 1966; Y.-H. Kim et al., 2010). In the next study, we also more explicitly measure whether the sense of being depersonalized is a threatening state for those who engage in individualistic cultures. This more explicit measure of threat affords us the opportunity to test the relationship between feeling depersonalized and negative emotions that may result from feeling threatened (Van Zomeren et al., 2007).

Study 3: Asian Americans and the Threat of Being Depersonalized by a Positive Stereotype

Study 3 examined U.S.-born Asian Americans' reactions to a wider array of positive stereotypes about their group. In addition to being stereotyped as good at math, Asian Americans are also positively stereotyped as ambitious, hardworking, and intelligent (Ho & Jackson, 2001). U.S.-born Asian Americans imagined being the target of one of four positive stereotypes (e.g., "Asians are so hardworking") or the same positive trait directed at the self (e.g., "You are so hardworking"). This control condition ensured that the observed effects were not due to hearing the trait in one condition but not in the other or due to feeling "fenced in" by someone else's definition of them (Brehm, 1966; Y.-H. Kim et al., 2010). This study also included a more explicit measure of the threat associated with being depersonalized by a positive stereotype. Finally, we tested for the alternative explanation that U.S.-born Asian Americans reacted negatively to the positive stereotypes because these stereotypes were conveyed in a way that denies them their American identity (Cheryan & Monin, 2005).

Method.

Participants. Seventy-one U.S.-born Asian Americans (39% female) were approached on campus.

Procedure. Participants were randomly assigned to imagine that they were the target of one of four positive stereotypes about

Asian Americans (i.e., good at math, hardworking, ambitious, or intelligent; Ho & Jackson, 2001) or were the target of an individual-directed positive trait. For example, in one version of the positive stereotype condition, participants read,

> Imagine a professor has assigned you a group project with three other people. The next day in class, the group takes time to assign roles to each person. During the group discussion, one of the team members turns to you and says, "Asians are pretty hardworking; you guys know how to get stuff done. Why not take on the role as project manager?"

Participants in the individual-directed positive trait condition read the same scenario, but the trait was instead directed at the self. (i.e., "You are pretty hardworking; you know how to get stuff done." See Appendix for other scenarios.)

Dislike of the person in the scenario was assessed using the same questions as the previous study, $r(70) = .57$, $p < .001$. Negative emotions were measured using the same emotions as those described in Study 1: anger, annoyance, and offense ($\alpha = .87$). The threat of being depersonalized was measured by asking participants the extent to which they agreed with the four following statements on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*; $\alpha = .97$): "I would worry that this person is judging me based solely on my race," "I would be concerned that this person is viewing me as identical to other members of my racial group," "I would worry that this person is seeing me as the same as others in my racial group," and "I would worry that this person is grouping me together with others of my racial group." These questions were designed based on previous research that measured threat as a worry or concern that one is being viewed through the lens of a stereotype (Cohen & Garcia, 2005; Marx & Goff, 2005). Participants' perception of whether their American identity went unrecognized was measured by asking, "How American does this person think you are?" on a scale from 1 (*not at all American*) to 7 (*very American*; reverse scored). Demographics were collected at the end.

Results.

Dislike. Asian Americans who were the target of a positive stereotype disliked the person more ($M = 4.78$, $SD = 1.05$) and felt greater negative emotions compared to Asian Americans who received an individual-directed positive trait ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.02$), $t(69) = 2.65$, $p = .01$, $d = 0.63$.

Negative emotions. Positively stereotyped Asian Americans experienced greater negative emotions ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.56$) compared to Asian Americans who received an individual-directed positive trait ($M = 2.29$, $SD = 1.42$), $t(69) = 3.63$, $p = .001$, $d = 0.87$.

Threat of being depersonalized. Positively stereotyped Asian Americans reported a stronger threat of being depersonalized ($M = 4.81$, $SD = 1.80$) than Asian Americans who received an individual-directed positive trait ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 1.78$), $t(69) = 4.50$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.07$.

Threat of being depersonalized as a mediator of the relationship between positive stereotypes and negative responses. First, we examined if negative interpersonal reactions could be explained by the threat of being depersonalized by the positive stereotype using the same procedures as the previous studies. Consistent with predictions, the threat of being depersonalized was a significant mediator of the relationship between positive stereotypes and dislike of the person (Step 1: $b = 0.66$, $SE = .25$, $p =$

.01; Step 2: $b = 1.92$, $SE = .43$, $p < .001$; Step 3: $b = 0.18$, $SE = .07$, $p = .01$; Step 4: $b = .0.32$, $SE = .27$, $p = .24$; Sobel $z = 2.23$, $p = .03$; 95% CI [.06, .64]).

Next, we investigated whether the threat of being depersonalized by the positive stereotype could explain targets' greater negative emotions using the same mediation procedures as above. As predicted, the threat of being depersonalized significantly mediated the relationship between being the target of a positive stereotype and negative emotions (Step 1: $b = 1.30$, $SE = .36$, $p = .001$; Step 2: $b = 1.92$, $SE = .43$, $p < .001$; Step 3: $b = 0.48$, $SE = .08$, $p < .001$; Step 4: $b = 0.38$, $SE = .34$, $p = .26$; Sobel $z = 3.50$, $p = .001$; 95% CI [.47, .1.46]).

