

Anti-Asian Racism during the Coronavirus Pandemic:

The Invisible Epidemic

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Sociology and Criminology

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

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ABSTRACT

Although everything has been slowly returning “back to normal”, the coronavirus pandemic has caused irreversible social and economic harms, chief among them the racial discrimination experienced by Asian people. Anti-Asian terms are more frequently seen in social media, and news articles and research indicate the disturbing escalation in verbal and physical assaults that Asian people have witnessed or suffered from. Grounded in critical race theory and intersectionality and using cross-national survey data from the COVIDImpacts.ca team in Canada, USA, and Mexico, this thesis examines, quantitatively, if and to what extent does the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbate racism against Asian people in Canada and the U.S. Findings from bivariate and logistic regression analyses reveal that Asians in both countries have higher odds of experiencing racial discrimination during COVID-19 compared to those with other socioeconomic statuses or identities, and Asians living in the U.S. are more likely to experience racial discrimination or more inclined to report such experience compared to those living in Canada. These results provide insight into the lived Asian experience during COVID-19 and shed light on the struggles that the Asian community has been facing since even before this pandemic.

Keywords: anti-Asian racism, the coronavirus pandemic, racial discrimination

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many that I would like to acknowledge and thank for the completion of this thesis, as this project cannot be accomplished without their help and support.

First and foremost, to my graduate supervisor, Dr. Lori Wilkinson. Thank you, Lori, for your patience, kindness, and endless moral and educational support. Your knowledge and critiques have solved so many of my questions since the beginning of this thesis. I would not have reached this stage if not for your help and encouragement; words cannot describe how immensely you have motivated me and how grateful I am to you. Thank you for being my supervisor.

To my graduate committee members, Dr. Kiera Ladner from Political Studies and Dr. Jeremy Patzer from Sociology for their thought-stimulating questions and suggestions. Your ideas and advice have led me to think deeper about the connections between theories and my research questions and have provided new insights for some of my arguments, for which I am immeasurably grateful. Thank you both for agreeing to be on my committee.

I would also like to express my gratitude towards the COVIDImpacts.ca team for agreeing to share their valuable data with me. Sincere appreciation is extended to the organizations and institutions that funded the COVIDImpacts.ca project – the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Canada Research Chairs (2), Association for Canadian Studies, Metropolis Canada, Vanier Institute, UNESCO Canada, and MITACS. Without their permission, I would not be able to access datasets for my research.

To the faculty members of the Department of Sociology at the University of Manitoba, thank you so much for your support throughout my graduate studies. It has not been easy coordinating the department and its students during the pandemic, and I hold the utmost respect

for the faculty and administrative staff for continuously providing help and support in so many ways.

To my colleagues going through the same stage, I feel lucky and honoured to have been able to study and work alongside all of you; you all inspire me to no end, and I cherish our friendship and camaraderie. Hey, we made it!

To my friends who have seen most of the ups and downs of this journey, thank you for being my constant source of encouragement and comfort, and thank you for providing an outlet for me, whether to express joy or to complain. You are my mental stabilizer!

Lastly, and most importantly, to my dearest mom and dad, who are thousands of miles away but are always inspiring me and cheering me on. Thank you for your endless love and support, for being there for me (via video chat) through everything, and for trusting me. I would not be who I am today without you. The pandemic has prevented me from travelling home for the past four and a half years, and I cannot describe how sorry I am and how much I miss you both. I love you.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

At the start of this thesis, I want to share my personal experience as a Chinese international student living in Canada during the coronavirus pandemic. As the first case of COVID-19 was diagnosed in China, before the virus hit the North American continent, my parents residing in China encouraged me to wear a mask while travelling in public spaces. Masks were not commonly worn in North America then, and I received judgmental looks on multiple occasions when I travelled with public transportation. During that time, the fear of being judged upon with a mask combined with the anxiety for my parents' health and safety in China took a toll on me mentally. When COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization and social distancing, lockdown, and quarantine policies were enacted, harassment towards Asian people spiked following social media coverage overtly or covertly blaming China for causing a global health crisis (Budhwani & Sun 2020; Della Cava & Lam 2020; Griffiths 2020). The fear of wearing a mask in public as a Chinese international student escalated for me, even though I did not encounter any direct racism or harassment.

I was not the only one worrying about the health of our loved ones living in cities where the pandemic was the most severe, nor was I the only one fearing for our own safety simply because of our ethnicities. The COVID-19 pandemic had been a distressing and challenging time for everyone, and its influence has extended into the post-pandemic era. The contagious disease spread like wildfires, catching everyone off-guard. Especially for those who identify as Indigenous persons or racialized people and those who were less socially prestigious, the pandemic not only affected their health and daily routines, but also made their already-difficult lives harder to live. The pandemic had raged on for over two years, and although it has recently

quieted down with everything returning “back to normal”, COVID-19 has nevertheless uncovered and intensified various social problems, chief among them the issues of racial discrimination and harassment. Many incidents of verbal aggression and/or physical violence surfaced, with the Asian community bearing the brunt of the attack when positive cases were discovered in various parts of the world. Terms such as “Chinese virus” and “Kung Flu” were used on social media and by major politicians in Canada and the U.S. to reference the disease, and former President of the United States Donald Trump called it the “China virus”, the “China plague”, or the “Kung flu” multiple times in press conferences and on his Twitter account, and said “it’s China’s fault” (Budhwani & Sun 2020; Griffiths 2020; Mamuji et al. 2021; Reja 2021; Wilkinson & Ogoe 2020). This racist and provocative rhetoric fostered more anti-Chinese and anti-Asian posts on social media and in real life.

Consequently, public perception became rampantly anti-Asian. A public poll done in the U.S. by Ipsos (2020) showed that 44% of respondents believed a specific group should be held responsible for the spread of the virus, and among them, 66% blamed China (Cho et al. 2020). On social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram, anti-Asian sentiments were more often associated with hashtags with racist languages – #Chinesevirus, for example – compared to more impartial hashtags such as #COVID-19 (Reja 2021). Researchers also discovered a whopping 972.43% increase in tweets containing terms like “Chinese virus” after Trump’s reference on Twitter (Budhwani & Sun 2020; Scott 2020). The pandemic, unfortunately, has become a blatant manifestation of racism against Asian people, and this manifestation was not contained online. As the viral disease ventured deeper and lingered longer in society, verbal harassment and physical assaults directed to Asian people skyrocketed. According to a press statement released by the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council (2020), approximately 1,500 incidents of

racially motivated attacks were reported from March 19, 2020, to April 15, 2020, the first month the organization was founded. Asian people have encountered physical assaults and expletives, experienced being barred from establishments and transportations, and discriminated in public spaces and in workplace because of their ethnicity (Della Cava & Lam 2020; Jeung & Nham 2020).

From social media posts to news articles, from verbal attacks to hate crimes, it is not difficult to realize that discrimination combined with the threat of a public health crisis has been used to rationalize and exacerbate xenophobia and racial stigmatization of the Asian community. Despite the harsh reality, people still question the importance of studying the Asian experience. Why does it matter? Who cares? From my perspective as a member of the Asian community and a researcher, these questions in and of themselves are part of the reason why studying about Asian discrimination is imperative. When a study on the experiences of a dominant group – Caucasians, for example – emerges, there hardly are voices of confusion or objection; but when a study on racialized people and racial minority groups appears, skepticism often follows suit. This is a blatant display of marginalization of minority groups, since these skepticisms regard racial minorities as less important members of the society by othering them, whether consciously or unconsciously. From this aspect, it is essential to study the discrimination of Asian people in Canada and the U.S., to provide information from an Asian perspective, and to educate the masses on the inequalities that not only Asians but also other members of the ethnic minority community are facing. Therefore, in this climate, it is both socially and sociologically significant to study Asian discrimination.

1.2 THESIS OVERVIEW

For this thesis, I examine, from a quantitative perspective, *if and to what extent does COVID-19 exacerbate racism against Asian people in Canada and the U.S.?* I will discuss the historical persistence of Asian discrimination and the meaning behind such persistence in society today; I will also observe if and how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the Asian community by reviewing recent reports and examining a set of survey questions. Although discrimination is of a qualitative nature, studying it through numbers brings its own advantages. While there are plenty of existing literature on the discrimination, microaggression, and Sinophobia that the Asian population face from a qualitative perspective, very few studies look at this social issue from a statistical standpoint. A qualitative analysis could, no doubt, provide more in-depth knowledge in the “what, why, and how” in the Asian experience during the pandemic by exploring personal narratives, but conducting quantitative research on Asian discrimination allows me to observe the frequencies of the phenomenon, to examine what factors influenced the experiences of the Asian community in a quantifiable method, and to compare across different countries on a macro scale. Another reason for conducting this research in quantitative methods lies in my personal interest to learn, on a national level, what people thought about their lived experiences during COVID-19 and how respondents from the two countries viewed the racial consequences stemming from the pandemic. One of my aims of this study is to add to the current literature, using statistical analyses, the information related to Asian discrimination on a larger scale, and to connect quantitative findings with existing qualitative discussions for a fuller picture of the Asian experience.

This thesis consists of five chapters. Immediately following this introductory chapter is the literature review, in which I go over previous research on the history of Asian discrimination

in Canada and the U.S. and review existing data on anti-Asian racism during COVID-19. The theories that I use to frame my research are also discussed in the literature review chapter. Chapter 3 is on the methodology and the dataset that I use for this study, including how the variables are operationalized and analyzed. Following data and methodology, I discuss the findings generated from data analyses, connecting them with existing research and my theoretical frameworks. In the concluding chapter, I consider some of the implications of the findings, as well as the limitations and future research suggestions that derive from this study.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

As the coronavirus crept onto the North American continent, it brought with it not only infections, but also discrimination against racialized persons, specifically Asians. To date, there are many news reports of physical or verbal assaults motivated by anti-Asian racism, and the number of witness or self-reports skyrocketed compared to pre-pandemic times (Angus Reid Institute 2020a; Kong et al. 2021; Ngo et al. 2023). It is not surprising that the Asian population are scapegoated as a community responsible for COVID-19, since prejudices and stigmas of Asians being unfavourable and expendable are long established through historical immigration legislations and restrictions. Nonetheless, the increased percentages of assaults and hate crimes motivated by anti-Asian racism remain alarming. For the Asian population, the COVID-19 is no longer just a pandemic, but a syndemic of physical and mental health crisis, economic inequalities, and racial discrimination.

In this chapter, I examine the historical persistence of Asian discrimination by reviewing past immigration legislations and restrictions as well as records of Chinese and Asian immigrants working as railroad labourers in the 19th and early 20th century. This section is followed by a review on preceding epidemics that bore similarities with COVID-19 to observe the extended influences that government intervention and public opinion have on this pandemic. In the subsequent section, I analyze reports, news articles, and social media posts since the beginning of the pandemic to gain a fuller understanding on Asians' lived experience and their opinions during COVID-19, as well as to examine, from a qualitative standpoint, the severity of anti-Asian racism because of the virus. Following the literature review, I consider the two theoretical frameworks that I use to frame this research: critical race theory and intersectionality.

2.2 HISTORICAL PERSISTENCE OF ASIAN DISCRIMINATION

The history of North America is one burdened with the othering of racial minorities. Large groups of Asian population migrated to this continent throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, among whom were Chinese and Japanese. Asian immigrants were brought in as cheap labour for railroad constructions and agricultural industries, but they soon became the receiving end of hostility from local white residents (Chen et al. 2020; Lee 2007; Lee 2015).

Both the U.S. and Canada implemented immigration laws to restrict and to prohibit Asian immigrants from entering the two countries. In the U.S., an Act to discourage immigration of those who were deemed unassimilable was passed by the administration in 1855, along with a fifty-dollar tax on every Asian migrant. Although this Act was quickly annulled, it was replaced by two other Acts that served the same purpose in 1858 (Daniels 2011). These legislations, combined with the fury from the nation's working class who blamed their economic hardships on Asian labourers, set off a chain reaction in anti-Asian sentiments: anti-Coolie clubs were created in San Francisco, and the Californian Democrats resolutely expressed anti-Chinese opinions (Daniels 2011). As a result, an all-out ban was issued for any Chinese or Japanese who wanted to enter the country.

Canada did not fare any better in the treatment of Asian immigrants in its own history. The mid- to late-1800s had seen multiple Canadian immigration policies with prejudice. Similarly to the Act passed by the U.S. legislature in 1855, the 1885 Chinese Immigration Act in Canada also curbed Asian immigration by imposing a fifty-dollar tax on Chinese trying to enter the country, and the following 15 years saw a drastic rise in the duty imposed – from the original \$50 to \$100 in 1900 and eventually to \$500 in 1903 (Ferguson 1975; Li 1998; Van Dyk 2018). In 1923, Canada passed another Chinese Immigration Act that practically prohibited all Chinese

immigrants from entering (Li 1998; Van Dyk 2018). The Gentlemen's Agreement (Hayashi-Lemieux Agreement) that Canada negotiated with Japan in 1908 effectively dwindled the number of Japanese immigrants down to 400 per year, and the Continuous Journey Regulation established in the same year required foreigners to arrive in Canada "on a through ticket purchased in that country", essentially barring the entry of those coming from places with no direct transportation with Canada (Ferguson 1975; Van Dyk 2018). In a more general sense, the Immigration Act of 1906 gave the Canadian government more authority on immigration admission, and those deemed unsuitable and undesirable for admission under conditions determined by the administration were banned from entry following the enactment of the Immigration Act of 1910 (Van Dyk 2018). These regulations were repealed in the 1920s and 1930s, but it was not until mid-1960s that the last vestiges of racial policies were removed and Asians were given more chances to enter Canada; until then, policies favoured the migration of people from Europe and the United States (Li 1998). These immigration strategies stereotyped Asian people not as desirable citizens but as perpetual foreigners – undesirable as residents and incapable of assimilation, and this label has been attached to the community ever since.

