

The Effects of Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Aggression on Individuals' Intention to Harm Asian Americans during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. has experienced a large increase in anti-Asian hate crimes due to the mistaken and pervasive belief that COVID-19 was a *Chinese virus*. While the rise in hate crimes is well-documented, not much research has been conducted into the characteristics that predict an individual's intention to harm Asian Americans. Therefore, we examined individuals' intention to harm Asian Americans related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants ($N = 94$) were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and were given 10 real-world scenarios of acts of aggression toward Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants responded to three questions for each real-world scenario, and right-wing authoritarianism and four types of aggression (i.e., physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, hostility) were examined as predictors of individuals' intention to harm Asian Americans. We found that right-wing authoritarianism, physical aggression, and anger were significant predictors of one's intention to harm Asian Americans. However, verbal aggression and hostility were not significant predictors of one's intention to harm Asian Americans. Implications of these findings are discussed since these findings can assist researchers' understanding of issues pertaining to prejudice and racism related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords

COVID-19, Right-Wing Authoritarianism, Aggression, Intention to Harm, Anti-Asian Hate Crimes

1. Introduction

SARS-CoV-2, known more commonly as COVID-19, was first documented in

Wuhan, China, in December 2019 (Zhou et al., 2020), and on January 31, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic (Zhou et al., 2020). COVID-19 symptoms range in severity from a cough and fever to loss of taste and difficulty breathing (WHO, 2022a). COVID-19 is also highly infectious, and this made the efforts to curb this disease extremely difficult. Indeed, while for many people COVID-19 is similar to a bad flu, for others it is a painful and dangerous disease that results in death. Due to the infectious nature of COVID-19, statistics on infection and mortality rates change daily. However, by May of 2022, over 515,000,000 people worldwide had been infected with COVID-19 (WHO, 2022b) and over 6,000,000 of these people died due to COVID-19.

1.1. Social Consequences of Pandemic

The psychosocial impacts of COVID-19 have been evident from the beginning of its universal spread. Researchers have found that social distancing during the pandemic has been related to increased anxiety and depression in previous studies (Marroquín et al., 2020). Similarly, being in isolation due to the pandemic has demonstrated an increase in anxiety, depression, substance use, and other mental health concerns (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020). During this period of isolation, social media has been a critical basis of communication for individuals worldwide. Posts on social media during the early months of the pandemic have been a valuable means for researchers to obtain insight into the impact of COVID-19 on mental health. For example, a large data analysis of individual posts to the social media platform Weibo demonstrated that users began expressing more negative emotions online after the COVID-19 outbreak (Li et al., 2020), and these emotions may have been enhanced by increased social media use during the pandemic (Gao et al., 2020). A survey of Italian students demonstrated a positive relationship between a fear of COVID-19 and addictive internet use behaviors (Servidio et al., 2021). Furthermore, individuals in Iraq reported that seeking information about the pandemic during lock down increased their sense of panic about the pandemic (Ahmad & Murad, 2020). In another study, COVID-19 worry was associated with the increase or initiation of substance use (Rogers et al., 2020).

In several studies, researchers found an increase in aggression during the pandemic, and this increase seemed to occur after stay-at-home orders were initiated. Physical acts of aggression, verbal aggression, loss of temper, and distrust or envy of others were occurring more commonly in participants that were under these stay-at-home orders during the first 6 months of the COVID-19 outbreak compared to participants who were under less restrictions (Killgore et al., 2021). These aggressive tendencies seemed to increase in participants as they continued to be under strict isolation protocols. Women and children have been particularly vulnerable to domestic abuse during the pandemic (Bradbury-Jones & Isham, 2020). For example, phone calls to the domestic violence hotline in

Peru increased by 48% during the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic (Agüero, 2021), and reports of child abuse in Uganda increased after stay-at-home protocols were initiated (Sserwanja et al., 2021). Additionally, in the U.S., clinics have seen an increase of child patient trauma injuries from familial abuse (Kovler et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has been a shared universal experience, and its global psychosocial impacts are many. However, the social impacts of the pandemic present particular challenges for Asian individuals.