Potential alternative mediator. Does the threat of being depersonalized remain a significant mediator even after accounting for the alternative explanation that the positive stereotype conditions caused negative reactions because Asian Americans perceived that their American identity was not being recognized? We conducted a meditational analysis with multiple mediators (Kenny, Kashy, & Bolger, 1998) using the SPSS macro developed by Preacher and Hayes (2008) with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. See above paragraphs for Steps 1 and 2. Also in Step 2, positively stereotyped Asian Americans perceived that the stereotyper saw them as less American than those who were not positively stereotyped ($b = 0.74$, $SE = .29$, $p = .01$). In Step 3, threat of being depersonalized predicted greater dislike of the person ($b = 0.15$, $SE = .07$, $p = .04$), but having one's American identity denied did not ($b = 0.12$, $SE = .10$, $p = .24$). In Step 4, the relationship between receiving a positive stereotype and dislike was no longer significant upon entering the mediators ($b = 0.28$, $SE = .27$, $p = .30$). The 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect of the threat of being depersonalized did not include zero [.04, .61] suggesting that the threat of being depersonalized remained a significant mediator. These data suggest that the threat of being depersonalized plays a unique role in explaining negative reactions toward positive stereotypes, above and beyond perceptions that one's American identity is being denied.

Discussion. Although Asian Americans were ascribed a positive trait in both conditions, they responded more negatively when this positive trait was directed to their group rather than the self. Across four positive stereotypes, U.S.-born Asian Americans who were the target of a positive stereotype derogated that person more than those who were the target of an individual-directed positive trait. Negative reactions to positive stereotypes therefore occur above and beyond the threat that results in individualistic contexts from having one's self defined by someone else (Y.-H. Kim et al., 2010). The fact that similar results were obtained across the four positive stereotypes suggests that results are not due to something idiosyncratic about a particular stereotype but apply to positive stereotypes about Asian Americans more broadly.

The present results correspond with our previous studies that show that being positively stereotyped is a threatening experience. Using a more explicit measure to assess threat, we showed that the threat of being depersonalized explained U.S.-born Asian Americans' derogation of the people who state them. Furthermore, the threat of being depersonalized explained why U.S.-born Asian Americans who were the target of a positive stereotype experienced greater negative emotions. The threat of being depersonalized remained a significant mediator even when accounting for another threat: that of having their American identity denied to

them. Being the target of a positive stereotype threatens how U.S.-born Asian Americans desire to be seen by others, leading to negative interpersonal consequences when a positive stereotype is deployed in an interracial interaction.

Part II: Negative for Everyone? Culture and Positive Stereotypes

In Studies 1–3, we demonstrated that U.S.-born Asian Americans and women react negatively to being the target of a positive stereotype. Negative interpersonal responses were accounted for by targets' sense that they were being depersonalized by the stereotyper. In the next section, we turn to a further test of our mediator by investigating how cultural self-construal moderates responses to positive stereotypes. We argue that while those with interdependent and independent self-construals may recognize that positive stereotypes are depersonalizing to the same extent, those with an independent self-construal should find being depersonalized a more negative experience than those with an interdependent self-construal. People with an independent self-construal, who endorse a view of the self as separate from others, may thus be more prone to react negatively to positive stereotypes than people with an interdependent self-construal, who define the self as connected to others.

Although we investigate these cultural hypotheses more fully in the next two studies, we obtained preliminary support by revisiting Study 2 (i.e., women's responses to positive stereotypes). One advantage of having recruited participants from a mass testing session was that we could analyze the data from an additional 23 women who were not born in the United States and compare them to our U.S.-born sample. A 2 (Condition: stereotype vs. no stereotype) × 2 (Birthplace: U.S.-born vs. non-U.S.-born) between-subjects ANOVA on dislike of the person revealed a marginally significant interaction, $F(1, 130) = 3.28$, $p = .07$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. In contrast to U.S.-born women (see Study 2 results), the foreign-born women did not differ in how much they disliked those who stated a positive stereotype ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.46$) compared to those who stated no positive stereotype ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 0.79$), $F(1, 130) = 0.75$, $p = .39$. These findings provide initial support that cultural background may play a role in determining how people react to being a target of a positive stereotype. Study 4 builds on these preliminary findings by testing a larger sample of U.S.-born and Asian-born Asian Americans, and Study 5 examines the causal role of cultural self-construal in shaping responses to positive stereotypes.

Study 4: Cultural Background Moderates Negative Reactions to Positive Stereotypes

The current study used place of birth as a proxy for cultural self-construal and compared Asian Americans born in the United States to those born abroad in Asia. Asian Americans born abroad in Eastern collectivistic countries but living in Western individualistic countries are less likely to endorse an independent self-construal than their counterparts of the same race born in Western individualistic countries (H. S. Kim & Drolet, 2009; Ross et al., 2002). We predicted that for Asian Americans born in the U.S., positive stereotypes would be a negative interpersonal experience because they evoke a sense of being depersonalized. For Asian

Americans born in Asia, although they too may realize they are being depersonalized by the positive stereotype, we predicted that they would respond less negatively to being characterized in this manner and that this would be driven by less negative responses to being depersonalized. This study also tested for the alternative explanation that U.S.-born Asian Americans derogate those who state positive stereotypes because the positive stereotyper is perceived as racist (Czopp, 2008). Controlling for perceptions of racism allowed us to examine whether the sense of being depersonalized explains negative responses above and beyond the belief that the type of person who states positive stereotypes is also likely to hold negative attitudes toward one's group.

Method.