During the 19th century, Chinese people migrated to the Americas and as many as 10,000 to 12,000 were recruited as railroad labourers (Voss 2018). Archaeologists and researchers later discovered evidence to their precarious and segregated working and living conditions, and that this population was significantly underpaid and heavily exploited compared to Irish and European immigrants (Kennedy 2019; Merritt, Weisz & Dixon 2012; Voss 2018; Williams 1996). Chinese immigrants, alongside immigrants from countries outside of the Americas, were notable contributors to the transcontinental railroads, and yet they were rarely mentioned or commemorated (Merritt et al. 2012). Instead, Chinese and Asian immigrants were treated as

dirty, disposable “others” that not only were denied basic human rights but were also accused of “destroying the ability of unions and other unskilled workers to fight for better working conditions” (Merritt et al. 2012).

These were only snippets of the history of Asian racialization in North America. The Asian population in North American histories had been labelled as economic competitions with a lack of willingness or ability to assimilate, and Chinese, Japanese, and other Asian immigration were described as the “yellow plague” (Lee 2007). Today, racialization is much more coded than it was in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, particularly after the civil rights movement when racial discourses turned from overt languages to covert and more elaborate terms (Kim 1999). However, this does not mean that racial stigmatization has become less of an issue in society. Statutes and regulations notwithstanding, there are other forms of discriminatory actions directed towards the Asian population that are less overt but remain deeply rooted in historical legislations such as scapegoating, stereotyping, microaggression, and objectification, and covertness only leads to lower consciousness for discrimination and more obstacles for conversation. The pandemic, unfortunately, ignited the long-existing racial conflicts by placing everyone in a public health crisis that affected people’s education, employment, and the ability to enjoy leisure activities. Research have shown that, in a negative environment, people would blame others in an attempt to defend the self from undesirable effects (Kaufmann, Quirin, & Baumann 2022). In frustration and under pressure caused by the mass lockdown and mandatory mask requirements, people rushed to find someone to blame, and the location for the initial COVID-19 diagnosis was the perfect ignition.

2.3 COVID-19: A MIRROR OF FLUS AND EPIDEMICS BEFORE ITSELF

The pandemic was a rather unique experience for most Canadians and Americans: this was the first time any had experienced a disease so contagious that social, economic, and cultural infrastructures were shut down for many months and quarantine protocols were implemented. Some of the more notable epidemics before COVID-19 were the Ebola virus of 2013-2016, the H1N1 epidemic of 2009-2010, the SARS epidemic of 2002-2004, and the HIV/AIDS crisis of 1981 (Byrne & Hays 2021; World Health Organization 2023). Compared to COVID-19, these epidemics were mostly geographically contained, with the exception of the HIV/AIDS epidemic which was largely confined to intravenous drug users, individuals requiring blood transfusions and organ transplants, and those with multiple sex partners. While devastating, these diseases did not reach pandemic proportions as COVID-19 did.

Before going deeper into the coronavirus pandemic and its social effects, it is important to look at the viral outbreaks that preceded it, the most notable and relevant being the 1918 flu pandemic and the 2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2018), the 1918 influenza infected an estimate of 500 million people and killed approximately 50 million worldwide, with high mortality rate among healthy people. Back then, there was no medication or vaccination, and mass quarantine was imposed as one of the preventions for the further spreading of the virus. In 2002, the first case of SARS was reported in Guangdong, China. It quickly spread from the province to Hong Kong and other parts of Asian and, later, to North America via human migration in 2003 (Cherry 2004; CDC 2013). Due to the withholding of information by the Chinese authorities, there were no exact numbers of infection or deaths, only an estimation that more than 2,500 cases of SARS occurred in Beijing by June 2003, and around 8,500 cases identified in more than 20 countries by

July 2003 (Liang et al. 2004). In Toronto, 44 people died from the virus, 213 cases were confirmed, and thousands were socially or economically affected (Keil and Ali 2006; Rae and Zeng 2006). Fast-forward to today, the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the globe like wildfires, and at the time of writing this thesis, there have been over 767 million confirmed cases, including almost 7 million deaths (WHO 2023).

Indeed, throughout human history, there have been more than three public health crises. I include the 1918 influenza and the 2003 SARS epidemic because the pandemic that we experienced recently bore uncanny similarities with each of them in terms of administrative preventions and social responses. All three times, the viruses appeared from the unknown and spread rapidly, adding to people's fear, and all three times, governments administered masks and quarantine mandates to various levels. The similarities between COVID-19 and the 1918 influenza ends here, but there exists a third commonality between the SARS epidemic and COVID-19 – that, in both cases, the viruses were first diagnosed in China, which led to a surge in anti-Asian racism in both situations. Combined with the deeply rooted fear of widespread contagious diseases, emotions against Chinese and Asian people were stronger than before. This constitutes one of the centre points of this thesis: that the Asian community has been suffering from discrimination because of the pandemic.

As was mentioned before, in a negative environment, people tend to blame others as a defense mechanism (Kaufmann et al. 2022). Asian migrants were scapegoated for competing with and taking away jobs from local people ever since they first set foot on North America. Today, with the pandemic, Asian people have, once again, become the target for scapegoating, distrust, and discrimination (Tahmasbi et al. 2021). When COVID-19 appeared, no one had any precise knowledge as to where the pathogen came from and how it would develop. As the virus

spread and the death toll started climbing, the fear of the unknown was layered with the dread of being infected and the fear of death. In an attempt to curb transmission and death rates, governments asked that people stay at home, and masks became mandatory in public spaces, and this furthered people's unease physically and psychologically (Bricker 2020; Williams et al. 2020). The fact that the first COVID-19 case was discovered and diagnosed in Wuhan, China only intensified the anxiety and increased anger the public felt towards the situation. It did not help that SARS was originated from China as well, and that the Chinese governments back in 2003 failed to report accurate data for the epidemic for various reasons (Davis 2005). Western societies began to crusade against Chinese and, ultimately, Asian people.

2.4 BEING ASIAN DURING COVID-19

Viruses do not discriminate against race or culture. The pandemic has been a difficult time for everyone, but it has been especially so for the Asian community. Asian people have suffered not only from the anxiety of being infected by the virus and the fear and pain of losing loved ones to the disease but also from the fear of being targeted by anti-Asian hate crimes. Asian people quickly became the personification of the virus and the target for racial discrimination.

According to reports by the Stop AAPI Hate campaign, in a little over a month from mid-March to late April 2020, the campaign's reporting centre received over 1,000 complaints or reports of "coronavirus discrimination" towards Asian Americans (Stop AAPI Hate n.d.). In Canada, from March 2020 to February 2021, 1,150 cases of racially motivated assaults were reported to web platforms such as COVIDRacism.ca and elimin8hate.org., 40% of which were from Ontario and 44% from British Columbia, the two provinces with the highest Asian population in the country (Kong et al. 2021; Statistics Canada 2016). In a year since the outbreak

of COVID-19, Vancouver saw a whopping 717% increase in anti-Asian hate crimes, while 16 of America's largest cities and counties observed a 164% rise in these incidents, with New York topping at 223% (Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism 2021; Vancouver Police Department 2021). A survey on racism towards Chinese Canadians revealed that half of the participants were verbally abused with name calling and racist insults (Angus Reid Institute 2020a), and 20% of Asian Canadian members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) experienced racism compared to 1% of other members of the union (Wilkinson & Ogoe 2020). Approximately 81% of Asian adults felt that hate crimes and violence against the Asian community were increasing in 2021, and while the percentage decreased to around 63% in 2022, people remained worried that they might be threatened or attacked due to their race or ethnicity (Noe-Bustamante et al. 2022; Ruiz, Edwards & Lopez 2021). These worries were not unfounded: a poll by the Chinese Canadian National Council for Social Justice (2020) reported that 21% of survey participants believed that sitting next to an Asian or Chinese person who did not wear a mask on a bus was not safe, and the same poll found that 4% of respondents believed that all Asians or Chinese carry the virus. Similarly in the United States, 24% of participants for an Ipsos poll (2020) were concerned about being physically close to someone of Asian ancestry, 46% felt unease about coming close to an Asian person who did not have masks on, and 3 in 10 blamed China or Chinese people for COVID-19.

The situation has not been pleasant for other racial minorities either: almost 42% of immigrants in Canada said they fear being the target of discrimination because of their racial identity (Hango 2020). On August 2, 2022, Statistics Canada released a report on police-reported hate crimes in Canada during 2021, and it indicated a 72% increase in hate crimes since 2019, with a 6% rise in hate crimes targeting race or ethnicity (Moreau 2022). Overall, racial minority

groups observed three times more aggression based on race and ethnicity compared to the rest of the population (Heidinger & Cotter 2020), and discrimination increased the most for Asians since the start of the pandemic, especially for Chinese people, who were 10 times more likely to experience discrimination than any other population (Statistics Canada 2022).

The numbers reflect the surge in reports for anti-Asian hate crimes in the media. In Manhattan, a Korean woman was punched in the face by someone who said to her, “you’ve got coronavirus” (ABC News 2020); a staff writer at the New Yorker was insulted while taking out the trash¹; an Asian family with two young children were stabbed in a supermarket in Texas because the suspect thought “the family was Chinese, and infecting people with the coronavirus” (Margolin 2020); an Asian man living in Vancouver experienced racist verbal attack and had garbage tossed at him (Baylon & Cecci 2021); in the 2021 Atlanta spa shooting, six Asian women were fatally shot (Vera & Hanna 2021); in New York, a man physically assaulted seven Asian women in the span of 2 hours (Yang 2022); the list goes on. These were not isolated incidents, as shown in the number and the percentage increases in complaints and reports on racially-motivated assaults.

The statistics and media outputs were alarming but indicative. The disease lowered public’s trust in Asian people and provided a reason for scapegoating and blame (Stop AAPI Hate 2022; Tahmasbi et al. 2021). The spread of COVID-19 was automatically connected to Asian people, and there were people who believed that all Chinese or all Asians carry the disease (Chinese Canadian National Council for Social Justice 2020; Ipsos 2020). Furthermore, the FBI issued a warning for the surge of anti-Asian hate crimes in as early as March 2020 – when

¹ Jiayang Fan’s Twitter post, accessed February 7 2023, <https://twitter.com/JiayangFan/status/1240111033550766080>

COVID-19 was initially deemed a global pandemic by WHO – based on an assumption that Asian Americans would be associated with the virus (Margolin 2020). These spoke volumes about the Western perception of Asian people as a dangerous “yellow peril” that posed a threat to the Western society (Li & Nicholson 2021). That the virus was first discovered in China only further solidified the stigmatization of the Asian community, branding all Asians as “virus carriers”.

The association between the Asian community and disease is not new. Yellow peril was one of the leading reasons why western societies decided to legally exclude Chinese and other Asian immigrants in the 19th century, and the perception towards Asian people worsened when a Chinese American man who died of the bubonic plague was falsely accused of being the source of the disease (Le et al. 2020). Today, images of wet markets in China and videos of an Asian woman eating bat soup set off an explosion in western societies (Shen-Berro 2020). No one thought of questioning the context or the accuracy of these materials; instead, public opinions swarmed to blame China, Chinese nationals, and eventually anyone of Asian descent for the spread of COVID-19. These incidents solidify the deep-seated “yellow peril” trope – that Chinese and Asians carry diseases, are unsanitary and diseased, and should be avoided and excluded – and the use of xenophobic terms in the face of COVID-19 further intensified discrimination against Asian people (Jack-Davies 2020). Essentially, the Chinese and Asian communities have been experiencing a syndemic of COVID-19, racial discrimination, and burdens on mental health.

The initial conceptualization of syndemics involved “gang-related and other violence, substance abuse, and AIDS” and the discussion on the interconnections of the three health and social phenomena, and a syndemic was explained as “a closely interrelated complex of health

and social crises” (Singer 2000: 13). Syndemic theory scholars focus on the biosocial connections between health and socioeconomic issues, that a certain disease is affected by social conditions in the way it spreads and in the communities it impacts (Singer et al. 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed social, economic, and health disparities among racialized groups, including higher infection and mortality rates, higher possibility of substance abuse, higher rates of poverty, and lack of health insurance, alongside any physical and mental burden associated with racial discrimination (Esses & Hamilton 2021; Gravlee 2020; Hooper, Nápoles & Pérez-Stable 2020; Khanlou et al. 2021; Poteat et al. 2020; Shim & Starks 2021; Zhou et al. 2021). For racialized persons and – in the case of this thesis – Asian people, the rise in anti-Asian racism co-concurred with the coronavirus pandemic in a syndemic-like fashion, and this form of intersection created an adverse effect that was disproportionately felt by the Asian population, making their lives exceptionally harder during the pandemic.

Sadly, there remain those who look for excuses for the prejudiced responses that Asian people received and experienced during COVID-19. In the 2021 Atlanta spa shooting where six Asian women were brutally killed, juries did not file hate crime charges against the gunman, only murder charges (Chavez & Chen 2022). The perpetrator told authorities that he had a sex addiction, and the police spokesperson described the 21-year-old’s action as trying to eliminate his sexual temptation and not racially motivated (The Guardian 2021; Whitehurst & Price 2021). Given that the shootings happened in locations mostly with female Asian employees and that six out of eight victims were Asian women, to describe such felony only as motivated by a sex addiction sparked outrage and disbelief not only in the Asian community but also in other racial minority communities as well. By pathologizing the attacker and labelling such a crime as an act induced by a sex addiction is, in and of itself, a form of racial discrimination towards Asian

women. It assumed and implied that all workers in these spas and parlors are sex workers, and displayed an underlying and long-lasting objectification and hypersexualization of Asian women. It may not be pandemic-induced racism against Asians, but it was discrimination nonetheless, fueled by the fetishization of Asian women and prejudice towards the Asian community. However, it is encouraging to learn that many Asian American legal scholars and practitioners have been advocating more detailed hate crimes sentences for cases such as this one, and they have also been actively helping the victims' families navigate the legal system in times of mourning (Pearson 2023). As well, following the attacks in Atlanta, the U.S. Congress passed the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act and then-President Joe Biden signed it into law (Sprunt 2021). These are all positive developments in rectifying the inherently and historically racist system, but we still have a long way to go.