1.2. Pandemic Consequences toward Asian Individuals

Asian Americans have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in a variety of ways including increased marginalization, hate-crimes, and psychological distress, and media outlets have contributed heavily to discrimination and xenophobia against Asian Americans. Researchers have found a correlation in the increase in hate crimes against Asian Americans and misleading statements from government officials attributing the cause and spread of COVID-19 to Asian people (California Department of Justice, 2021). The use of titles such as *Chinese virus*, *China virus*, and *Wuhan virus* early in the pandemic may have promoted the exclusion and marginalization of Asian American individuals (Fallows, 2020). The term *kung flu* has even been allegedly used by American leaders to describe the COVID-19 pandemic (Boyer, 2020; Gover et al., 2020). Misleading headlines such as *Chinese virus pandemonium* or *China kids stay home* portrayed on the news have also contributed to the marginalization of Asian Americans (Wen et al., 2020). Such harmful rhetoric and biased coverage have attributed COVID-19 to race and have led to anger and stress among the Chinese community (Wen et al., 2020). Because many individuals in the U.S. view the COVID-19 virus as foreign, Asians are considered the source of the virus and are blamed as the main spreaders of the virus (Ellerbeck, 2020). As a result, hate crimes against Asian Americans during the pandemic have increased drastically.

A hate crime is defined as a criminal act that can include physical violence, harassment, vandalism, or threats targeting an individual or group “due to their real or perceived race, color, religion, nationality, country of origin, disability, gender or sexual orientation” (Gover et al., 2020: p. 648). Large numbers of physical assaults (e.g., attempted murder, stabbings, attacks with acid) against ethnically Asian individuals in the U.S. were directly related to COVID-19 (Tessler et al., 2020). Additionally, from March 19, 2020, to April 23, 2020, there were 1497 instances of anti-Asian bias (Jeung & Nham, 2020). Examples of such anti-Asian bias included physical attacks, verbal harassment, threats, vandalism, and being coughed at or spat on (Tessler et al., 2020). Moreover, anti-Asian hate crimes in 2021 increased by 339% compared to 2020 (Yam, 2022), and over 10,000 anti-Asian hate incidents were reported from March 2020 to December 2020 (Yamaguchi, 2022). As such, these rising numbers illustrate how Asian individuals have been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Both marginalization and increased hate crimes have contributed to increased

psychological damage among Asian Americans. Daily racial discrimination including acts of physical aggression, insults, blame for the spread of COVID-19, and rejected service at businesses resulted in increased depression in Asian undergraduates (Dong et al., 2022). Researchers found that there was a 39% increase in Asian Americans accessing the Mental Health America anxiety screening tool (Campbell & Ellerbeck, 2020), and Asian Americans have also experienced increased fear for physical safety when going out in public and anxiety about being targeted for hate crimes (Tessler et al., 2020). Because of the damaging psychological and physical impacts against Asian Americans, it is crucial to examine how such harmful behaviors can be predicted by others' personal characteristics.

1.3. Right-Wing Authoritarianism

Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), a phrase coined by Altemeyer after conducting a statistical analysis on the original aspects of authoritarianism, consists of conventionalism (i.e., traditionalism), authoritarian aggression (i.e., aggression toward a specific group that is perceived to be disliked by those in authority), and authoritarian submission (i.e., obedience; Zakrisson, 2005). Altemeyer (1998) also posited that RWA was characterized by ethnocentrism. Crowson (2009) found that RWA was positively correlated with Dangerous World Beliefs. This indicates that people with high levels of RWA believe that the world is dangerous and on the verge of falling into chaos. This may be an explanation for why people with high RWA are so obedient toward authority as they may believe that following authorities will keep them and the world safe.