Participants. Seventy-six U.S.-born and 80 Asian-born Asian Americans (59% women) participated in a mass testing session for participant pool credit. Ethnicities of U.S.-born participants included 18 Chinese, 12 Korean, seven Vietnamese, four Japanese, two Cambodian, two Indian, two Filipino, one Pakistani, and one Thai, and the rest did not indicate their ethnicity. Ethnicities of Asian-born participants included 26 Chinese, 15 Korean, four Vietnamese, three Indian, three Filipino, and one Japanese, and the rest did not indicate their ethnicity.

Procedure. Participants were randomly assigned to imagine a situation where they either received a positive stereotype or not. The same four scenarios from the previous study were used. The control condition took one of two forms: an individual-directed positive trait (e.g., "You are good at math") or no corresponding statement. Using both control conditions enabled a comparison of the two types of control scenarios used in the previous studies.

After imagining themselves in the scenario, participants completed the same measures of dislike of the person in the scenarios as the previous studies, $r(154) = .83$, $p < .001$, and the same measures of depersonalization as Study 2 ($\alpha = .74$). The proposed alternative mediator, perceptions that the person is racist, was measured by asking, "How racist is this person?" on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very racist*).[3] Demographic information (e.g., race, birthplace) was collected at the end.

Results.

Collapsing across control conditions. We first investigated whether we could combine the two control conditions. A 2 (Condition: individual-directed trait vs. no statement) × 2 (Culture: U.S.-born vs. Asian-born) between-subjects ANOVA revealed no differences between the two control conditions on dislike, $F(1, 101) = 0.29$, $p = .59$, or sense of being depersonalized, $F(1, 101) = 1.94$, $p = .17$, and the Condition by Culture interactions were not significant, dislike: $F(1, 101) = 0.42$, $p = .52$; depersonalization: $F(1, 101) = 1.08$, $p = .30$. Thus, we collapsed across control conditions.

Dislike of the person. A 2 (Condition: positive stereotype vs. no stereotype) × 2 (Culture: U.S.-born vs. Asian-born) between-subjects ANOVA on dislike of the person revealed no main effect of Culture, $F(1, 152) = 1.26$, $p = .26$, but a main effect of Condition, $F(1, 152) = 13.34$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$, which was qualified by a Condition by Culture interaction, $F(1, 152) = 4.76$, $p = .03$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. U.S.-born participants who received a positive stereotype disliked the person more ($M = 5.09$, $SD = 1.42$) than U.S.-born participants who received no positive stereotype ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.03$), $F(1, 152) = 15.70$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$. In contrast, Asian-born participants were not influenced by whether

they received a positive stereotype or not ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.26$ vs. $M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.12$), $F(1, 152) = 1.18$, $p = .28$ (see Figure 1). Seen another way, U.S.-born participants disliked the positive stereotyper more than Asian-born participants, $F(1, 152) = 4.03$, $p = .046$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, but U.S.-born and Asian-born participants did not differ in their dislike of the person in the no stereotype condition, $F(1, 152) = 0.87$, $p = .35$.

Sense of being depersonalized. A 2 (Condition: positive stereotype vs. no stereotype) × 2 (Culture: U.S.-born vs. Asian-born) between-subjects ANOVA on sense of being depersonalized revealed a main effect of Condition, $F(1, 152) = 64.41$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .30$. Positive stereotypes elicited a stronger sense of being depersonalized ($M = 5.12$, $SD = 1.18$) compared to the no stereotype condition ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.21$). There was no main effect of Culture, $F(1, 152) = 0.50$, $p = .48$, and no interaction of Condition and Culture, $F(1, 152) = 0.04$, $p = .84$, revealing that both U.S.-born and Asian-born participants recognized that positive stereotypes are depersonalizing.

Moderated mediation: Cultural background moderates effects of depersonalization on responses to positive stereotypes. Next we examined whether the tendency for positive stereotypes to elicit negative reactions was moderated by a difference in the way that U.S.-born and Asian-born participants responded to the sense of being depersonalized (see Figure 2). We conducted a moderated mediation analysis (Model 3) using the SPSS macro developed by Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007) with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. As seen above, there was a significant condition by culture interaction on dislike of the person. In addition, there was a significant interaction between sense of being depersonalized and culture on dislike of the person, $b = 0.28$, $SE = .13$, $p = .03$. Examining the relationship between depersonalization and dislike for each cultural group showed that the sense of being depersonalized was related to greater dislike for U.S.-borns ($b = 0.56$, $SE = .18$, $p = .001$), but not Asian-borns ($b = 0.09$, $SE = .17$, $p = .59$). The effect of condition on dislike was reduced to nonsignificance ($b = 0.39$, $SE = .23$, $p = .10$), once the sense of depersonalization and its interaction with cultural group was controlled for. Examining the conditional indirect effects for each cultural group revealed that the sense of being depersonalized significantly mediated the relationship between positive stereotypes and dislike for U.S.-borns (bias-corrected 95% CI [.22, .94]) but not for Asian-borns (bias-corrected 95% CI [−.26, .47]).