2.5 GENERALIZED TRUST DURING COVID-19

The definition of trust varies, with some scholars conceptualizing it as a form of rational evaluation: that “I trust you because your interest encapsulates mine”, that “any expectations I have are grounded in an understanding [...] of your interests specifically with respect to me”, or defined as “the belief that others will not deliberately or knowingly do us harm, if they can avoid it, and will look after our interests, if this is possible” (Delhey & Newton 2005: 311; Hardin 2002: 3). Another conceptualization of trust denotes a reliance on “certain characteristics of the trusted, which we learn to detect and process” (Nannestad 2008: 415). Prior research indicated that racial discrimination has a negative impact on generalized trust – trust in other people (Douds & Wu 2017; Park, Jaung & Park 2024; Wilkes & Wu 2019). However, these studies focused more on a one-way relationship for trust and racism: that racial discrimination is an indicator of trust; if a racialized person has experienced discrimination, they are likely to have

lower generalized trust. At the time of this thesis, there remains a gap in research on trust – or lack of trust – as an indicator of discrimination. Discrimination and trust are never unidirectional; they work with each other. Racialized groups are more often the subjects of surveillance and heavy biases in various situations and locations, carefully profiled and scrutinized for potential criminal activities (Glover 2009; Luo & Wilkinson 2024; Ontario Human Rights Commission 2017). Racial profiling exists socially and institutionally because of stereotypes that stemmed from historical forms of discrimination: in the context of Asian people, the migration of Asians was termed the “yellow peril”, branding Asian people as unsanitary, untrustworthy, and undesirable migration viruses (Lee 2007; Leung & Guan 2004). This is an example of Asian people being subjected to discrimination due to lack of trust towards this population that stemmed from biased opinions deeply rooted in society. As iterated, discrimination and trust are not unidirectional; there exists, in between them, an interweaving effect. Therefore, I believe it is equally important to include the discussion of trust in this study.

2.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

To contextualize my study, I rely on critical race theory and intersectionality as my theoretical frameworks as they provide comprehensive arguments for analyzing and understanding the racial phenomena stemming from the pandemic.

2.6.1 Critical Race Theory

Originated from American legal studies in the late 1970s, critical race theory investigates the persistence of racism despite state polity intervention, questions the equality in the jurisprudence of race, and targets the lack of improvement for the experience of racialized people (Delgado & Stefancic 2017; Harris 2015). It emerged as a response to the lack of emphasis on race during legal processes, and has since served as a form of legal scholarship grounded in

contextualized, lived experience, dedicated to studying about racism (McCoy & Rodricks 2015; Taylor 1998). There are three tenets in critical race theory that provide a firm theoretical support for this study: (a) *racism as a normal but permanent aspect of experiences for racial minority groups*; (b) *race as a social construct*; and (c) *intersectionality as a vital part in understanding and promoting equalities* (Delgado & Stefancic 2017; McCoy & Rodricks 2015).

Many writers and scholars have pointed out the prevalence and commonness of racism in racialized peoples' everyday lives, whether from a theoretical standpoint or from writing about real-life incidents (Delgado & Stefancic 2017; DiAngelo 2018; Ladson-Billings 2013; Metz 2019; Taylor 1998). Racism is regarded by critical race theorists as an ordinary but unacknowledged social phenomenon and a fundamental cause of racialized inequalities. "Racism is a system", wrote Robin DiAngelo (2018: 21), and it is a system supported by administrations and authorities, as well as a system deeply embedded in society and infiltrates the ways people live, work, think, and interact. The pervasiveness of racism was obviously displayed through the establishment of immigration policies back in the 19th century and the stigmatization and discrimination towards Asian people has since persisted. Racism today is more difficult to address because the ways in which people express racist thoughts have become more covert – some even hidden behind jokes and "friendly banter", leading to fewer and tougher acknowledgements of racism and more acquiescence of racial inequalities (Aguilera 2020; Delgado & Stefancic 2017). However, from the alarming number of abrasive social media posts and reports of hate crimes and harassment, one cannot deny that the existence of racism remains strong today, and COVID-19 has made racism more evident and further amplified it.

Critical race theory also holds that race is socially constructed to serve the interests of the dominant group – that the concept of race is not objective, but one that was invented for the

convenience of characterization and manipulation for the dominant group. The social constructionism of race is deeply rooted in colonialism, slavery, and segregation – “race” as a concept was constructed to differentiate groups of people by physical appearances and languages, and it is used to justify the inequalities that minority groups suffer from (Delgado & Stefancic 2017; DiAngelo 2018). This is a prevalent phenomenon and is of great interest to critical race theorists, since, in order to serve theory social, political, or economic purposes, the dominant society would utilize aspects such as skin colour and cultural disparities to create distinctions between different groups and to bestow upon racialized groups “pseudo-permanent characteristics” (Delgado & Stefancic 2017: 9). Take, for example, the description of Asian migration into North America as the “yellow peril” and the “yellow plague” (Lee 2007; Leung & Guan 2004), the “model minority” label on Asian people that diminishes Asian achievements and perpetuates the ignorance in Asian othering (Chou 2008; Kawai 2006; Ruiz, Im & Tian 2023; Wong & Halgin 2006), or the reference of COVID-19 as the “Chinese virus” or “Kung-Flu” that proliferated xenophobia and the stigmatization of Asian community as a plague and a disease carrier (Day 2020; Lantz & Wenger 2023; Leung & Guan 2004).

Intersectionality is also one of the several tenets in critical race theory, with many scholars stressing the importance of approaching racism as a social issue that manifests according to different conditions, as well as recognizing the effects different identities and positionalities have on people’s experiences (Crenshaw 1991; Delgado & Stefancic 2017; Fleras 2012; Gillborn 2015; Jones & Abes 2013). Intersectionality is discussed in further detail in the following subsection, as I am using it not only as a concept emerging from the critical race discourse but also as its own framework.

2.6.2 Intersectionality

In order to gain a more holistic picture of the Asian experience during COVID-19, intersectionality also acts as an essential theoretical structure that guides this study, not only within the premise of critical race discourse, but also as its own theory.

Intersectionality is one of the several tenets of critical race theory, with many scholars stressing the importance of recognizing the effects that different identities and positionalities have on people's experiences (Crenshaw 1991; Delgado & Stefancic 2017; Fleras 2012; Jones & Abes 2013). The term "intersectionality" was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, who used it to refer to the marginalization of Black women in legal and political fields and in feminist discourse, as well as to discuss how Black women are affected in areas such as the labour market by the intersection of race and gender (Carbado et al. 2013; Kaushik & Walsh 2018). In the article "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color", Crenshaw (1991) emphasized how the experiences of women of colour are not only the combined results of racial and gender biases, but also the product of their social and political identities. One cannot paint a holistic picture of the violence towards women of colour without looking at their lived experience as a gendered, racial, social, political, or even historical minority, just as one cannot form an exhaustive understanding on the experiences of Chinese and Asian people without grounding the analysis in the history and the lived experiences of this community. Intersectionality thus becomes a useful analytic tool for this study, as it proposes that race, ethnicity, gender, and class interact with one another in the discussion and expression of inequality while also recognizes the influence each separate attribute has as a cause for discrimination (Fleras 2012). Researchers such as Hill Collins and Bilge (2016) also

acknowledged that intersectionality is helpful for analyzing the complex power structure of society – how different conditions and dimensions can be influenced by one another.

As iterated, a person’s situation can be shaped by the collaborative effects of multiple axes.

Take, for example, racialized women and their lived experiences during COVID-19. Many of these women either worked in the healthcare sector or in positions designated as essential during lockdown, and yet they still had to take up familial responsibilities since this is something that societal norms placed upon the female identity (McKeon 2021). Women had to juggle their occupations alongside childcare with little support, yet they were more affected by the economy and suffered higher probability of job loss than men (Madgavkar et al. 2020; McKeon 2021). Intersectionality, therefore, plays an important role in understanding how and why people are affected in different ways. Similarly, intersectionality helps me in analyzing and comprehending how various socioeconomic identities and conditions affected Asian people during the pandemic, as it looks at discrimination and oppression as experienced not through one single identity or system but through the intertwining of all identities.

2.6.3 The Weighing of Two Theories

This study is informed by intersectionality with roots in critical race theory. Although critical race theory is helpful in framing this study, intersectionality is the main theory for analysis. Critical race theory is included as it provides a solid ground for discussing the experiences of racialized people. The three tenets mentioned – racism is ordinary and a permanent part of lived experience; racism as a social construct; and intersectionality – substantiate my thesis by placing race and racism at the centre of discussing, with the notion that racial inequalities and discrimination are woven in the very fabric of our lived experiences and the society we live in, and that the sharp increase in discriminatory jargon and acts is not an

occasional occurrence. Racism has always existed, only that it has been amplified by a public health crisis with its first diagnosed case in a country that is not white. Critical race theory brings the problems of inequality and the institutionalization of racism to the forefront, and it acts as an analytic tool for understanding the persistence of racism prior and throughout the pandemic.

However, given the nature of the data that I possess, critical race theory cannot be fully referred to. Data from surveys and questionnaires indicate different experiences of discrimination by people with different social identities and with various contexts. While the responses may hint towards the problems in racial policies, the focus of my data analysis is on understanding the similarities and differences between the Asian experience in Canada and the U.S. during COVID-19 and to compare the Asian experience across different variables. Therefore, my primary theory is intersectionality, as it plays a principal role in connecting multiple factors, and could better guide the analysis on how different aspects and conditions associate with anti-Asian discrimination.

2.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter reviews literature on archival and current discriminatory policies and incidents in Canada and the United States. A study showed through regression analyses that infectious diseases are statistically significant in relation to social stigmas, and noted the role of media in proliferating stigmatization and discrimination (Williams, Gonzalez-Medina & Le 2011). My review in literature vis-à-vis the coronavirus pandemic and anti-Asian discrimination supports this finding. From social media posts to news articles, from reports to surveys, it is evident that the coronavirus pandemic has intensified racial discrimination towards Asians in Canada and the USA. However, most studies on Asian discrimination during COVID-19 are qualitative, and there lacks quantitative research on anti-Asian racism during pandemic.

The theoretical frameworks that guide this study are also discussed in this chapter. This study is grounded in critical race theory, as it provides a comprehensive tool on analyzing racial disparities, xenophobia, and the lived experiences of racialized persons. Due to the nature of my dataset and the focus of my analysis, I refer to intersectionality as a primary theoretical framework, as intersectionality allows me to study the synergistic influences that different socioeconomic factors have on Asian people's lived experiences during COVID-19.

CHAPTER 3 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the dataset and the methodology used for this study. In the first section, I discuss the rationale behind the selection of data. It is followed by the section on data source, which provides an in-depth description on the dataset used for analysis, including how and from whom data were collected. The third section discusses details of data analysis techniques, which includes the conceptualization and operationalization of the independent and dependent variables. The section following data analysis techniques discusses the benefits and limitations of using secondary data, as well as any ethics considerations that affect this study. In the last section, I conclude this chapter with a brief summary of data and methodology used for this thesis.

3.1 RATIONALE

To reiterate, my thesis addresses the following question: *if and to what extent does COVID-19 exacerbate racism against Asian people in Canada and the U.S.?* To better examine this question, I divide it into two representational points: (a) have Asians in Canada and the U.S. experienced racism due to COVID-19 and, if so, under what circumstances and how likely? And (b) are there any similarities or differences between the Asian experiences in Canada and the U.S.? Under the first question, I further separate the circumstances into various smaller contexts, including age, gender, education level, employment, and immigration status, to name a few.

We know from reviewing existing research that the pandemic has exacerbated existing and uncovered various hidden social problems, with anti-Asian racism being one of the most severe (Budhwani & Sun 2020; Cho et al. 2020; Le et al. 2020). Due to the virus being initially discovered and reported in China, public opinion towards this country have reached an all-time

low in 2021 (Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada 2021). To provide some quantitative analysis to address this problem, I approached the COVIDImpacts.ca team in Canada, USA, and Mexico, and they have graciously agreed to share the data they have collected after the outbreak of the pandemic.

There are two reasons behind the selection of this project and its dataset, and the first one is simple: at the time of proposing my research question, this was one of the only existing cross-national comprehensive surveys on how COVID-19 has affected various groups of people socially, economically, mentally, and physically, and it was the only study examining North America holistically. While the COVIDImpacts.ca team studies the social impacts caused by the pandemic in a large scope, I am more interested in the experiences of Asian population residing in Canada and the U.S. with regard to racism during the pandemic. One of the principal research questions asked in the larger study is “to what extent have socioeconomic inequalities faced by Indigenous peoples, racialized persons and immigrants influenced their experience of COVID-19 and its related social and economic restrictions?” (covidimpacts.ca, accessed January 14, 2022); this question aligns with the marked anti-Asian racism events co-concurring or syndemic with COVID-19, a social phenomenon that I want to have a deeper understanding to.

The second reason is a personal one: being a part of the Asian community myself, I experienced firsthand the anxiety and uneasiness experienced by this community when hints of the virus began to spread long before COVID-19 was declared as a global pandemic. The situation turned from bad to worse after some western media, racist groups and some government authorities such as Donald Trump started calling coronavirus the “Chinese virus” and “Kung Flu” (Budhwani & Sun 2020; Kurtzman 2021; Reja 2021; Wilkinson & Ogoe 2020).

From this perspective, I see not only the sociological importance but also the social, emotional, and human rights need for studying Asian discrimination during this trying time.

3.2 DESCRIPTION OF DATASET AND LIMITATIONS

The data used for this study – *The Mental Health and Socioeconomic Impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples, Immigrants, Refugees and Racialized Peoples in Canada, USA, and Mexico* – is a set of data collected after the outbreak of COVID-19 by the COVIDImpacts.ca team in Canada, USA, and Mexico. Funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), Canada Research Chairs (2), Association for Canadian Studies, Metropolis Canada, Vanier Institute, UNESCO Canada, and MITACS (grant number 2020-448105 and VS2-175571), it provides a wealth of information on people’s experiences and opinions during the pandemic. For example, it provides valuable information about trust in government and other institutions and whether Asian peoples and other minority groups have encountered discrimination based on their identities, among other information. This dataset consists of eight longitudinal surveys conducted online and involves nearly 8,000 participants across the three countries. Participants were surveyed on topics ranging from socioeconomic status, physical and mental health conditions, to issues of trust and vaccination status. Respondents of this dataset are selected randomly from Leger’s North American Internet panels, paying attention to the allocation of participants so that there are reasonable representation of women, immigrants, and racialized persons. The surveys and polls are conducted weekly online, supported by larger omnibus surveys every three to four months. The collected data are subsequently cleaned and furnished to the research team by Leger Marketing. For my thesis, I specifically look at the Asian social and economic experiences to construct a profile of Asian people during the pandemic.