Given the propensity of people with RWA toward conventionalism, aggression, submission, and ethnocentrism, RWA has been correlated with prejudice and racism, and this has especially been found during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the U.S., RWA was positively correlated with xenophobia (e.g., prejudice against foreigners) during the pandemic (Pazhoohi & Kingston, 2021). Likewise, in Italy, RWA was positively correlated with racist behaviors that included avoiding Chinese people in public and engaging in aggressive behavior toward Chinese people (Bochicchio et al., 2021). RWA has also been found to be negatively correlated with high levels of affection toward Asian Americans during the pandemic (Wright & Duong, 2021). Additionally, RWA is generally correlated with prejudice. In both the U.K. and U.S., RWA has been associated with supporting anti-immigration and anti-foreigner policies (Hartman et al., 2021; Manson, 2020). RWA further predicts prejudice against dissident groups such as feminists and gay rights activists (Cantal et al., 2015). Overall, RWA appears to be positively correlated with prejudice which can include both xenophobia and racism.

1.4. Aggression

Aggression refers to any range of hostile behaviors or attitudes directed toward

another individual with the intent to cause harm (Sturme, 2017). Buss and Perry's Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) is one of the most utilized measurements of aggression. It was originally created as a psychometrically sound alternative to the Buss-Durkee Hostility Inventory (Buss & Durkee, 1957) which was considered outdated and found to be lacking consistency among scales. While developing the BPAQ, multiple models were tested on undergraduate students in the U.S. (Gallagher & Ashford, 2016). The researchers found that the four-factor model was superior to all other models. As a result, the BPAQ includes four components: physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility (Buss & Perry, 1992). It contains 29 items and has been found to be an effective measurement of aggression for the general population (Gerevich et al., 2007), and Buss and Perry (1992) found that the BPAQ scales were internally consistent and stable over time.

Previous researchers have found that when exposed to an aversive event, an individual will have a physiological reaction that can then lead to feelings of irritability and anger (Berkowitz & Heimer, 1989). Aggression occurs in varying levels from verbal abuse to life threatening physical abuse (Shafiq et al., 2021). Furthermore, there is a positive correlation between intention to harm and physical aggression such as punching, slapping, shoving, and sexual assault (Graham et al., 2006). Researchers found that the more severe the physical aggression appeared, the more likely the harm was rated as intentional (Graham et al., 2006).

1.5. Purpose of Study

From the time Asians first immigrated to the U.S. in the late 1700s, Asian Americans have been the victims of xenophobia, microaggressions, and racism (Gover et al., 2020). Due to COVID-19's origin in China, many people in the U.S. unjustly began to increase their discrimination toward Asian Americans as had previously been done. Therefore, it is important to study how Asian Americans have potentially been used as scapegoats during the high intensity COVID-19 pandemic and how this has led to lasting bias and discrimination against them. As such, we examined the tendency of participants to harm Asian American victims of hate crimes after receiving information about the mistreatment of Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lee et al. (2003) operationalized intention to harm in the context of one's likelihood to sexually harass by assessing personality traits strongly associated with the likelihood to sexually harass. We utilized a similar variable to Lee et al.'s (2003) study in the current study by measuring intention to harm in the context of anti-Asian hate crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since researchers have found that RWA is associated with conservatism, racism, and prejudice (Kerr & Wilson, 2021), and that a history of aggression in an individual is one of the strongest risk factors for future violent behaviors (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, 2015), we examined both RWA and four types of aggression as predictors of participants' likelihood to harm Asian Americans.