Potential alternative mediator. We next assessed whether feelings of being depersonalized remained a significant mediator even after accounting for the alternative mediator that Asian Americans perceived positive stereotypers as racist. We conducted a multiple meditational analysis in the same manner as the previous study. See the above paragraph for Steps 1 and 2. Also in Step 2, positively stereotyped Asian Americans perceived the stereotyper as more racist than those who were not positively stereotyped ($b = 1.82$, $SE = .32$, $p < .001$). In Step 3, being depersonalized predicted marginally greater dislike of the person ($b = 0.21$, $SE =$

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[3] We observed differences between the two control conditions on ratings of how much the other person in the control condition scenarios was rated as racist, $F(1, 100) = 11.33$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$. Participants who received an individual-directed positive trait perceived the other person as more racist ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.43$) than participants who received no statement ($M = 1.67$, $SD = 1.05$), a finding we address in the discussion.
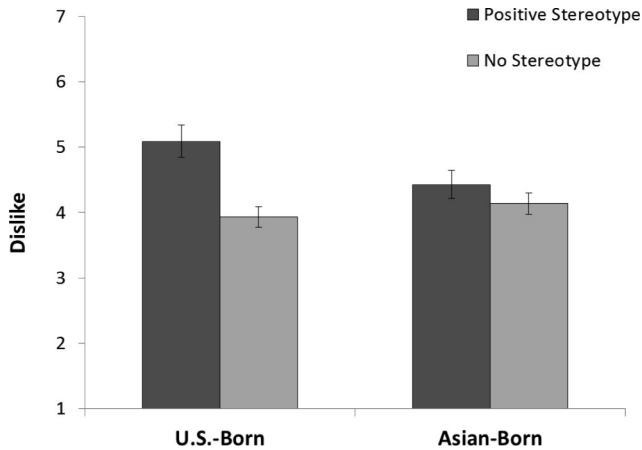
Figure 1. U.S.-born and Asian-born Asian Americans' dislike of positive stereotypers, compared with those who did not state a positive stereotype in Study 4. Error bars represent standard errors.

.12, $p = .07$), but perceptions of racism did not ($b = 0.12$, $SE = .10$, $p = .22$). In Step 4, the relationship between receiving a positive stereotype and dislike became marginal upon entering the mediators ($b = 0.59$, $SE = .33$, $p = .07$). The 95% bias-corrected confidence interval for the indirect effect of being depersonalized did not include zero [.01, .77], but for perceptions of racism it did [−.05, .70], suggesting that being depersonalized was a significant mediator. These data suggest that being depersonalized plays a unique role in explaining negative reactions toward positive stereotypes, above and beyond targets' perceptions that the stereotyper is racist.

Discussion. Negative reactions to someone who invokes a positive stereotype were more pronounced among those born in individualistic cultural contexts, which define the self as unique and separate from others, and less pronounced among those born in Eastern cultural contexts, which define the self as connected and intertwined with others (Heine & Lehman, 1997; H. S. Kim & Markus, 1999; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Although U.S.-born and Asian-born Asian Americans both sensed that they were being depersonalized by the positive stereotype, this belief only predicted negative reactions for U.S.-born Asian Americans. To understand these varying reactions to positive stereotypes, these results suggest that it is necessary to consider how people are embedded within cultural contexts that guide how they want to be seen by others.

This study included two control conditions: an individual-directed positive trait (e.g., "you are ambitious") and no statement. Comparing the two control conditions to each other revealed that U.S.-born participants liked the person who made no statement just as much as the person who offered an individual-directed compliment. The fact that the two control conditions were no different from each other among U.S.-borns may initially seem like a puzzling finding: Why would people not want to hear that they are smart or hardworking, especially in light of Americans' tendencies to self-enhance, or prefer to see themselves in a positive manner (Heine & Lehman, 1997)? One possibility is that hearing the trait directed at the self results in an ambiguous situation that can be interpreted by some as a positive stereotype. Indeed, U.S.-born Asian Americans perceived the person who stated the individual-directed positive trait as more racist than the person who made no statement (see footnote 3). Targets of positive stereotypes may thus encounter situations in which the potential positivity of hearing a compliment directed at them may be canceled out by a suspicion that the statement was based on a stereotype.

The sense of being depersonalized remained a significant mediator for U.S.-born Asian Americans even when controlling for perceptions that the stereotyper is racist. One could argue that asking directly about perceptions of racism is limited in its ability
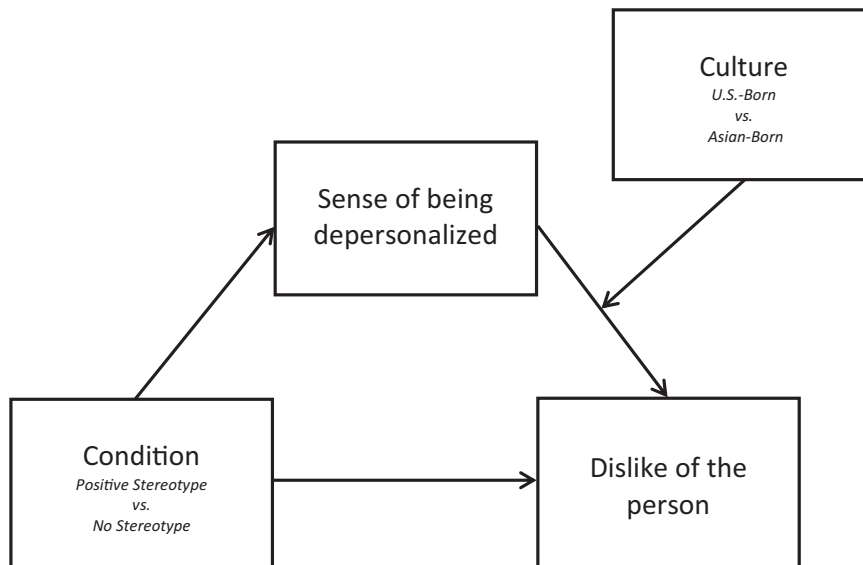

Figure 2. Depiction of the full model in Study 4. For U.S.-born Asian Americans, but not Asian-born Asian Americans, the sense of being depersonalized mediated the relationship between receiving a positive stereotype and dislike of the person (see Study 4 Results for statistics).

to tap into perceptions of racism because of the social costs of calling someone racist (Good, Moss-Racusin, & Sanchez, 2012; Kaiser & Miller, 2001). However, the fact that Asian-born participants did not respond negatively in this study to positive stereotypes lends further credence to our depersonalization hypothesis because Asian-born Asian Americans have been shown to react negatively to incidents of racism (e.g., Yip, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2008). To further test our depersonalization hypothesis, in the next study, we moderate the effects of depersonalization by including an experimental manipulation of cultural self-construal, consistent with recommendations for demonstrating the presence of psychological processes (i.e., *moderation-of-process* designs; Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005).