This profile is divided into two parts according to the participants' residing countries, distinguishing the Asian experience in Canada from that in America.

While the experiences of racial discrimination and xenophobia are better measured using qualitative methodology, there are useful and established survey questions related to the experience of discrimination and xenophobia which are used in the dataset. Furthermore, due to the widespread and long-term restrictions related to movement and economic activity imposed upon the persons living in Canada and the USA, online survey data collection was the only feasible method to measure this type of information in a timely fashion. Statistics Canada and the US Census Bureau have conducted some studies about discrimination during the pandemic, but their samples were drawn using convenience samples – where potential participants had to self-select into a crowd sourcing survey, meaning the participants were highly skewed in terms of their demographic, social and cultural characteristics (see Statistics Canada 2022). What differentiates this sample from the U.S. and Canadian government samples is that the participants for this COVID-19 project were randomly drawn from Leger Marketing's two pre-existing country pools of online participants. Potential participants were invited and selected using quota samples where we oversampled immigrants, Indigenous peoples, and racialized persons from both countries so we would be able to create a large enough subsample of each from where to draw comparisons. The COVIDImpacts.ca data is a larger, more geographically spread and demographically representative set of data than other existing datasets. This is far better than what I would be able to achieve on my own, given the small budget and significant time and geographic constraints that I face as well as my limited experience in the field.

3.3 CONCEPTUALIZATION AND OPERATIONALIZATION OF VARIABLES

This section focuses on the conceptualization and operationalization of variables that I use for data analysis, including the dependent and independent variables, and variables used for constructing indices for factor analysis.

Before operationalizing the variables that I use, it should be noted that, since my research question mainly focuses on Asian discrimination in Canada and the U.S., when I process the data, I recode and take out the Mexican responses from all but one question concerning visible minority status, which is directed towards Canadian respondents only. The sample sizes for Mexican respondents for the questions that I use and analyze are significantly smaller compared to the ones for American and Canadian respondents, therefore I decide to exclude Mexican responses from my analysis.

The COVIDImpacts.ca team provided me with five sets of data for each wave of survey that they did, one every six months. After comparing across variables for each dataset, I have picked the third set of data (wave 3) for my thesis, because the dataset for wave 3 includes all the variables that I find useful for my research question. The question numbers for each survey are slightly different due to the conceptual and geopolitical differences between Canada and the U.S., therefore, any variable names that are indicated in this section are from this set of data only.

3.3.1 Dependent Variable

Since this study is interested in anti-Asian discrimination in Canada and the U.S., for data analysis, I am including only the respondents who identify as Asians. The original question for respondents' race or ethnicity contains various ethnic groups such as Asian, Black, and Indigenous groups; therefore, after cleaning the missing values, I perform a dummy coding

procedure and sort all those who identify as an ethnicity other than Asian into “Not Asian”, recoded as “0”; the rest are sorted into “Asian”, recoded as “1”. This coding scheme works for both the Canadian and the American variables.

The dependent variable for this study is the experience of racism, which is defined as an individual’s experience of being discriminated against based on their race or ethnicity. For my study, this measure is framed in the surveys as the questions “Since the outbreak of COVID-19, have you been treated unfairly on the basis of visible minority status/race²?”. The question is direct and has been used in other surveys to measure discrimination (for example, the Annual Labour Force Survey in Canada).

3.3.2 Independent Variables

Various demographic characteristics have been used in previous studies to examine the factors influencing discrimination experiences. For example, the 2020 General Social Survey – Social Identity compiled information for the experiences and contexts of discriminations five years before and since the beginning of COVID-19, and asked questions regarding different aspects of discrimination (due to sex, age, race and ethnicity, physical appearance, and so on), as well as situations for discrimination (being denied entry to stores and restaurants, discriminated at workplace or when applying for jobs, dealing with public institutions such as the police, et cetera). Using the 2020 General Social Survey as a guide, I am incorporating age (categorized in age groups), sex, race and ethnicity, immigration status, education level, employment situation, income level, and trust as the independent measures for this study.

² The difference in terminology for the American versus the Canadian question is due to the lack of a uniform term in describing the population of non-Caucasian ethnicity, and there is no satisfactory term to all in defining people who do not identify as white. The use of terminology for race and ethnicity remains an ongoing discussion.

Apart from these social and economic indicators, I am also adding vaccination status as an independent variable for this study. In the histories of global health crises, vaccines have always been a stable and effective way to lower positive cases and mortality rates, but the vaccines for COVID-19 came with many controversies that gave rise to the hesitation of getting the shots. The first COVID-19 vaccines were introduced in early 2021 in an attempt to curb the fast-growing number of positive cases, but they did not come as good news only. Suspicion arose to question the extremely short amount of time used for developing and approving these vaccines, and people wondered if they were safe and effective. It did not help that, after these vaccines were introduced, news of adverse effects and neurological complications were reported, with a few severe cases that required hospitalization, leading to higher level of vaccination hesitancy (de Vrieze 2020; Hosseini & Askari 2023; Stones 2021; Wiysonge et al. 2021). Taking the vaccine is normally seen as a responsible action to keep oneself and those around them safe, but with the incidents of side effects, “to take or not to take” has really become a question, with many citizens increasingly rejecting vaccines of all forms, largely due to misinformation and misunderstanding of vaccine science. According to reports from Statistics Canada (2020 & 2022), those who have a higher education level indicated a high intent of getting vaccinated, and those who were born in Canada also responded more positively than immigrants; those who live in smaller communities and those with a household income of “less than \$30,000” reported higher rates of vaccine rejection (Frank & Arim 2020; Guay et al. 2022). Therefore, I am bringing in vaccination status as a prospective factor for discrimination.

Since I am only looking at results from respondents located in Canada and the U.S., before diving into deeper data selection, I recode a variable on geographic location using the questions “in which province or territory do you live?” for Canadians (recoded GEOC=1) and

“in which state do you live?” for Americans (recoded GEOC=2). This variable is essential for further recoding and grouping independent variables by respondents’ countries, making it easier for analyses and comparisons. In table 3.1, I list all of the independent variables that I use in data analysis for this study.

Table 3.1 The List of Independent Variables

Factor	Variable Name	Variable Label
Age group	AGECAN1	Age for Canadian respondents
	AGEUSA1	Age for American respondents
Sex	SEXCAN1	Gender for Canadian respondents
	SEXUSA1	Gender for American respondents
Race and ethnicity	ETHNC2	Ethnically for Canadian respondents
	RACEUS2	Race for American respondents
Immigration status	IMSTACA	Are you an immigrant in Canada?
	IMSTAUS	Are you an immigrant in the U.S.?
Education level	EDUCAN	Education level (Canadians)
	EDUUSA	Education level (Americans)
Employment	BEMPLOC	Employment Canadian respondents
	BEMPLOU	Employment American respondents
Income level	INCOMEC	What is your annual household income (Canadians)?
	INCOMEU	What is your annual household income (Americans)?
Vaccination status	VACCAN1	Have you had the vaccine for COVID-19 (Canadians)?
	VACUSA1	Have you had the vaccine for COVID-19 (Americans)?
Trust towards people (generalized trust)	TRPPLCAN	Canadian responses – Trust towards people in general in regard to COVID-19
	TRPPLUS	American responses – Trust towards people in general in regard to COVID-19
Trust towards immigrants	TRIMMCAN	Canadian responses – Trust towards immigrants/newcomers in general in regard to COVID-19
	TRIMMUS	American responses – Trust towards immigrants/newcomers in general in regard to COVID-19

Respondent age was collected using ordinal categories rather than date of birth. For both Canada and the U.S., the recoding process follows the same approach: those between 18 and 24 years old are recoded as “0”, those between 25 and 34 as “1”, those between 35 and 44 as “2”, those between 45 and 54 as “3”, those between 55 and 64 as “4”, those between 65 and 74 as “5”, and those who are 75 or older as “6”.

For the variable on sex, the coding scheme remains the same for both Canada and the U.S.: respondents who identify as male are coded as “0”, and those who identify as female are coded as “1”. There was an option for participants to select non-binary or an open option to indicate other gender identities, but the numbers of participants are not large enough to include them in the sample.

The variable “immigration status” refers to participants’ citizenship status within Canada or the U.S. For both countries, those who identify as immigrants are coded as “1”, while those who do not are coded as “0”.

Education level refers to respondents’ highest level of education received. For participants in both countries, those who have received high school level education or less are coded as “0”, those who have received postsecondary education³ are coded as “1”, and those who have obtained a university bachelor’s degree or higher are coded as “2”.

Employment refers to the employment situation for respondents, and for the purpose of this study, this measure is coded into a binary variable, with those who are out of the labour force coded as “0”, and those who are employed as “1”.

³ Postsecondary education including diplomas or certificates but excluding university-level degrees; this terminology error is due to a poorly written response category in the survey.

Income level is measured in five categories, with “1” representing an annual income of \$19,999 or less, “2” representing an income between \$20,000 and \$39,999, “3” as an income between \$40,000 and \$59,999, “4” as an income between \$60,000 and \$79,999, and “5” indicating an annual household income of \$80,000 or more. For the American respondents, the grouping is slightly different in terms of the amount of income and the interval of each income category, with “1” representing an income of less than \$25,000, “2” as an income equals to or higher than \$25,000 but less than \$35,000, “3” as an income equals to or higher than \$35,000 but less than \$50,000, “4” as an income equals to or higher than \$50,000 but less than \$75,000, and “5” representing an annual household income of \$75,000 or more. These differences reflect the differential value of the dollar for American versus Canadian respondents.

Vaccination status refers to whether respondents’ have taken the vaccine for COVID-19 around October 2021, the time of completing the survey. For both countries, they are categorized into two groups, with those who have not taken the vaccine coded as “0 = No” and those who responded positively coded as “1 = Yes”.

Other than the set of questions on discrimination, I have also included two questions on people’s trust towards different entities as an independent variable. The reason for this inclusion is that prior research have indicated significant association between discrimination and trust, that racialized groups and those who have experienced higher level of discrimination report a lower level of trust, and that this level of trust varies between racial groups, as well as between different socioeconomic identities such as gender, age, education, and income (Evangelist 2021; Wilkes and Wu 2019). The questions on trust ask participants to what extent do they trust people in general (variables TRPPLCAN and TRPPLUS) or immigrants/newcomers (variables TRIMMCAN and TRIMMUS) in regard to COVID-19. The survey questions that I use for

modelling and analyzing trust are originally framed in a Likert scale from 0 to 3, with 0 equaled to “not at all”, 1 “not a lot”, 2 “somewhat”, and 3 “a lot”. Although the best-fitting model for analyzing ordinal variables would be an ordinal regression, I opt to convert the ordinal variables to binary ones, since I am not looking at the degrees of difference between each scale; rather, I am more interested in the distinction between whether respondents trust or do not trust a certain group of people. Therefore, all four of the variables indicating levels of trust are coded as “0 = Do not trust (to any degree)” and “1 = Trust (to any degree)”.

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

For the reading and analysis of the data, I use the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). I removed them to remove any missing cases as is prescribed by good statistical methods. Descriptive statistics including univariate analyses are used to display the frequency, valid percentage, and sample size for each variable. Next, a series of bivariate analyses are run to examine the associations between experience of racism and each of the independent variables, as well as to analyze any similarities or differences between the experience of racism for respondents residing in Canada and the U.S.; these are accompanied by a measure of statistical significance and strength for any relationship found between these variables. Following bivariate analyses, I apply logistic regression to examine if a predictor contributes to the experience of discrimination significantly, as well as to observe the likelihoods of the factors influencing Asian people’s experiences of discrimination during the pandemic by analyzing the odds ratios for each factor.

3.5 BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS OF USING QUANTITATIVE SECONDARY DATA

There are several benefits of using secondary data, chief among them being that secondary data is the most cost-effective for a researcher’s time and financial resources. Having

readily available data saves the time and money needed for recruiting research participants and collecting primary data. For research projects like mine, using secondary data is much preferable than using primary data since I require a large sample size to reduce standard errors.

However, there are also limitations in using secondary survey data for analysis. As I mentioned earlier, an important prerequisite for secondary data being cost-effective is that it is readily available. Indeed, without prompt availability, access to secondary data is normally rather difficult. I am lucky that, for this thesis, I am provided with a clean and informative dataset; but in general, a researcher would either have to file request forms for the data they want or gain permission to access information through other means, and the time, financial, and human resources required are not trivial.

Another limitation in using secondary data lies in the restrictions of the dataset itself. Since secondary data is already collected and categorized, if the researcher was not directly involved in the development of surveys and the collection of data, there leaves little to no room for them to add or make changes to the survey questions. In my case, take the variables for trust as an example – existing data from the project by which my thesis is supported only provides responses on trust towards institutions such as governments, military, religious leaders, and media. Only two questions are related to trust towards people, one on trust towards people in general, and one on trust towards immigrants and newcomers; there are no questions on trust towards people from different ethnic groups or people according to gender. Restrictions are also observed in the categorization of options for some questions, such as the question on American respondents' race, which only includes Native Americans, Asian Americans, African Americans, Caucasian, and other. While most questions are very useful in helping me choose suitable variables for my study, some can be limiting regarding the definitions of certain concepts

(concepts such as gender or race and ethnicity may change overtime, for example) or the subjects of these questions (trust questions ask about certain subjects but not others, for example).

From analyzing the dataset, I find another limitation in using secondary data: when answering the surveys, some people may choose not to respond to certain questions, thus creating missing values for these questions. Researchers can attempt to probe for further information if these circumstances arise during the collection of primary data, but for secondary data, or quantitative data in general, it is very hard to do so, and this may or may not lead to missed information.