Since RWA has been found to be positively correlated with prejudice, and

since aggression is associated with one's intention to harm, our hypothesis is as follows: individuals higher, compared to individuals lower, in RWA and all four subscales of the BPAQ (i.e., physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, hostility) will be more likely to have the intention to harm Asian Americans.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

One hundred and fifteen participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (i.e., MTurk; www.mturk.com). MTurk is a service offered by Amazon.com and is an online survey platform researchers can utilize to recruit participants (MTurk Workers) and compensate them (Burnham et al., 2018). Inclusion criteria included the following: 1) have an MTurk account/be an MTurk Worker, 2) be at least 18 years of age or older, 3) live in the United States, 4) have a previous HIT (i.e., survey) approval rating greater than 95%, and 5) have a previous number of HITs approved greater than 500. Two participants selected "No" to one of the four consent form questions and could not continue in the survey. Additionally, six participants identified as Asian. Due to the nature of the scenarios used in this survey that depict aggression directed toward Asian Americans, we excluded individuals who identified as Asian. Therefore, these six participants could not complete the survey. Three participants (men) were deleted from the dataset for less than 80% completion of the survey, and four participants incorrectly answered one of the four attention check questions and were omitted from the dataset. One participant selected responses down the middle for the full survey, and five participants reported different gender identities from the beginning of the survey to the end of the survey. These six responses were omitted from this dataset. As such, we utilized responses from 94 participants (47 women, 47 men).

Participants' ages ranged from 23 - 75 ($M = 38.51$, $SD = 11.80$), and participants identified as the following races: White ($n = 84$; 89.36%), Black or African American ($n = 8$; 8.51%), American Indian or Alaska Native ($n = 1$; 1.06%), and more than one race ($n = 1$; 1.06%). Regarding ethnicity, nine participants (9.57%) identified as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish. Participants' political affiliations were as follows: Democrat ($n = 55$; 58.51%), Republican ($n = 23$; 24.47%), Libertarian ($n = 1$; 1.06%), Green ($n = 2$; 2.13%), and Independent ($n = 13$; 13.83%).

2.2. Materials

2.2.1. Factual Information

To include information about the COVID-19 pandemic for participants' knowledge, the following paragraph was taken from the CDC and was given to all participants:

The following paragraph contains information about the COVID-19 pandemic:

Since January 2020, approximately 65 million Americans have been infected with and over 860,000 have died from COVID-19 which first broke out in Wuhan, China. Although COVID-19 vaccines are now widely accessible throughout the U.S. and are found to be highly effective in decreasing the spread of the virus, the CDC recommends that all individuals wear masks when social distancing is not possible due to the emergence of more deadly and highly contagious variants. Researchers are not sure when the pandemic will be eradicated.

2.2.2. Scenarios

We utilized 10 real-world scenarios of Asian Americans experiencing aggression due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These scenarios were previously utilized by Yamawaki et al. (2021). Example scenarios included the following:

Imagine you are riding on a bus and you witness the following situation:

An Asian woman is riding a bus in the afternoon. Four teenage girls see her on the bus and one shouts, “You caused coronavirus, bitch!” They demand to know why she doesn’t have a mask on. Before exiting, another one of the girls hits her over the head with an umbrella.

Imagine you are shopping nearby and you witness the following situation:

A Chinese man is walking down the street around a popular shopping area.

A man comes up to him and begins verbally assaulting him. He says to him, “I don’t want your coronavirus in my country” and then punches him.

2.2.3. Dependent Variable

We examined participants’ intention to harm the Asian American victims from the 10 real-world scenarios by following the format of Pryor’s (1987) Likelihood to Sexually Harass Scale as an example. We included two distractor items with our question of interest pertaining to intention to harm for a total of three questions asked after each real-world scenario. Overall, our dependent variable measure consisted of 10 items for the intention to harm measurement, and no items were reverse scored. Example items included “Assuming that nobody finds out and there are no consequences for your actions, how likely is it that you would have done the same to this Asian woman?” and “Assuming that nobody finds out and there are no consequences for your actions, how likely is it that you would have done the same to this Chinese man?” Participants responded on a Likert-scale from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 7 (*very likely*), and higher scores indicated higher likelihood of intention to harm the Asian American victims. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.99.