Using two different samples based on nativity illuminated who is most susceptible to feeling threatened by positive stereotypes in an ecologically valid manner (Oyserman & Lee, 2007). Those born into individualistic cultures deemed the presence of a positive stereotype problematic, but this was not the case for those born into collectivistic cultures. However, there were potentially other differences between the samples aside from cultural self-construal that could also explain varying responses to positive stereotypes. In the next study, we manipulate self-construal to more fully test the causal process and our proposed mechanism.

Study 5: Cultural Self-Construal Shapes Reactions to Positive Stereotypes

In this study, we hypothesized that priming an independent self-construal would elicit greater negative reactions to positive stereotypes than priming an interdependent self-construal. We used Asian American subjects because they have both self-construals available to them and are able to shift readily between them depending on which is activated in a given context (Hong et al., 2000; Oyserman et al., 2009).

Method.

Participants. Forty-nine U.S.-born Asian Americans (65% women) participated in exchange for participant pool credit. One participant was removed for skipping the priming task.

Procedure. Participants were primed with either an independent or interdependent self-construal following procedures developed by Trafimow, Triandis, and Goto (1991). For the independent prime, participants were instructed to do the following: "For the next two minutes, you will not need to write anything. Please think of what makes you different from your family and friends. What do you expect yourself to do?" For the interdependent prime, participants were instructed to do the following: "For the next two minutes, you will not need to write anything. Please think of what you have in common with your family and friends. What do they expect you to do?" This prime task has been used successfully by other researchers to prime cultural self-construal (e.g., Lalwani & Shavitt, 2009; Vohs & Heatherton, 2001) and has been shown to have stronger effects on self-construal than other commonly used cultural primes (see Oyserman & Lee, 2008, for a meta-analysis comparing cultural primes to one another).

After being primed, participants read about a scenario in which they were either positively stereotyped (e.g., "you Asians are hardworking") or received an individual-directed positive trait (e.g., "you are hardworking"). The same four scenarios from Studies 3 and 4 were used except that the word "you" was added

to the positive stereotype conditions such that participants were personally addressed in both conditions.

Negative evaluation was measured with two questions: "To what extent would you find the person's comment a compliment," on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very complimentary*), reverse scored, and "To what extent would you be offended by this person's comment," on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very offended*), $r(48) = .66$, $p < .001$. Sense of being depersonalized was measured in the same manner as the previous study ($\alpha = .84$). As a manipulation check, participants also completed the modified seven-item independent self-construal subscale of the Self-Construal scale (Singelis, 1994; $\alpha = .72$; see Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002). Demographic information was collected at the end.

Results.

Manipulation check. A 2 (Condition: positive stereotype vs. individual-directed positive trait) × 2 (Prime: independent self-construal vs. interdependent self-construal) between-subjects ANOVA revealed a main effect of Prime, $F(1, 44) = 6.05$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$. Participants primed with an independent self-construal endorsed an independent self-construal more ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 0.91$) than participants primed with an interdependent self-construal ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 0.83$). There was no significant main effect of Condition, $F(1, 44) = 0.39$, $p = .54$, and no Condition by Prime interaction, $F(1, 44) = 0.41$, $p = .53$.

Negative evaluation. A 2 (Condition: positive stereotype vs. individual-directed positive trait) × 2 (Prime: independent self-construal vs. interdependent self-construal) between-subjects ANOVA revealed a main effect of Condition, $F(1, 44) = 20.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .32$, which was qualified by a Condition by Prime interaction, $F(1, 44) = 7.10$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$. Participants primed with an independent self-construal evaluated the positive stereotype scenarios more negatively ($M = 5.13$, $SD = 1.05$) than participants primed with an interdependent self-construal ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 1.62$), $F(1, 44) = 5.71$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$. The two groups did not differ in their evaluation of the individual-directed positive trait scenarios ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.40$ vs. $M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.06$), $F(1, 44) = 1.73$, $p = .20$ (see Figure 3).

Sense of being depersonalized. A 2 (Condition: positive stereotype vs. individual-directed positive trait) × 2 (Prime: independent self-construal vs. interdependent self-construal) between-subjects ANOVA on sense of being depersonalized revealed a main effect of Condition, $F(1, 44) = 53.50$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .55$, such that participants who were the target of a positive stereotype felt a stronger sense of being depersonalized ($M = 5.70$, $SD = 0.92$) than participants who received a positive trait directed at the self ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.12$). There was no significant main effect of Prime, $F(1, 44) = 0.21$, $p = .65$, and no Condition by Prime interaction, $F(1, 44) = 1.70$, $p = .20$.