3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The project by which this thesis is supported is compliant with the research ethics protocols and gains ethics approval from various universities. The sample size for these data is sufficient in ensuring and protecting respondents' confidentiality. In using their surveys as my secondary data, I also comply with the rules and guidelines, as well as the confidentiality agreement as outlined by the research ethics board.

3.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I talked about the dataset that I use for this study, including how the COVIDImpacts.ca team collects the data and the reason behind my selection of this dataset. I also discussed how I operationalize the variables, and the methodology used to analyze these variables. Lastly, I considered some benefits and limitations in using secondary survey data, and the ethical considerations that affect this study.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only exacerbated anti-Asian racism, but has also provided opportunities for scapegoating the Asian population. Multiple recent research indicates an exponential rise in anti-Asian racism since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, and the public's opinion towards Chinese and Asian people has reached an all-time low (Angus Reid Institute 2020a; Chinese Canadian National Council for Social Justice 2020; Feng 2023; Georgarakis 2022). Various researchers also noted the lowered trust in immigrants and the automatic association between the virus and Asian peoples reflected in escalated workplace and business discrimination such as being refused services, being disrespected, and being asked inappropriate questions (Chinese Canadian National Council for Social Justice 2020; Ngo et al. 2023; Stop AAPI Hate 2022). Verbal and physical harassment against Asian people have increased exponentially, both online and offline, since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. These incidents include the use of expletives, racial slurs, offensive gestures, and physical assaults that caused hospitalization (Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council 2020; Budhwani & Sun 2020; Margolin 2020; Ngo et al. 2023; Stop AAPI Hate 2022; Wilkinson & Ogoe 2020). These were the incidents that Asian people have experienced since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic.

In this chapter, I present an overview of the findings of my study on the Asian experience during the pandemic, comparing the experiences of Asians living in Canada and Asians living in the USA. This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I provide the descriptive statistics for both the dependent and independent measures, including respondents' demographic and socio-economic information. The second section shows the bivariate analyses that examine

the relationships between the dependent measure and several statistically significant independent variables. The same section also includes logistic regression models used to estimate the occurrence probability of experiencing discrimination. In the third section, I connect the results from the regression models with existing research and discuss whether present findings support or contradict existing literature. I conclude this chapter with a short discussion on how the theoretical frameworks that I use relate to the present observations, and a summary on these findings.

4.2 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

In this section, I present the descriptive statistics for the independent and dependent variables used in this analysis. The independent variables include the socio-economic factors of age, sex, race and ethnicity, immigration status, vaccination status, and a few others. The dependent variable is respondents' experience of racism and discrimination, separated into two groups: the Canadian response and the American response.

4.2.1 Independent Measures

Table 4.1 displays the demographic information for the respondents in the third wave of survey, which was collected in October 2021. These variables constitute my list of independent variables as well.

Table 4.1 Descriptive Information for All Canada and U.S. Respondents, 2021

Variables	Canada	U.S.
SEX:		
Male	1,436 (48.4%)	1,783 (48.2%)
Female	1,533 (51.6%)	1,913 (51.8%)
Total	2,968 (100%)	3,695 (100%)
AGE GROUP:		
18-24	314 (10.5%)	389 (10.5%)
25-34	498 (16.7%)	719 (19.4%)
35-44	471 (15.8%)	608 (16.4%)

45-54	544 (18.2%)	610(16.4%)
55-64	520 (17.5%)	620 (16.7%)
65-74	466 (15.6%)	534 (14.4%)
75 or older	166 (5.6%)	235 (6.3%)
Total	2,980 (100%)	3,714 (100%)

IMMIGRATION

STATUS:

Immigrant	645 (21.7%)	509 (13.8%)
Non-immigrant	2,327 (78.3%)	3,178 (86.2%)
Total	2,972 (100%)	3,687 (100%)

**RACE AND
ETHNICITY:**

Asian	364 (12.8%)	219 (5.9%)
Non-Asian	2,490 (87.2%)	3,466 (94.1%)
Total	2,854 (100%)	3,685 (100%)

EDUCATION LEVEL:

High school or less	857 (29.1%)	1,004 (27.2%)
Postsecondary schooling	1,277 (43.4%)	1,239 (33.6%)
University bachelor's degree or higher	811 (27.5%)	1,447 (39.2%)
Total	2,944 (100%)	3,691 (100%)

EMPLOYMENT:

Employed	1,692 (58.7%)	1,986 (55.6%)
Out of labour force	1,190 (41.3%)	1,584 (44.4%)
Total	2,882 (100%)	3,570 (100%)

INCOME

(CANADIANS):

\$19,999 or less	218 (8.3%)	
Between \$20,000 and \$39,999	411 (15.5%)	
Between \$40,000 and \$59,999	460 (17.4%)	
Between \$60,000 and \$79,999	428 (16.2%)	
\$80,000 or more	1,126 (42.6%)	
Total	2,642 (100%)	

INCOME

(AMERICANS):

\$24,999 or less		740 (20.9%)
\$25,000 - \$34,999		490 (13.8%)

\$35,000 - \$49,999		521 (14.7%)
\$50,000 - \$74,999		699 (19.7%)
\$75,000 or more		1,096 (30.9%)
Total		3,546 (100%)
VACCINATION STATUS:		
Vaccinated	2,645 (88.8%)	2,564 (69%)
Unvaccinated	335 (11.2%)	1,150 (31%)
Total	2,980 (100%)	3,714 (100%)
TRUST TOWARDS PEOPLE IN GENERAL:		
Do not trust (to any degree)	1,782 (59.8%)	2,131 (57.4%)
Trust (to any degree)	1,198 (40.2%)	1,583 (42.6%)
Total	2,980 (100%)	3,714 (100%)
TRUST TOWARDS IMMIGRANTS:		
Do not trust (to any degree)	1,585 (59.2%)	2,120 (61.8%)
Trust (to any degree)	1,092 (40.8%)	1,308 (38.2%)
Total	2,677 (100%)	3,428 (100%)

Excluding Mexican participants, a total of 6,694 respondents from Canada and the U.S. completed the third omnibus survey. At the time of completion, there were 2,980 (44.5%) from Canada and 3,714 (55.5%) from the United States, with age ranging mostly between 18 and 74 years. In terms of sex, 48.4% (1,436) of Canadian respondents identified as male and 51.6% (1,533) identified as female, whereas 48.2% (1,783) of American respondents identified as male and 51.8% (1,913) identified as female. Less than a quarter (21.7%) of Canadian respondents were born outside of Canada, compared to only 13.8% of American respondents. When asked about their ethnicity, 12.8% of Canadian respondents and 5.9% of American respondents identified themselves as Asians, while 87.2% of Canadian participants and 94.1% of American participants identified as other ethnicities (including Black, Indigenous, and white). With respect

to respondents' education level, about 7 in 10 Canadian respondents (70.9%) said they have received postsecondary education or higher; American respondents reported a similar but slightly higher percentage (72.8%) for those who have received postsecondary education or higher. About 6 in 10 Canadian respondents (58.7%) reported that they were in the labour force, compared to 55.6% of American respondents, and 58.8% of Canadian respondents earned an annual household income of close to or above \$68,400, the national median (Statistics Canada 2023), whereas only 3 in 10 American respondents reported an annual household income above the 2021 national median of \$76,330 (US Census Bureau 2023). In terms of vaccination for COVID-19, a large majority of Canadian respondents (88.8%) took the vaccine, while a lower percentage of American respondents (69%) were vaccinated.

Trust is a predictor for Asian discrimination for this study as there exists a gap in research on trust – or lack of trust – and its influence on people's experience of racial discrimination. Trust can be negatively by experiencing multiple acts of discrimination, and it can also be an indication of a higher probability of being discriminated. From the descriptive statistics, only 4 in 10 respondents from Canada said that they trusted immigrants or people in general. In the U.S., people were less trusting towards immigrants regarding the pandemic (61.8%).

4.2.2 *Dependent Measure – Experience of Discrimination*

Two questions regarding discrimination were asked: (a) Since the outbreak of COVID-19, have you been treated unfairly on the basis of visible minority status? And (b) Since the outbreak of COVID-19, have you been treated unfairly on the basis of race? Table 4.2 shows the distribution of the responses among the entire sample from Canada and the USA.

Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistics on Experience of Discrimination, Canada vs. USA

	Canadian	American
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Since the outbreak of COVID-19, have you been treated unfairly on the basis of visible minority status/race ⁴ ?	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent
No	2,845	95.5%	3,418	92%
Yes	135	4.5%	296	8%
Total	2,980	100%	3,714	100%

An examination of table 4.2 reveals that a small number of participants from both countries reported having experienced discrimination. In Canada, 4.5% of survey participants reported experiencing some form of discrimination. In the United States, however, this number is nearly double at 8%.

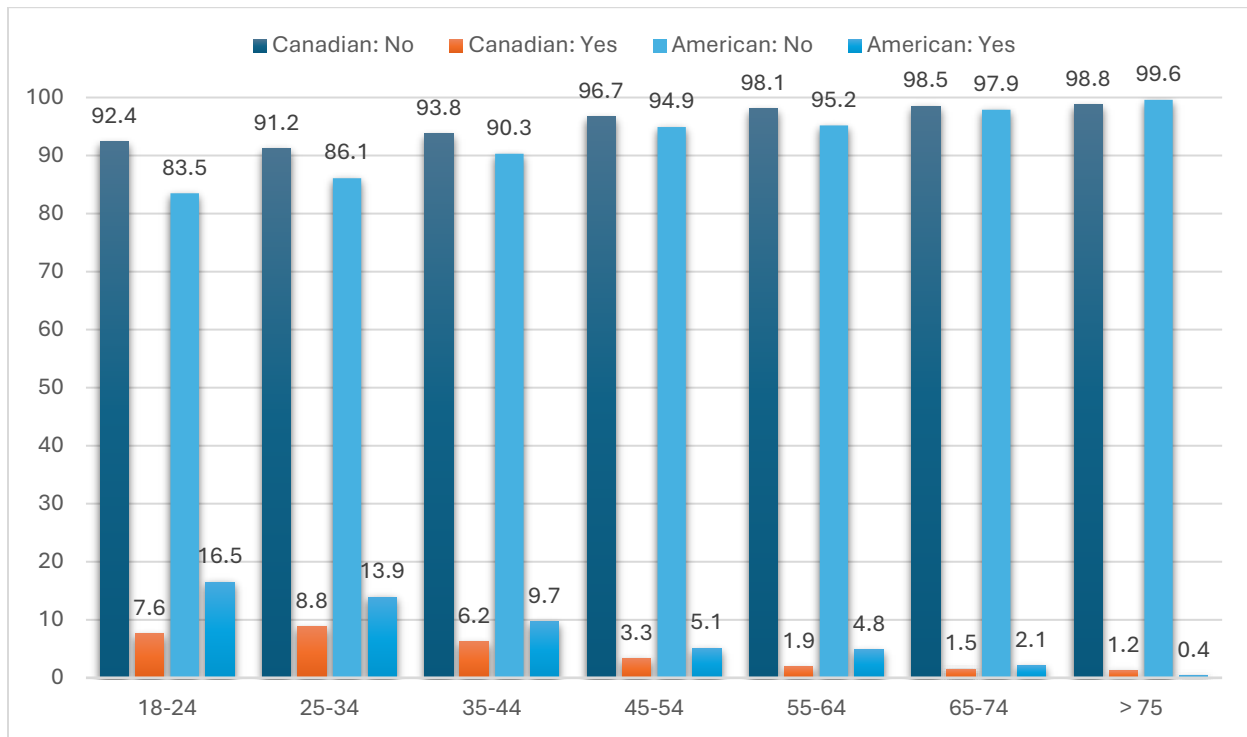
4.3 EXPERIENCE OF DISCRIMINATION: BIVARIATE ANALYSES

Bivariate analyses and logistic regressions were conducted to compare the experiences of participants in Canada and the United States.

⁴ Note the reason for etymological differences in defining people who do not identify as white in previous chapter.

4.3.1 Age

Figure 4.1 Experience of Discrimination by Age Group, Canada vs. USA, 2021 (%)

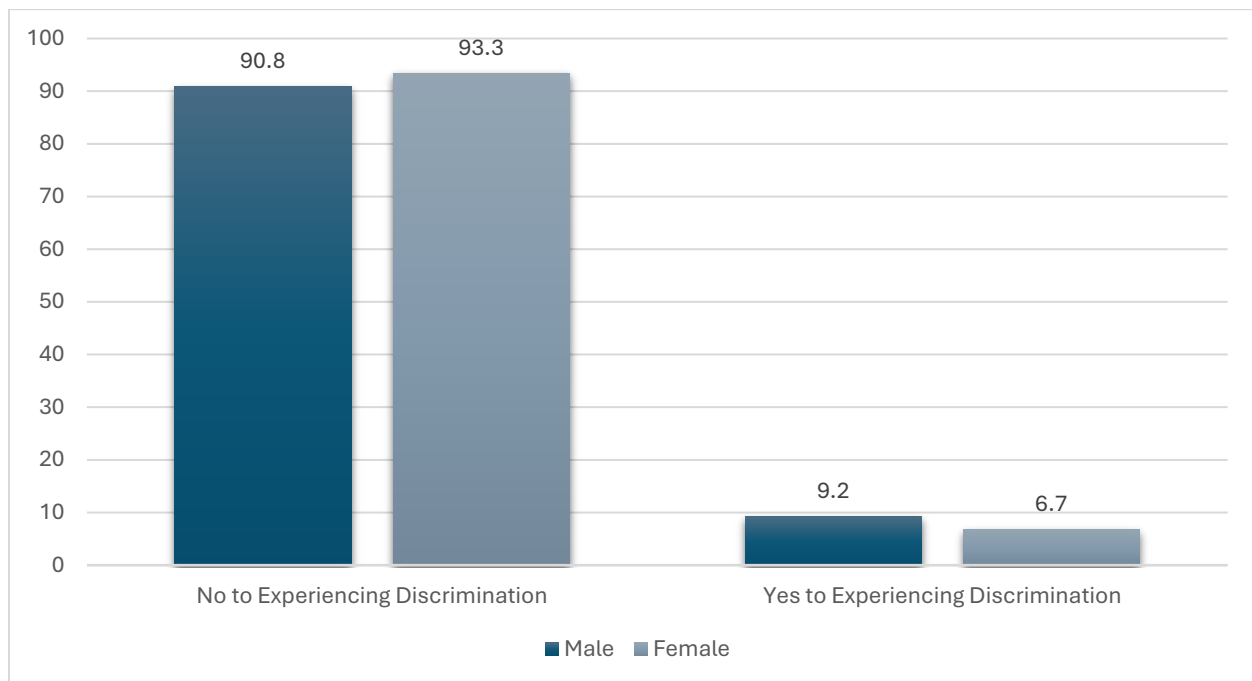


Notes: Canadian responses: $N = 2,979$, $X^2 = 55.801$, $p < 0.001$
 American responses: $N = 3,714$, $X^2 = 134.060$, $p < 0.001$

Figure 4.1 compares the Canadian and American experience of discrimination by respondents' age groups. Younger Canadians and Americans (from 18 to 44 years old) reported higher rates of having experienced racial or ethnic discrimination. Compared to their Canadian counterparts, American respondents were more likely to report their experience of discrimination, especially those who were younger: 16.5% of Americans aged 18 to 24 said they experienced racism, more than doubling the percentage of Canadians of the same age group (7.6%); 13.9% of Americans aged 25 to 34 years reported having experienced racism, compared to 8.8% of Canadians of the same age; as well, 9.7% of Americans between 35 and 44 years old responded "yes" to experiencing discrimination, while 6.2% of Canadians aged 35 to 44 said the same.