2.2.4. Predictor Variables

RWA was measured with the Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (Altemeyer, 2006). This measure consisted of 22 items. Two items were omitted since they were defined as practice items (Altemeyer, 2006), and 10 items were reverse scored. Example items included “The ‘old-fashioned ways’ and the ‘old-fashioned values’ still show the best way to live.” and “This country would work a lot bet-

ter if certain groups of troublemakers would just shut up and accept their group's traditional place in society." Participants responded on a Likert-scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), and higher scores indicated higher authoritarianism. Cronbach's alpha was 0.95.

Aggression was measured by the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire Short-Form (BPAQ-SF; Bryant & Smith, 2001). This measure consisted of 12 items, and no items were reverse scored. There were four subscales for this measure: physical aggression (PA), verbal aggression (VA), anger (AN), and hostility (H), and each subscale had three items. Example items included "Given enough provocation, I may hit another person." (PA) and "My friends say that I'm somewhat argumentative." (VA). Participants responded on a Likert-scale from 1 (*extremely uncharacteristic of me*) to 5 (*extremely characteristic of me*), and higher scores indicated higher aggression for all four subscales. Cronbach's alpha for each subscale was as follows: PA = 0.86, VA = 0.85, AN = 0.88, and H = 0.84.

2.3. Procedure

First, participants completed a CAPTCHA and then read and agreed to the consent form and four consent form questions. Next, participants verified that they were at least 18 years of age or older, answered if they were Asian, and selected their gender from a binary category (i.e., woman, man). Afterwards, all participants read the paragraph with factual information about COVID-19 and then completed two manipulation check questions (i.e., "Do you believe that the COVID-19 pandemic was caused by China?" and "It is believed that COVID-19 originated in China and then was spread by Chinese individuals."). After, participants received instructions about the upcoming scenarios and then received the 10 scenarios about aggression depicted toward Asian Americans. After each of the 10 scenarios, participants received a set of three questions. One question asked about participants' intention to harm, and the other two questions were the two distractor items. Participants then received the two predictor variable measures (i.e., RWA, BPAQ-SF) in a randomized order to control for order effects. Participants filled out the demographics section and then were reminded about a 5-digit ID that they would receive to insert on MTurk. This 5-digit code was inserted on MTurk to identify participants' completed survey within Qualtrics and to ensure they answered the attention check questions correctly and completed at least 80% of the survey. Next, participants received their ID, inserted it on MTurk, and then submitted the survey on Qualtrics.com. Participants were compensated with \$1.75.

3. Results

A simultaneous multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of the five predictor variables (i.e., RWA, PA, VA, AN, H) on the one dependent variable (i.e., intention to harm). RWA, PA, and AN were significant

predictors of intention to harm [$\beta = 0.18$, $t(88) = 2.91$, $p = 0.005$, $\beta = 0.51$, $t(88) = 6.03$, $p < 0.001$, and $\beta = 0.32$, $t(88) = 3.51$, $p = 0.001$, respectively]. Therefore, individuals higher in RWA, PA, and AN were more likely to report their intention to harm Asian Americans. VA and H were not significant predictors of intention to harm [$\beta = 0.00$, $t(88) = 0.02$, $p = 0.988$ and $\beta = -0.02$, $t(88) = -0.31$, $p = 0.755$, respectively]. These findings explained a significant amount of variance [$F(5, 88) = 50.37$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.74$, $R^2_{adj} = 0.73$].

4. Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the predicting role of individuals' RWA and aggression on their likelihood to harm Asian American hate crimes victims when individuals are assured that their actions will not be held accountable. Participants' RWA were measured by the Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (Altemeyer, 2006), and participants' levels of aggression were measured by the Buss Perry Aggression Questionnaire-Short Form (Bryant & Smith, 2001) that consisted of four domains: physical aggression (PA), verbal aggression (VA), anger (AN), and hostility (H).