Moderated mediation: Self-construal moderates effects of depersonalization on responses to positive stereotypes. We conducted a moderated mediation analysis in the same manner as the previous study to examine whether the indirect effect of condition on negative evaluation through the sense of being depersonalized was moderated by the cultural prime. As seen above, there was a significant condition by cultural prime interaction on negative evaluation. There was also a significant interaction between sense of being depersonalized and cultural prime on negative evaluation ($b = 0.55$, $SE = .25$, $p = .04$). Sense of being depersonalized was
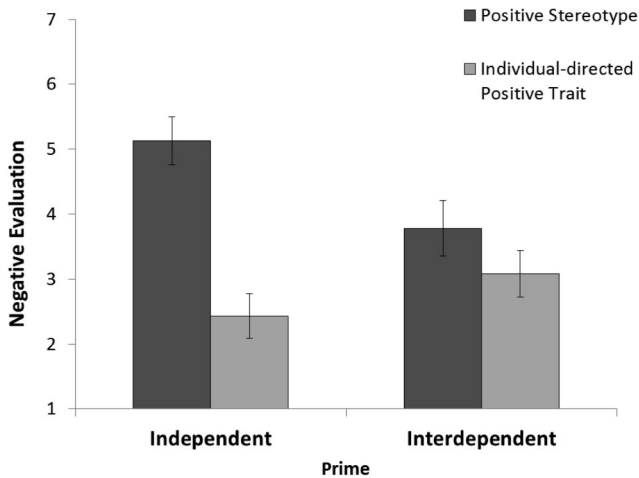
Figure 3. U.S.-born Asian Americans' evaluation of statements containing positive stereotypes or individual-directed positive traits after being primed with an independent or interdependent self-construal in Study 5. Error bars represent standard errors.

associated with greater negative evaluations of the scenarios for those with an independent self-construal ($b = 1.19$, $SE = .51$, $p = .02$) but not for those with an interdependent self-construal ($b = -0.04$, $SE = .53$, $p = .94$). The effect of condition on negative evaluations was reduced to nonsignificance ($b = 1.05$, $SE = .56$, $p = .07$) once the sense of depersonalization and its interaction with cultural prime was controlled for. Examining the condition indirect effects for each cultural prime revealed that the sense of being depersonalized mediated negative evaluations upon being positively stereotyped for those primed with an independent self-construal (bias-corrected 95% CI [.28, 2.26]), but this mediation did not hold for those primed with an interdependent self-construal (bias-corrected 95% CI [−1.16, 1.00]). Only for Asian Americans primed with an independent self-construal did sense of being depersonalized mediate negative reactions to positive stereotypes.

Discussion. Study 5 documents the importance of cultural self-construal in guiding responses to positive stereotypes. Asian Americans primed with an independent self-construal reacted more negatively to positive stereotypes than Asian Americans primed with an interdependent self-construal. This experimental moderation of the mediator demonstrates the unique role depersonalization plays in explaining negative responses to positive stereotypes. Sense of being depersonalized predicted negative responses only among Asian Americans first primed with an independent self-construal and not among Asian Americans primed with an interdependent self-construal even though Asian Americans reported a similar sense of being depersonalized by the positive stereotypes across self-construal primes. In other words, when Asian Americans were primed to think of themselves as fundamentally connected to others, positive stereotypes and the resulting sense of being depersonalized were less negative than when they thought about themselves as separate and distinct from others.

In Studies 4 and 5, while positive stereotypes elicited negative responses for U.S.-born and independent-primed participants, they were seen no differently than individual-directed positive traits by

Asian-born and interdependent-primed participants. Why did Asian-born and interdependent-primed participants not respond more favorably to positive stereotypes than to individual-directed positive traits in light of the fact that positive stereotypes could be seen as a form of validating their group identities? First, our participants lived in and attended college in the United States and therefore routinely engaged with Western notions of individualism. This may have made them less likely to interpret positive stereotypes positively (thus providing a conservative test of our hypothesis). Second, previous work finds that those who engage in collectivistic cultures do not actually engage in group-enhancement, or see their groups in a positive light, as much as those from individualistic cultures (Heine & Lehman, 1997), suggesting that positive stereotypes may not be compatible with collectivism either. Future research should examine how people in collectivistic countries respond to positive stereotypes.

One limitation of the current study is that, in contrast to the previous studies, we did not include measures tapping into interpersonal reactions to positive stereotypes and instead measured only responses to the statements themselves. To show that self-construal influences reactions to the person who states a positive stereotype and to improve consistency with the previous studies, we conducted a follow-up study on a separate sample of U.S.-born Asian Americans ($N = 33$). Participants were primed using the same cultural self-construal primes as Study 5 except that participants wrote down their answers (see Chentsova-Dutton & Tsai, 2010, for a similar modification). The same four positive stereotype scenarios and the same measures of dislike and negative emotions as previous studies were used. Results showed that the independent self-construal prime elicited greater dislike of the positive stereotyper ($M = 5.53$, $SD = 1.07$) and stronger negative emotions ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 1.20$) than the interdependent self-construal prime, dislike: ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 0.92$), $t(31) = 2.01$, $p = .05$, $d = 0.70$; negative emotions: ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.23$), $t(31) = 2.92$, $p = .01$, $d = 1.02$. This follow-up study demonstrates that an independent self-construal causes Asian Americans to feel greater dislike toward those who state a positive stereotype and engenders stronger negative emotions compared to Asian Americans primed with an interdependent self-construal.

General Discussion

How do people react to being positively stereotyped? Across five studies, using two different social groups (Asian Americans and women) and six different positive stereotypes involving both competence and warmth, we demonstrated that those who define the self as independent from others have an aversion to being positively stereotyped. U.S.-born Asian Americans were more critical of someone who stated a positive stereotype of their group than someone who stated no stereotype. Extending the findings to gender, we found that U.S.-born women responded negatively to someone who characterized their gender group as nurturing and cooperative. Targets also experienced negative emotional responses to being on the receiving end of a positive stereotype and expressed concern about how they were being seen by the stereotyper, attesting to the threatening nature of these experiences.