4.3.2 Sex

Figure 4.2 Experience of Discrimination by Sex, U.S.A., 2021 (%)

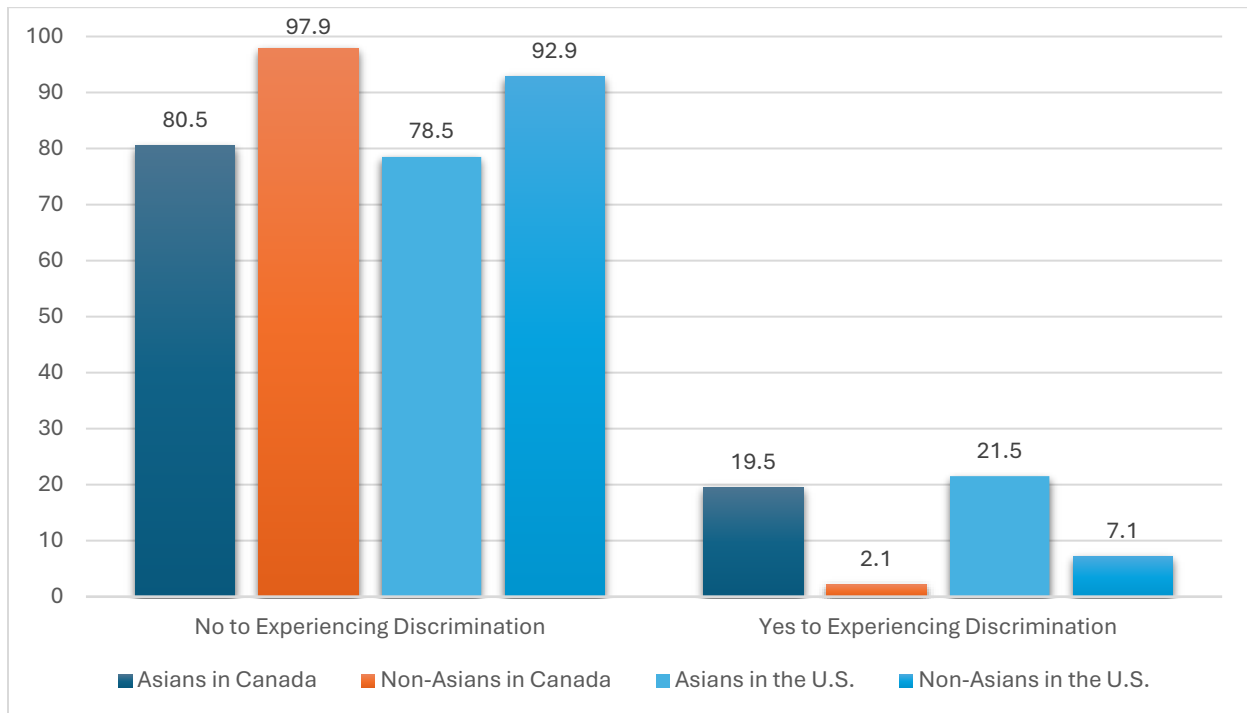


Note: $N = 3,695$, $X^2 = 7.945$, $p < 0.01$

Sex was not a significant influencing factor in the discussion of discrimination for Canadians, but for Americans, figure 4.2 shows that male respondents were more likely than their female counterparts to report having experienced discrimination, albeit not by much (9.2% versus 6.7%).

4.3.3 Asian identity

Figure 4.3 Experience of Discrimination by Asian Identity, Canada vs. U.S.A., 2021 (%)

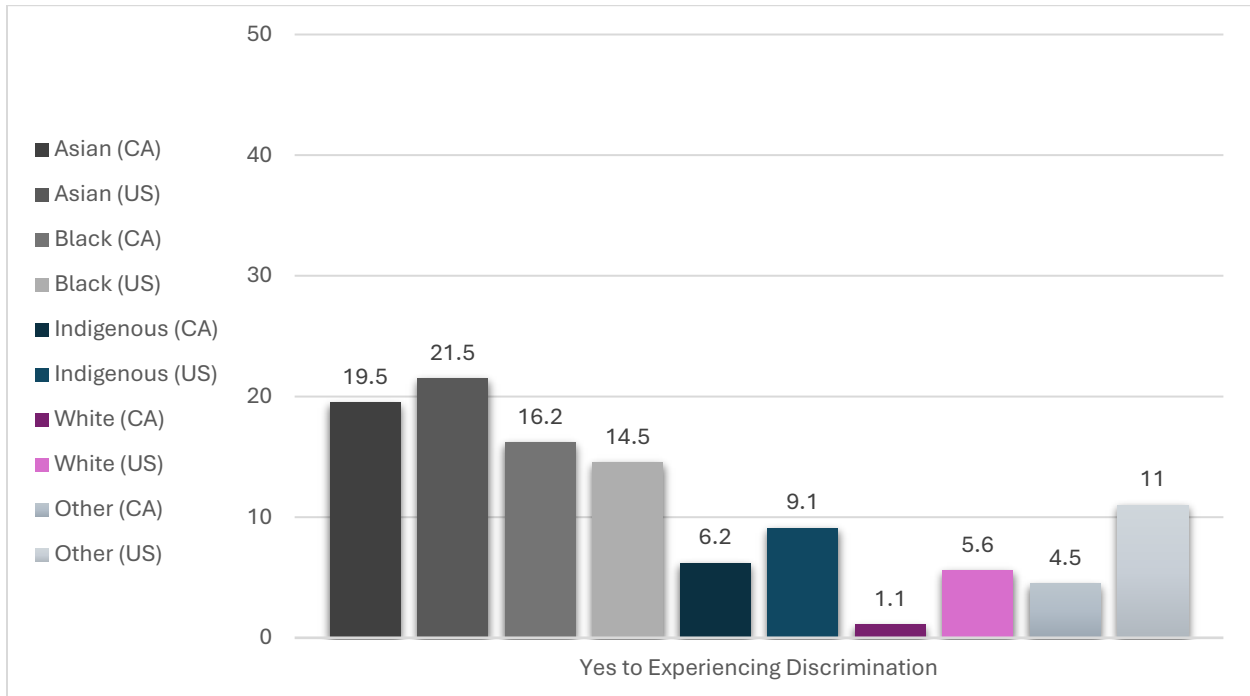


Notes: Canadian responses: $N = 2,854$, $X^2 = 233.605$, $p < 0.001$
American responses: $N = 3,651$, $X^2 = 58.224$, $p < 0.001$

Figure 4.3 examines the experience of discrimination more directly. Asians in Canada (19.5%) and the United States (21.5%) reported the highest levels of racial and ethnic discrimination of all ethnic groups, rates significantly higher than others (2.1% of non-Asian respondents in Canada and 7.1% in the U.S.). Asians living in the U.S. (21.5%) reported higher levels of discrimination than Asians living in Canada (19.5%) and had rates significantly higher than the average for both nations (4.5% in Canada and 8% in the U.S.).

4.3.4 Race and ethnicity

Figure 4.4 Experience of Discrimination by Race/Ethnicity, Canada vs. U.S.A., 2021 (%)



Notes: Canadian responses: $N = 2,854$, $X^2 = 296.629$, $p < 0.001$

American responses: $N = 3,685$, $X^2 = 106.903$, $p < 0.001$

Black Canadians are excluded as the sample size is too small

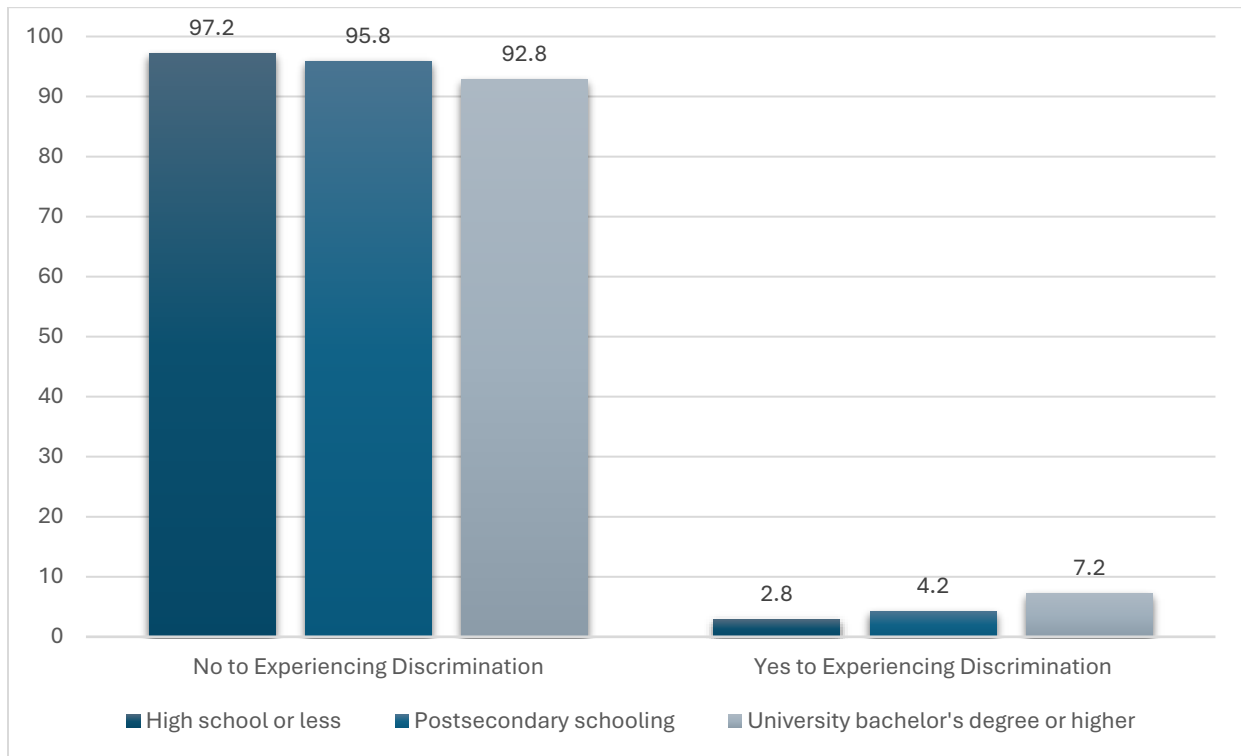
Indigenous peoples in Canada are excluded as the sample size is too small

Other ethnicities are excluded as the sample size is too small

If we examine respondents' experience of racism in greater detail, Asians in Canada (19.5%) and the U.S. (21.5%) reported the highest levels of discrimination, with Black people coming in second (16.2% and 14.5%). In general, respondents in the U.S. reported higher levels of racial discrimination than their Canadian counterparts, with the exception of Black people.

4.3.5 Education

Figure 4.5 Experience of Discrimination by Education, Canada, 2021 (%)



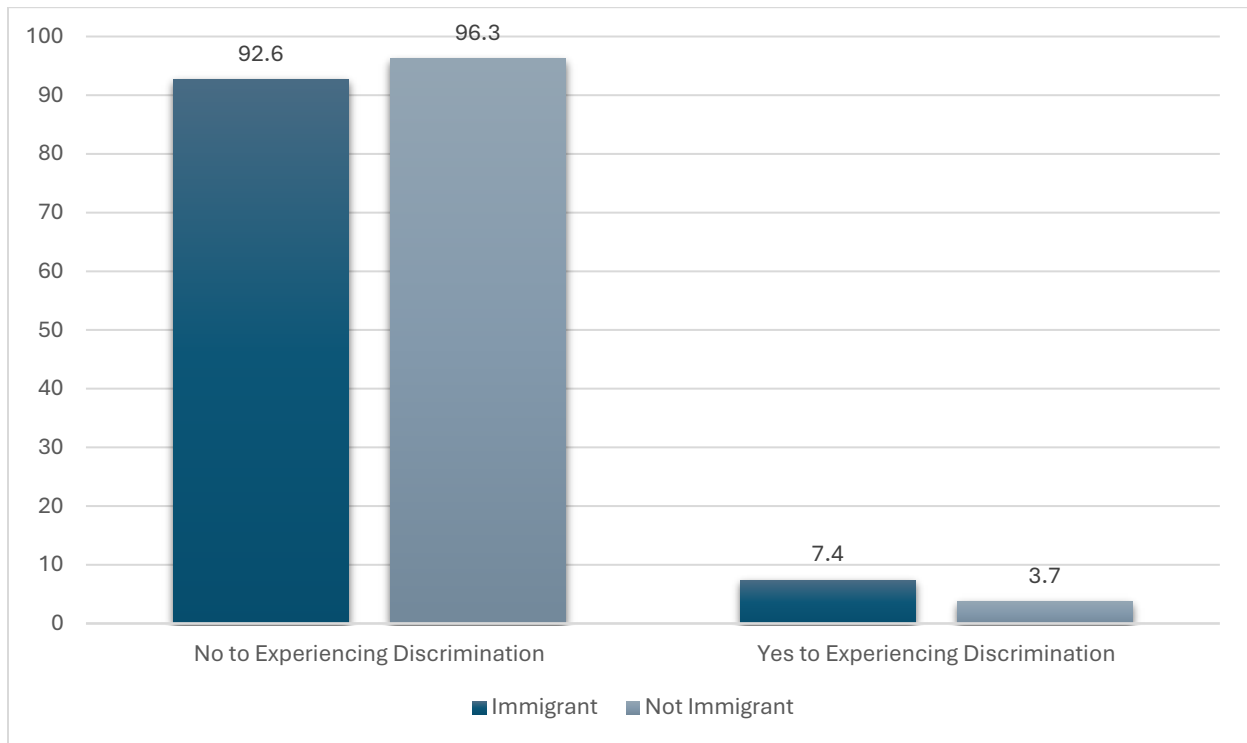
Note: $N = 2,944$, $X^2 = 19.069$, $p < 0.001$

Of the 2,944 responses from Canada, 135 (4.6%) said they have been on the receiving end of discrimination because of their education level. Figure 4.4 also shows that the higher a respondent's education level, the higher the possibility of reporting experiencing discrimination: 7.2% those with a university bachelor's degree or higher stated that they have experienced racial discrimination, almost twice as much as those with post-secondary education (4.2%), and almost three times as much as those with high school or less education (2.8%).