RWA was a significant predictor of intention to harm, and this indicates that participants who were more politically conservative were more likely to harm Asian Americans within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Regarding aggression, we found that PA and AN were significant predictors of intention to harm while VA and H were not. This shows that people who had higher scores in physical aggression and anger were more likely to harm the hate crime victims while participants with higher scores in verbal aggression and hostility did not necessarily indicate that they would have a higher likelihood to harm Asian Americans. Although anger is not a physical action, AN can still be a strong predictor of intention to harm because it is an emotion that is usually associated with aggression. A possible reason for this finding is the level of cost associated with different types of aggression. While both PA and VA are harmful to its receiver, a perpetrator who utilizes PA is arguably subject to more severe costs under the legal system. For example, a physically aggressive person can face fines, jail time, restraining orders, and the like while a verbally aggressive person will not face such consequences when identified by the legal system.

Although, to our knowledge, we are the first to examine individuals' intention to harm during the COVID-19 pandemic based on political conservatism and aggression, numerous researchers have already examined such concepts in other aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic that have provided a basis for the current experimental design. Instances of aggression have increased at an unprecedented rate during this pandemic. According to a review article by Field (2021), 4000 more murders happened in 2020—a 25% increase. With increased social media usage one result of COVID-19 related restrictions and lockdowns, the amount of exposure to aggression also increased along with mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Although mental

health and social media use were examined in many studies during COVID-19, none of the researchers have examined aggression and anger during this time period. Since pre-COVID-19 literature has already established the predicting role of exposure to social media violence and aggression, this further exemplifies the importance of the current study in which we examined aggression during the COVID-19 pandemic (Khurana et al., 2019, as cited in Field, 2021).

On top of an unprecedented increase in violence during this pandemic in general, the Asian community is undoubtedly the most affected during such calamities. Historically, phenotypic Asian appearances have always been associated with foreignness in the U.S., and this phenomenon was termed *perpetual foreigner* (Tessler et al., 2020). For example, the Bubonic plague and Yellow Peril were both framed as racial diseases specific to Asians in the history of the U.S. (Tessler et al., 2020). The current COVID-19 pandemic reintroduced and exacerbated the perpetual foreigner effect due to politicized comments that dominated the media during the early stages of the pandemic. Even now, there are still many that believe that public health initiatives aimed toward disease prevention are a violation of freedom and the virus is a *Chinese virus* due to a previous government official using this term in public (Tessler et al., 2020). As previously noted, within one month of lockdown in the U.S., the Asian and Pacific Islander Equity Alliance (AAPI) received 1497 reports of COVID-19 related discrimination (Jeung & Nhan, 2020). History is repeating itself as aggressive behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic are motivated based on bias toward the Asian race, and government officials' politicized comments on this pandemic further influenced the public's opinion (Gover et al., 2020).

Although researchers have not previously examined the link between RWA and intention to harm, many researchers still provided a basis for the aim of this study by examining other negative consequences that the COVID-19 pandemic has on the public. For example, Pazhoohi and Kingston (2021) found that higher pathogenic threat (i.e., more people infected, more people dead from the disease) from the pandemic was associated with higher RWA traits and beliefs. One reason for this is the recurring finding in the literature that the spread of infectious disease is associated with a higher preference for a socially conservative value system (see Pazhoohi & Kingston, 2021). Another reason for higher RWA traits during events with high pathogenic threats is the tendency to protect in-group members (e.g., White individuals) from outgroup members (e.g., individuals who are foreign to the U.S. based on race) which is ingrained in people's social cognition to avoid people who are potentially more contagious. Due to this reason, Asians in the U.S. faced tremendous hostile criticism and discrimination during this pandemic (Pazhoohi & Kingston, 2021).

From the abovementioned findings, it is reasonable to suggest that with the ongoing COVID-19 threat, more people are showing preference for a more conservative view toward society, and this in turn makes them more likely to have negative attitudes toward outgroup members in the U.S.—Asian Americans.