Why would people respond negatively to someone who characterizes their group positively? Negative interpersonal reactions resulted from a sense that one was being depersonalized by the

positive stereotype and seen as undifferentiated from fellow group members. This state is threatening to those who define themselves as distinct from others in their group. When this sense of being depersonalized was accounted for, both U.S.-born Asian Americans and women did not respond as negatively to a positive stereotype. Our last two studies further examined this mechanism by demonstrating that responses to positive stereotypes are culturally shaped. Both U.S.-born and Asian-born Asian Americans felt they were being depersonalized by positive stereotypes, but only U.S.-born Asian Americans responded more negatively to this state of being depersonalized. Manipulating cultural self-construal in our final study revealed that those primed with an independent self responded more negatively to being a target of a positive stereotype than those primed with an interdependent self. Taken together, these findings suggest that positive stereotypes are more problematic—causing derogation of the stereotyper and negative emotional responses—for those who define themselves as unique and differentiated from others in their group.

Are Positive Stereotypes a Form of Prejudice?

Previous research has demonstrated the pitfalls of endorsing positive stereotypes from the perceiver's perspective. Positive stereotypes can give way to negative attitudes in the minds of perceivers. "Smart" can become "acting too smart" (Lin, Kwan, Cheung, & Fiske, 2005, p. 37; see also Ho & Jackson, 2001), and positive traits (e.g., nurturing) can suggest an absence of other valued traits (e.g., competence; Fiske et al., 2002; Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005). A seemingly successful outgroup can also be threatening to one's own group (Maddux, Galinsky, Cuddy, & Polifroni, 2008). As a result, positive stereotypes can justify or downplay discrimination against that group (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005; Kay & Jost, 2003) and perpetuate discrimination against other groups who are blamed for not achieving the same standards (Wu, 2002).

In our work, we take the target's perspective and show that positive stereotypes are problematic when they occur in a cultural context that emphasizes uniqueness and defines the self as separate from others but are less problematic when they occur in a cultural context that emphasizes people's interconnectedness with others in their groups. One implication of these findings is that people in collectivistic cultural contexts may be less wary of using stereotypes in describing their own groups and other groups (Spencer-Rodgers, Williams, Hamilton, Peng, & Wang, 2007; see also Gómez, Seyle, Huici, & Swann, 2009). In contrast, the cultural value placed on individuality in American contexts may discourage stereotyping. Indeed, even majority groups in the United States (i.e., White Americans) report that ascribing positive stereotypes to minority group members is a form of intolerance (Mae & Carlston, 2005). When having conversations about cultural differences between groups, first acknowledging the variability that exists within groups may be one way to prevent group members from feeling that their individuality is being overlooked.

Our work focused on Asian Americans and women, groups that are lower status than Whites and males in American society (Ridgeway, 2007; Sue et al., 2007). Do our results apply to other lower status groups? African Americans have been shown to react negatively to a White male who describes African Americans as "natural athletes" (Czopp, 2008). Such negative responses may also be motivated by African Americans' desire to be seen as individuals above and beyond their racial group membership. Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests that being depersonalized is a concern for African Americans. In his book, *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness?: What it Means to Be Black Now*, Touré argued that the new Black identity is one that is "rooted in" Blackness but "not restricted" by it (Touré, 2011, p. xi)—suggesting that group members can feel pride in their groups while at the same time wishing for their individuality to be recognized. As Michael Eric Dyson, who is quoted in the book, stated, "The fact is that we're still lumped together in many ways. . . . It would be silly to believe that Black people are not still judged as a group even though we argue for this robust individualism" (Touré, 2011, p. 9). The concern that one will be seen as undifferentiated from group members may be prevalent among other minority groups within the United States as well.

What about groups afforded higher status in society (e.g., Whites)? On the one hand, positive stereotypes may also violate the way that higher status group members in the United States see themselves as distinct from their social groups. On the other hand, members of higher status groups may not respond as negatively to positive stereotypes because they feel sufficiently individuated by virtue of their higher status (see Fiske, 1993). More generally, members of highly individuated groups, or those groups that are publicly recognized to be heterogeneous, may be buffered against feeling that they are being depersonalized compared to members of groups that are perceived as more homogeneous. Group status and perceived group entitativity may be important considerations when trying to understand how people react to being positively stereotyped.

Thus, when it comes to determining whether positive stereotypes are a form of prejudice, the answer seems to be that it depends. For individuals who feel sufficiently individuated from their group or who do not mind being depersonalized, positive stereotypes may not be threatening at all. However, there are also those who feel that being positively stereotyped is an assumption based on group membership and therefore inherently problematic. The Oxford English Dictionary ("Prejudice," 2012) defines prejudice as a "preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience." While prejudice is often thought of as involving negative stereotypes (see Fiske, 1998, for a review), our work demonstrates that positive stereotypes also evoke negative interpersonal and emotional reactions among targets because these depictions deny targets their individuality. As the lawyer Frank Wu stated in *Yellow* (Wu, 2002),

> I am an Asian American, but I am not good at math. I cannot balance my checkbook, much less perform calculus in my head. I would like to fail in school, for no reason other than to cast off my freakish alter ego of geek and nerd. I yearn to be an artist, an athlete, a rebel, and, above all, an ordinary person. (pp. 39–40)

For him and countless others, being seen through the lens of a positive stereotype is a painful experience that challenges their full humanity.