In comparison, education was not statistically significant for American respondents when discussing experience of discrimination.

4.3.6 Immigration status

Figure 4.6 Experience of Discrimination by Immigration Status, Canada, 2021 (%)

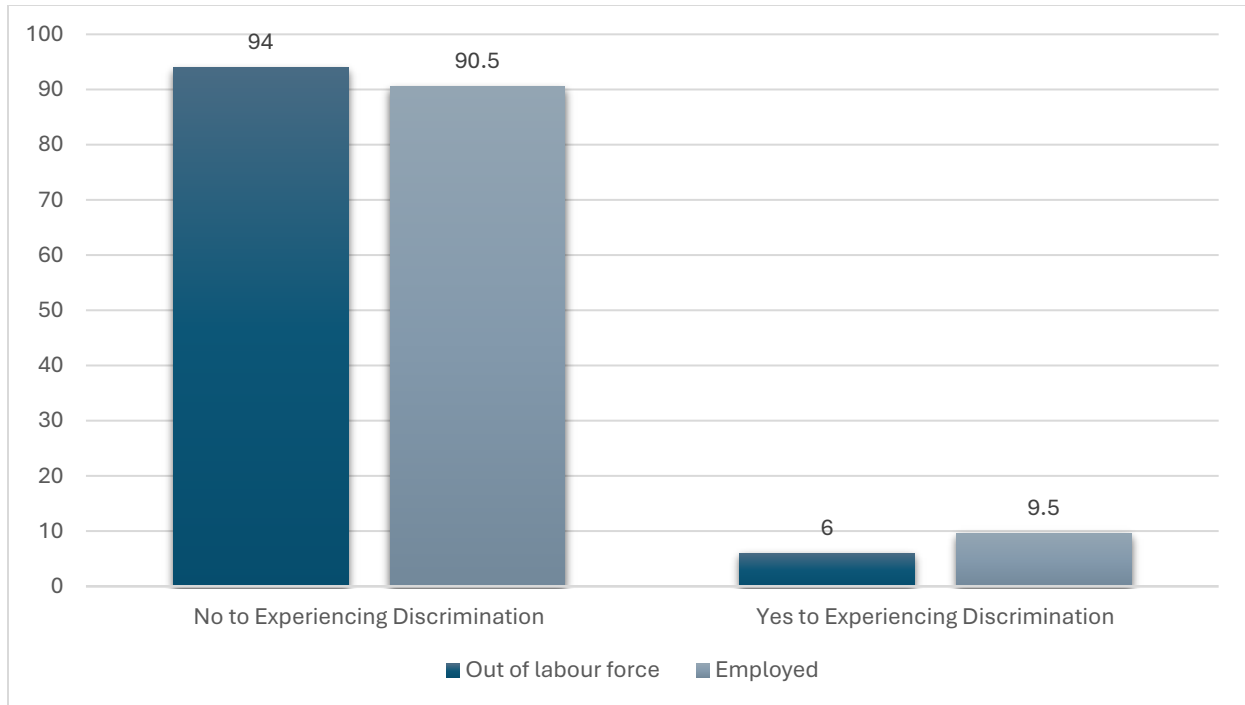


Note: N = 2,972, $X^2 = 16.961$, $p < 0.001$

Figure 4.6 shows that immigrants in Canada were almost twice as likely to experience racism than non-immigrants (7.4% versus 3.7%). Conversely, immigration status was not a significant influencing factor for American respondents.

4.3.7 Employment

Figure 4.7 Experience of Discrimination by Employment Situation, U.S.A., 2021 (%)



Note: $N = 3,569$, $X^2 = 14.486$, $p < 0.001$

For American respondents, approximately 1 in 10 who were employed stated that they have experienced discrimination. In addition, those who were employed were more likely to experience discrimination or more inclined to report such experience compared to those out of the labour force. For Canadian respondents, employment situation was not a significant influencing factor.

4.4 EXPERIENCE OF DISCRIMINATION: LOGISTIC REGRESSION

Binary logistic regressions were used to analyze if and to what extent did Asian people in the U.S. and Canada experience racism due to the pandemic. As the two variables on trust – “trust towards people in general” and “trust towards immigrants” were correlated with each other [$r(6,448) = 0.444$, $p < 0.001$], I opted for using two models for examining these two variables in relation to other independent measures. In model 1, the variable “trust towards people in general” was included, while the other variable was included in model 2.

4.4.1 Regression model 1

Tables 4.3 and 4.4 present the findings from the first logistic regression model for respondents from both Canada and the United States.

Table 4.3 Logistic Regression Results – Canadian Responses on Discrimination, Model 1

Variables	B	df	Significance	Exp(B)
Age	-0.347	1	<0.001	0.707
Sex	0.212	1	0.316	1.236
Asian	2.371	1	<0.001	10.709
Employment	-0.116	1	0.632	0.890
Education level	0.295	1	0.045	1.342
Annual household income	0.044	1	0.60	1.045
Immigration status	-0.224	1	0.376	0.799
Trust towards people in general	0.058	1	0.790	1.059
Vaccination status	-0.707	1	0.024	0.493

Notes: N = 2,417, $X^2 = 172.554$, $p < 0.001$
goodness-of-fit = 4.522, $p = 0.807$

Table 4.4 Logistic Regression Results – American Responses on Discrimination, Model 1

Variables	B	df	Significance	Exp(B)
Age	-0.503	1	<0.001	0.605
Sex	-0.367	1	0.010	0.693
Asian	1.195	1	<0.001	3.304
Employment	-0.006	1	0.971	0.994
Education level	0.101	1	0.297	1.106
Annual household income	-0.021	1	0.686	0.979
Immigration status	0.168	1	0.427	1.183
Trust towards people in general	0.009	1	0.949	1.009
Vaccination status	0.166	1	0.287	1.180

Notes: N = 2,792, $X^2 = 190.915$, $p < 0.001$
goodness-of-fit = 17.185, $p = 0.028$

This model was overall significant at the 0.001 level according to the Model chi-square statistics (X^2). From table 4.3, in Canada, those who identified as Asians were approximately 11 times (CI = 6.63, 17.297; $p < 0.001$) more likely than non-Asians to have experienced racial

discrimination during COVID-19. Younger Canadian respondents were 70% more likely to report that they have experienced racial discrimination than those aged 75 and older (CI = 0.611, 0.817; $p < 0.001$). Canadian respondents with postsecondary education were approximately 1.3 times more likely to report having experiences of discrimination than those with lower levels of education (CI = 1.006, 1.791; $p < 0.05$). Vaccination status also appeared to be a significant predictor for Canadian respondents – those who took the vaccine for COVID-19 were half as likely to report discrimination than those who did not (CI = 0.267, 0.910; $p < 0.05$). Conversely, trust did not appear to be a significant predictor of whether one experienced discrimination during COVID-19 for Canadians.

Compared to the Canadian results, model 1 did not fit the data as well for Americans. For American participants, an individual’s age and race were statistically significant factors influencing discrimination experiences. Younger Americans were 60% more likely than their older counterparts to experience discrimination or to report such experience (CI = 0.550, 0.664; $p < 0.001$), and those who identified as Asians were around 3.3 times more likely to encounter racial discrimination, compared to those who identified as non-Asians (CI = 2.207, 4.945; $p < 0.001$).

4.4.2 Regression model 2

Tables 4.5 and 4.6 display the findings from the second logistic regression model for respondents from both Canada and the United States.

Table 4.5 Logistic Regression Results – Canadian Responses on Discrimination, Model 2

Variables	B	df	Significance	Exp(B)
Age	-0.365	1	<0.001	0.694
Sex	0.122	1	0.580	1.130
Asian	2.330	1	<0.001	10.273
Employment	-0.286	1	0.254	0.751
Education level	0.301	1	0.051	1.351

Annual household income	0.056	1	0.518	1.058
Immigration status	-0.242	1	0.364	0.785
Trust towards immigrants/newcomers	0.124	1	0.573	1.132
Vaccination status	-0.794	1	0.013	0.452

Note: N = 2,213, $X^2 = 158.570$, $p < 0.001$
goodness-of-fit = 7.066, $p = 0.529$

Table 4.6 Logistic Regression Results – American Responses on Discrimination, Model 2

Variables	B	df	Significance	Exp(B)
Age	-0.482	1	<0.001	0.617
Sex	-0.426	1	0.003	0.653
Asian	1.184	1	<0.001	3.268
Employment	-0.098	1	0.549	0.907
Education level	0.068	1	0.495	1.070
Annual household income	0.001	1	0.990	1.001
Immigration status	0.198	1	0.365	1.219
Trust towards immigrants/newcomers	0.483	1	<0.001	1.621
Vaccination status	0.061	1	0.704	1.063

Note: N = 2,598, $X^2 = 192.113$, $p < 0.001$
goodness-of-fit = 11.581, $p = 0.171$

Model 2 was also significant at the 0.001 level. For Canadian respondents, age and Asian identity were still significant – younger respondents were 69% more likely to report that they have experienced racial discrimination than those aged 75 and older (CI = 0.597, 0.807; $p < 0.001$), and those who identified as Asian were 10 times more likely to have experienced discrimination than their non-Asian counterparts (CI = 6.197, 17.031; $p < 0.001$). Vaccination status also became significant, that those who were not vaccinated were almost half as likely to experience racism or to report such experience. However, education was no longer significant when trust towards immigrants or newcomers were taken into the equation.

For American respondents, model 2 yielded some interesting findings. When taking respondents' trust towards immigrants and/or newcomers into account, respondents' age, sex,

Asian identity, and trust all became significant predictors of one's experience of discrimination during COVID-19. Younger Americans were approximately 62% more likely than their older counterparts to experience discrimination or to report such experience (CI = 0.560, 0.680; $p < 0.001$), and those who identified as Asians were around 3.3 times more likely to encounter racial discrimination (CI = 2.151, 4.966; $p < 0.001$), compared to those who identified as non-Asians. In terms of trust, those who indicated any degree of trust towards immigrants or newcomers were 1.6 times more likely to experience discrimination or to report having such experience (CI = 1.233, 2.131; $p < 0.001$). Interestingly, from this regression model, American male respondents were 65% more likely to experience racial discrimination or to report such experience than females (CI = 0.490, 0.869; $p < 0.001$).

4.4 DISCUSSION

The survey that I used for this study presented a large sample size from both Canada and the U.S., and were spread somewhat evenly between male and female, with females slightly more than male respondents. Since this survey was directed to the general public, the sample size for Asian respondents only took up 12.8% of the Canadian participants and 5.9% of the American participants. From the findings, the majority of respondents from both countries had mostly positive experiences during the pandemic – they reported that they did not experience unfair treatment or racial discrimination since the outbreak of COVID-19. This result, however, may be biased because the data was consisted of 76% and 75% of respondents who identified as white in Canada and the U.S. respectively.

Data analysis showed that respondents' age (categorized into age groups) and their Asian identity were statistically significant for both Canada and the U.S. when looking at experiences of discrimination. Overall, younger respondents were more likely to have experienced

discrimination or to report such experience in both countries, compared to their counterparts who were older than 65 years. This finding aligns with existing research (Angus Reid Institute 2020b; McGarity-Palmer et al. 2023), with a potential connection to respondents' accessibility to and proficiency in using technology such as Zoom, text messaging, and various social media platforms. During the pandemic when everything was in a state of lockdown, people relied heavily on mobile phones and the Internet to maintain interpersonal connections and to obtain information. For younger people and those who could afford quality home internet, it rarely posed a problem. For older adults, however, many experienced technological challenges even prior to the pandemic, as older people found digital technology could pose threats to privacy, and regarded it as time consuming, confusing, even "intimidating" (Jung et al. 2017; Niehaves & Plattfaut 2014; Olson et al. 2011). When everything moved online during the heavily quarantining stages of the pandemic, older adults were not only exposed to isolation in real life but also online, due to lack of tech literacy and proficiency (Zapletal et al. 2023). McClain et al. (2021) also noted the struggle that older adults faced during the pandemic, that those with "lower tech readiness" would need to seek help in using technology and had lower confidence in this regard. This aspect contributes to the findings that older respondents generally showed lower possibility in experience discrimination or reporting such experiences. When digital communication was almost a daily necessity during lockdown, those with higher technology proficiency were more likely to learn about discrimination, thus more likely to report such experiences.