Higher RWA is also associated with higher victim blaming attitudes during COVID-19 (Yamawaki et al., 2021). This indicates that covert acts of prejudice already exist in the context of this pandemic, and it also provides reasons for overt or more serious acts of hostility to occur when the consequences of such actions are being ignored. Most importantly, political conservatism is associated with less compliance with COVID-19 related preventive measures (Rothgerber et al., 2020) and is linked with anti-mask attitudes, negative views toward vaccination, and beliefs that the severity of COVID-19 has been exaggerated (Taylor & Asmundson, 2021). Based on Pazhoochi and Kingston's (2021) conclusions about RWA and the avoidance of outgroup members in a community, it is highly likely that people who are not compliant with COVID-19 measures in the first place (e.g., people who have higher RWA tendencies) may also harm Asian Americans—who are outgroup members—during this pandemic due to their belief that COVID-19 is an Asian disease.

Indirect but crucial findings emerged in the current literature and supported the aim of the present study to link aggression and intention to harm. Parrott et al. (2022) found that COVID-19 stress is associated with intimate partner aggression. Moreover, researchers have found that a sense of fear during the COVID-19 pandemic could lead to expressions of aggression in the form of AN and H toward women and PA toward men (Florek et al., 2021). This indicates that not only is aggression an existing issue during this pandemic, but it could also vary based on gender. Both examples indicate that emotions such as stress and fear can greatly contribute to individuals' aggressive behaviors. Possible stressors and sources of fear from the COVID-19 pandemic could be the preventive measures implemented on a state or federal level, and such factors have also been examined by previous researchers. For example, Killgore et al. (2021) found that more lock-down time and more COVID-19 restrictions were associated with higher aggression in all four domains of the BPAQ, and this provides evidence that aggression can indeed be a result of COVID-19. Since COVID-19 is continually being associated with Asian Americans, the intention to harm Asian Americans is also highly likely and is worthy of our attention.

Similarly, anti-maskers were also found to exhibit higher levels of toxicity in their tweets (Pascual-Ferrá et al., 2021). Toxicity refers to the actions of online harassment and verbal aggression such as insults, identity attacks, and profanity (Pascual-Ferrá et al., 2021). Anti-maskers believe that being forced to wear masks is unconstitutional and the act of not wearing a mask is seen as an anti-democrat action (Pascual-Ferrá et al., 2021), and these both further exemplify the idea that consequences of COVID-19 are at least partly influenced by politics. Since toxicity can be seen as a measure of outrage (Pascual-Ferrá et al., 2021), the existing toxicity online could lead to PA in the real world.

4.1. Implications

The significance of our findings lies in the increased danger that Asian Ameri-

cans are currently facing during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic begins to lessen, the lives of Asian Americans remain at stake and in need of enhanced security and protection. Anti-Asian hate crimes in U.S. cities have increased by 339% since 2020 (Yam, 2022), and over 10,000 anti-Asian hate incidents have been reported from March 2020 to December 2020 (Yamaguchi, 2022). In response to the increasing cases of anti-Asian hate crime incidents, the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act was enacted to combat anti-Asian hate crimes in the U.S. in May of 2021 (congress.gov, 2021). However, the media criticized the bill for failing to focus on prevention and argued that it does not directly deter people from committing anti-Asian hate crimes (Zhou, 2021). Therefore, it is critical to address growing negative sentiments toward Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic to eradicate anti-Asian hate crimes in the U.S.

In investigating the underlying reasons for aggression toward Asians, one of the implications of our findings is that political beliefs may play a role in anti-Asian hate crimes in the U.S. We found in our current study that RWA was a significant predictor of intention to harm Asian Americans. It is possible that political conservatism contributes to perpetuating as well as intensifying anti-Asian sentiments as a driving force. This impact of political conservatism could be attributable to political representatives reinforcing anti-Asian attitudes and sentiments (Gover et al., 2020). It is crucial to examine the hate crime law, strengthen legal protection, and address the root cause of anti-Asian hate crimes rather than merely respond to incidents. Given that the intention to harm Asian American victims is predicted by political beliefs and aggressive traits, a greater emphasis on the prevention of anti-Asian hate crimes is needed. Moreover, considering the impact of certain political affiliations, it is important for political representatives to be aware of the potential effects of their statements and to use unbiased narratives regarding Asian Americans and COVID-19.