Are These Effects Unique to Positive Stereotypes?

Although we focused on positive stereotypes, we believe that these findings may also help to uncover secondary mechanisms

involved in resistance to other group generalizations, such as negative stereotypes. Targets of negative stereotypes might, like the targets of positive stereotypes, feel that they are being depersonalized or reduced to their group membership. If this state is uncomfortable, as it was to the U.S.-born participants in our experiments, it could provide a secondary explanation for why negative stereotypes prompt resistance. Known responses to negative stereotypes, such as distancing from or denying them (Biernat et al., 1996; Pronin, Steele, & Ross, 2004; Steele & Aronson, 1995) or working to prove them wrong (Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Kray, Thompson, & Galinsky, 2001) could represent not only an attempt to restore the positivity of one's group but could also serve to restore one's sense of individuality from one's group. Along the same line, the discomfort expressed in response to stereotype threat, understood primarily as a response to having one's group depicted in a negative manner (Steele & Aronson, 1995), could be partly due to feeling reduced to one's group membership. This mechanism may help to explain why individuating oneself before taking a test reduces stereotype threat effects (Ambady, Paik, Steele, Owen-Smith, & Mitchell, 2004).

Future Research

In his book, *The Accidental Asian*, Eric Liu (1999) described how he "combated the stereotypes in part by trying to disprove them; if Asians were reputed to be math and science geeks, I would be a student of history and politics" (p. 50). It is known that embracing counterstereotypical behaviors is a compensatory response to negative stereotypes (Kray et al., 2001; Pronin et al., 2004; Steele & Aronson, 1995), and future research could examine whether it is also a strategy deployed by targets of positive stereotypes. Future work could also examine the extent to which responses to positive stereotypes are moderated by other individual characteristics, such as the extent to which participants endorse the stereotypes as characteristic of their group or characteristic of themselves. Targets of positive stereotypes may be more willing to accept a positive stereotype of their group if they themselves believe the stereotype to be true (see Gómez et al., 2009) or if they think they possess that quality (Swann, Polzer, Seyle, & Ko, 2004).

This work also suggests other potential factors that could result in less negative responses to positive stereotypes. Positive stereotypes that are activated outside the context of an intergroup interaction—for instance, those that are self-endorsed or stated by ingroup members—may be less threatening than those stated by outgroup members because ingroup members are thought to have a more individuated perspective on the group. In addition, because choice can be a way to express one's individuality (H. S. Kim & Markus, 1999), group memberships that are chosen (e.g., university affiliation) may also be more prone to eliciting positive reactions to positive stereotypes than groups that are seen as rooted in biology (e.g., race, gender). Finally, although we propose that the sense of being depersonalized explains why positive stereotypes can be a negative experience, we do not believe this mechanism operates in isolation. Indeed, our own studies suggest other potential mechanisms that might simultaneously be at play in explaining why people may react negatively to positive stereotypes, such as the belief that the person who endorses positive stereotypes also holds other more negative and inaccurate beliefs about that group. In order to develop a nuanced understanding of how individuals

may react to being a target of a positive stereotype, future research should consider these conditions and others that may further exacerbate or attenuate negative reactions to positive stereotypes.

Conclusion: Integrating Work on Race, Gender, and Culture

An observation made by many social psychologists who study diversity is that the body of work on "race" is often characterized as distinct from the body of work on "culture" (see Markus, 2008). While those who study race primarily investigate negative stereotypes and differential power relations between groups, those who study culture focus on how cultural background shapes individual psychological processes. The separation between the two groups is institutionalized: They often publish in different journals and speak in different conference sessions. Markus (2008) recently called for a more "unified theory of race and ethnicity" (p. 652) in which the two groups come together to investigate how race and culture function jointly to influence psychological processes.

By bringing together work on cultural self-construal with negative responses to being the target of a stereotype, our work demonstrates that self-construal informs the way people make sense of their interactions with those outside of their group. To receive a positive stereotype about one's racial or gender group is problematic when it occurs within a cultural context that emphasizes being distinct from one's groups and perceived for one's unique characteristics and merits. For cultural contexts that do not emphasize such differentiation from the group, the same experience may be construed as no more problematic than receiving a personal compliment. Taking a cultural perspective on stereotypes uncovers how culture interacts with group identities to shape targets' responses to their racialized and gendered experiences.

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Appendix

Study 3 Scenarios

Participants in the positive stereotype condition in Study 3 received one of the following scenarios without the brackets (see text for fourth scenario). In the control condition, references to the group (i.e., "Asians") were replaced with "you."

Imagine you are at the local café studying for an upcoming math final. While you are studying, you are approached by a classmate who says, "Can you help me with these two problems. [I know Asians are typically good at this stuff.]"

Imagine you are working for a company and assigned a team project with four project members. On the first day, you send an e-mail to your team members to try and set up an organizational meeting. During lunchtime, a team member comes up to you and remarks, "I got your e-mail! I still have to check my schedule and then I'll get back to you. Wow, the project doesn't even start until 2 weeks from now! [Asians are so ambitious.] I can't wait to get started! I'll e-mail you soon."

Imagine you're at the grocery store. You make your way to the produce section where you find a great deal on some of your favorite fruit. The sign reads, "Your choice! Mix and match for 5.99 a pound or pick 10!" As you proceed to select fruit, a shopper approaches you, points to the sign and says, "I see you're picking fruit. [Asians seem like a pretty intelligent group.] Which deal do you think is better?"