Another implication of the current research is that our results may serve as a potential means to understand and explain anti-Asian hate crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S. Within the current research, we found that people will display the intention to harm Asian Americans if no legal consequences would follow, and this was predicted by RWA, PA, and AN. This finding may contribute to explaining the mechanism behind covert intentional racism—intentional discriminatory behavior that is covered up—in cases of anti-Asian racism (Ridley, 1995). People with certain political beliefs and aggressive traits tend to hold an intention to harm Asian Americans if they know that their actions will not be held accountable, and this may explain why people show intentional racist behaviors while attempting to conceal them.

4.2. Limitations and Future Directions

One limitation of the current study was the lack of diversity within the sample which predominantly consisted of White individuals. To examine attitudes to-

ward Asian Americans at a more generalizable level, a diverse sample that consists of more non-White participants should be obtained in future studies. Due to the racial nature of anti-Asian hate crimes, it is essential to further examine the possible effects of participants' race. Yam (2021) reported that 75% of offenders of anti-Asian hate crimes and incidents identified as White despite viral images on media often showing people of color as anti-Asian perpetrators. Therefore, future researchers should investigate how White and non-White individuals may show attitudes toward Asian Americans differently to allow the exploration of differences in perceptions based on participants' race.

In addition to racial diversity in this sample, diversity in political affiliations should also be obtained in future studies as half of the participants in our sample identified as Democrats. Previous researchers found that Democrats are more likely to take racial discrimination and the threat of COVID-19 more seriously than Republicans (Earle & Hodson, 2020; Taillon et al., 2022). Since racial prejudice functions as a political force and mediates a lower likelihood to support racial hate crime laws (Malcom et al., 2022; Peacock & Biernat, 2022), further examination in future research is needed to study how categorical political affiliations (e.g., Democrats versus Republicans) may mediate negative attitudes toward Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.3. Conclusion

Despite the covert form of prejudice, any negative sentiments and attitudes toward Asians and Asian Americans should not be overlooked or minimized. Intention to harm may appear to be unafflicting; however, this invisible form of prejudice and bias toward Asian Americans may result in visible consequences that are detrimental to the lives of Asian Americans. To combat anti-Asian hate crimes, it is crucial to address the potential consequences of political affiliations which may lead to aggressive behaviors perpetrated toward Asians. Moreover, political information and narratives should be presented without harmful racial biases, and racial and/or ethnic issues should be examined at an institutional level (e.g., government officials, political parties, law enforcement). Overall, further action should be taken to eradicate the underlying cause of racial prejudice and bias.

As the anti-Asian hate crimes continue to affect the lives of Asian Americans even after moving from the national pandemic phase in the previous two years, the safety and mental health of Asians in the U.S. need to be ensured and protected. It is critical to enhance legal protections, prevent anti-Asian hate crimes, and improve the mental health support system and resources. It is also important to note that among the Asian population, there are certain subgroups that are more vulnerable. For example, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women experience hate crime incidents 2.2 times more frequent than AAPI men, Chinese Americans get targeted in nearly 43% of hate crime incidents reported, and older Asian American adults are less likely to report hate crimes

than younger Asian American adults (Lee & Ramakrishnan, 2021; Stop AAPI Hate, 2022; Yamaguchi, 2022). Therefore, a more holistic approach should be taken to understand the impact of COVID-19 on these vulnerable populations to provide necessary support and protection. The ongoing impacts of COVID-19 on the lives of Asian Americans should continue to be addressed as Asians are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic differently. Further examinations may contribute to unfolding the underlying cause of anti-Asian sentiments in the U.S. that are rooted deeper than the racial prejudice that was uncovered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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