Comparing between Canada and the U.S., respondents' Asian identity – whether one identified as Asian or not – was also a significant factor in determining respondents' experience of discrimination. Those who identified as Asian had a higher percentage of experiencing racism

or reporting such experiences, whether comparing between the two countries or comparing across different race and ethnicity. This finding did not surprise me, given the environment during and post-pandemic in which discrimination towards the Asian population spiked significantly to the point where discrimination towards Asian people is considered “more acceptable” (Bricker & Chhim 2020), and various existing surveys and literature support this finding as well (Guo & Guo 2021; Heidinger & Cotter 2020; Ngo et al. 2023; Noe-Bustamante et al. 2022). What came as alarming was Asian respondents’ likelihood to experience discrimination during COVID-19 – Asians in Canada were approximately 10 to 11 times more likely to experience racism, while Asians in the U.S. had an odd of 3.3 times. On a broader level, immigration status was, surprisingly, only statistically significant when discussing in the Canadian context: respondents from Canada were twice as likely to experience discrimination or to report such experience.

Education level was also an important indicator of racial discriminatory experiences in the Canadian context: the higher-educated respondents were more likely to experience discrimination or to report such experience. According to Zhang and Hong (2012), perceived discrimination increased for Asian Americans who were better educated because this population were generally more assimilated. I believe this is also the case for Asians in Canada, as findings from this study reflected this observation. I also argue that it is possible that this correlation is due to more knowledge in defining and recognizing discriminatory actions and better accessibility to discuss and report such behaviours.

The argument that a higher level of acculturation may lead to a higher possibility of experiencing discrimination or reporting such experiences could also be made for the finding that, for respondents from the U.S., those who were employed were more likely to experience or

report having experienced discrimination. It is equally important to note the gender differences in the relationship between employment and experience of discrimination during COVID-19. Female workers comprised 79.6% of healthcare providers in 2021 and 79.4% in 2022 (Statistics Canada 2023b), with many more working as grocery stores cashiers at the height of the pandemic (McKeon 2021; Robertson & Gebeloff 2021). As well, among the frontline workers, 34% identified as visible minorities, and for those working in critical food and grocery services during the pandemic, many were visible minorities as well (Statistics Canada 2020). Research revealed that racialized persons were more likely to experience discrimination or to report harassment and microaggression, especially Asian people, who bore the brunt of anti-Asian racism in the wake of COVID-19 (Kim & Shang 2022; Statistics Canada 2020). Workplace discrimination is at the intersection of gender and ethnicity, and could only be fully understood when discussing in relation to these factors.

The analysis of experience of discrimination also revealed that respondents from the U.S. were more inclined than their Canadian counterparts to experience discrimination or to report such experiences. One popular thinking about the treatment of immigrants and racialized persons in these two countries is that Canadians are less discriminatory to ethnic minorities than Americans – compared to the U.S., Canada adopted the multiculturalism policy, and the Parliament passed the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, recognizing diversity and equality in the country (Government of Canada 2024; Reitz & Breton 1994) – thus fewer reports for experiencing discrimination in Canada. An opinion poll by Ipsos showed that 40% of Canadians believed that racism was “an American issue” (Bricker & Chhim 2020). Americans’ preference for individualistic values may also be a contributing actor, that the American individualism has implications on racial discrimination because it is shaped by white supremacy in ways such as

diminishing the collective value of gender and ethnic minorities and stereotyping them with negative labels (Zakaras 2022). White supremacists also feel threatened by the incoming racial minority groups due to the sizes of these groups, as obviously seen in the enactment of restrictive immigration laws in the history of both countries and from the disparaging description of Asian immigration as the “yellow plague” (Daniels 2011; Lee 2007; Reitz & Breton 1994; Zakaras 2022). In terms of Canada, the country is commonly acknowledged as more tolerant and favours equality. Public opinion surveys showed that, compared to Americans, Canadians were more likely to agree that governments “should do much more to make sure racial minorities are treated fairly” (Adams & Perkin 2022), a result similar to the 1986 opinion polls, and echoes the findings in Reitz and Breton’s (1994) comparative study of attitudes among Americans and Canadians.

One interesting finding with limited prior literature include vaccination status as a significant factor when discussing racial discrimination in the Canadian context. Results from logistic regression showed that, in Canada, those who were vaccinated were less likely to experience discrimination or to report such experience. Prior research has found that racial discrimination is positively correlated with vaccine hesitancy – the higher the frequency of experience of discrimination, the more hesitant one is towards taking the vaccine (CarlLee et al. 2023; Elam-Evans et al. 2023; Sanchez et al. 2021; Willis et al. 2023). The findings from my research revealed a reverse relationship between the experience of discrimination and vaccination status in Canada, but at the same time, it confirmed that there existed a correlation between these two variables. At the time of completion of this study, more research is needed to further investigate the relationship between discrimination and vaccination rate and hesitancy.

Another interesting finding was that for respondents from the U.S., those who indicated any positive degree of trust towards immigrants were around 1.6 times more likely to experience discrimination or to report such experience. Current literature discovered that, compared to other groups, racial minorities tend to have lower trust because they have a higher rate of experiencing discrimination or are more likely to report such experience (Wilkes & Wu 2019; Ziller 2017). My findings revealed the relationship between trust and the experience of discrimination from a different angle, and one possible explanation for this would be that if one holds trust towards immigrant groups, one is more likely to be friendly with them, and believe them to be reliable. This leads to more willingness to understand the immigrant experience but could also result in higher vulnerability to be guilted and discriminated by association with immigrations and newcomers. However, as mentioned in my literature review, there remains a gap in research on trust (or lack of trust) as an indicator of discrimination, and this finding would require the support of further in-depth analyses.

For my study, both critical race theory and intersectionality substantiate my findings. Critical race theory holds that racism is ordinary and a permanent part of lived experience, and this tenet is demonstrated throughout literature review and data analysis as existing research and my findings showed that discrimination is a persisting phenomenon in our lives and that the pandemic only amplified the problems it brings. Intersectionality recognizes that race, ethnicity, gender, and class each has a unique influence as a cause for discrimination, but also proposes that these factors are intertwined with one another in the discussion of discrimination (Fleras 2012). I decided to examine the experience of discrimination during COVID-19 in relation to various socioeconomic variables because I believe it is important to study discrimination by placing this social problem at the intersection of age, gender, ethnicity, and class (as perceived in

this study by employment, income level, and education level) since these elements shape different social identities and paint different pictures of people's lives. As demonstrated in the findings, Asians in both Canada and the U.S. were far more likely than other racialized groups to have experienced racism or to report such experience; those who were better educated in Canada and those who were in the labour force during the pandemic in the U.S. were also more likely to have experienced or to report discrimination. These results cannot be fully understood if they are analyzed isolated from other social or economic factors.

4.5 CONCLUSION

This study has shown that, during the coronavirus pandemic, being Asian in Canada and the U.S. not only had higher percentages of experiencing racial discrimination compared to other racial groups, but this population also had a much higher probability of experiencing racism. The findings also highlight several significant factors – such as age – in relation to discrimination, as well as several interesting discoveries that require further research, such as the relationship between vaccination status and racial discrimination.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 CONCLUSION

From the immigration legislation in the 19th and 20th century to the modern and historic proliferation of anti-Asian racism, from the SARS epidemic to the COVID-19 pandemic, Asian people have been on the receiving end of discrimination and scapegoating (Budhwani & Sun 2020; Cho et al. 2020; Daniels 2011; Griffiths 2020; Jeung & Nham 2020; Lee 2007; Lee 2015; Li 1998; Ngo et al. 2023; Reja 2021; Van Dyk 2018). The pandemic has sparked a renewed interest in research on anti-Asian racism and Asian people's experiences during and after the COVID-19 era, but few studies were done quantitatively and cross-nationally. To partly address this gap, my research examined *if and to what extent does COVID-19 exacerbate racism against Asian people in Canada and the U.S.* from a quantitative perspective, and the aim of this research is to understand the information related to Asian discrimination on a larger statistical scale and to connect quantitative findings with existing qualitative discussions for a panoptic picture of the Asian experience during the pandemic.

Findings from my research corroborate existing literature on Asian discrimination, that Asian people were more susceptible to racism and harassment during and post-pandemic and that these observations are not just casual, they are statistically significant. The statistics also revealed that the odds of Asian people experiencing racism or reporting these experiences were significantly higher than those who with other socioeconomic status or identities in both countries. It was obvious from existing research that discrimination towards Asians skyrocketed since the beginning of COVID-19, and my research allowed for a straightforward visualization of this observation by providing the probability of experiencing racism when being Asian compared to other socioeconomic statuses. As mentioned in the previous chapter, none of the

other significant socioeconomic factors yielded as high a likelihood to experience racism as one's Asian identity did. This is a noteworthy finding that supported existing qualitative research on this subject.

Findings also highlighted some differences in the experience of racism between Canada and the U.S. For people living in Canada, education and vaccination status were shown to be significant indicators for experience of discrimination. The result in relation to education matched findings from prior research, while the correlation between racism and vaccination status remains understudied and would require further research. For those living in the U.S., employment situation and, interestingly, trust towards immigrants were significant predictors of discriminatory experiences. My analysis also revealed that those living in the U.S. were more likely to experience discrimination or more inclined to report such experience, and the difference in national policies and ideologies between Canada and the U.S. could contribute to this finding.

5.2 STUDY LIMITATIONS

As with all studies, this research has its limitations. Chief among the limitations was my lack of control over the questions asked in the survey since I was not involved in the development of it. Despite this limitation, the survey data used for this study provided valuable information on the experiences and opinions during COVID-19 from people living in Canada and the U.S., but because it was a cross-national comprehensive survey, questions were created with the general public in mind and were not specifically tailored to Asian respondents. I was able to extract information on Asian experiences during COVID-19 from this survey, and this information were helpful in constructing a comparison on the likelihood of experiencing racism between Asian and other respondents, but it was not as detailed as if I were to create a questionnaire with only Asian participants in mind. Another limitation – or rather, challenge –

with using this omnibus survey laid in the terminology used to describe the population of non-Caucasian ethnicity. Canada and the U.S. have different notions about describing this population either as racial minority, people of colour, visible minority, or ethnic minority. There is not a term that is uniform or satisfactory to all in defining people who do not identify as white, and the use of terminology remains an ongoing debate.

There is also a lack of discussion on the agency of Asian people in the face of racism and hate crimes in this study. This is not to say that the Asian community was muted or docile in the face of discrimination; on the contrary, the founding of Stop AAPI Hate campaign and various protests showed just how active this community has been in fighting racial discrimination. For this research, the discussion on agency and proactive responses to hate was not included due to the fact I was doing secondary analysis of a dataset that had already been collected, but this conversation could be a useful aspect for future research on racism and hate or could become a whole new study on its own. Another omission in this research would be the role of the media in perpetuating or fighting racism with the use of certain terms, images, and stories. This is an analysis on the biases and double standards exhibited by major media outlets and could also constitute an interesting future research topic when discussing racial biases and discrimination.

5.2 ACADEMIC AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Anti-Asian racism spiked with the emergence of COVID-19, but people of Asian descent have been steadfastly advocating and fighting for Asian people's rights and equality. Many educational and training resources on how to learn and teach about anti-Asian racism were produced, including webinars, speaker series, and other documents (Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada 2024; Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion 2023; Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario 2021). Educators were quick to action in reflecting and changing what and

how they educate racism, and organizations have also created reports, websites, and campaigns for combatting racial discrimination and for providing platforms for recording and reporting hate crimes and racist encounters (Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada 2024; Lee 2023; Wong 2021). Institutionally, apart from amending legislations, governments directed various budgets as financial support for communities to develop programs and platforms for combatting anti-Asian racism (Ontario Newsroom 2021).

These are but snippets of what the Asian community have been engaged in ever since the pandemic, but they are far from enough. To initiate any effective communication in racial discrimination and to combat such inequality, one needs to acknowledge the existence of racial biases and heterogeneity in social identities (DiAngelo 2018). I suggest that, for those who do not identify as an ethnic minority, they should be made aware of the existence of white supremacy and the structural advantages of being white, as the discussion of racism would not be comprehensive without acknowledging the institutional differences in positionality. For those who identify as an ethnic minority and – in the case of this research – as Asian, one should be educated in the racial stigmas forced upon the community by the dominating society and to put a stop to the internalization of these stigmas. Educators are suggested to approach topics of racial discrimination by making aware daily incidents, whether through storytelling or by distributing news articles and social media posts, and institutions and organizations are encouraged to educate the public on the scientific knowledge of COVID-19 and the harmful results of racism by producing materials such as fact sheets and reports, and by making these materials more accessible for the public. Information on how to keep safe and where to report when encountered hate crimes should also be widely distributed.

5.3 FUTURE RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

As stated in previous chapters, this research was done in a quantitative method that allowed me to observe the frequencies and likelihoods of certain events, as well as to make comparisons on a macro scale and to learn about the similarities and differences on a national level. However, the study on the Asian experience during COVID-19 and anti-Asian racism would be more extensive and accurate if conducted with both qualitative and quantitative data by creating national surveys and conducting focus groups interviews with questions that take into consideration the Asian heritage and culture, and the unique lived experience of the Asian diaspora, as critical race theory advocates that the use of storytelling and narratives (or counter-narratives) is important in the understanding and critiquing of racialized lived experience. Another direction for future research that stemmed from this study would be the comparison between Asians' experience during the pandemic in Asian countries versus in non-Asian countries. Apart from these topics, the agency of Asian people in the face of discrimination would also make an interesting topic to research, as well as the role of the media in perpetuating or curbing racism at times of a public health crisis, as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

5.4 CONCLUSION

In light of the coronavirus pandemic where the Asian community has been discriminated, scapegoated, and harmed, the study on Asian discrimination has never been more relevant. The prevalence of anti-Asian sentiments and the amount of anti-Asian hate crimes are indications of the blatant discrimination stemming from the pandemic. By looking at the reported statistics, and by analyzing survey data, it is alarming to see the number of assaults and crimes motivated by a deep-seated prejudice and dislike towards the Asian community. The pandemic has been a harsh and difficult time for everyone, but it was exceptionally cruel to Asian people, as this community

needed to handle the syndemic of a contagious disease and the possibility of being targeted for racial rhetoric or racist actions. By targeting and scapegoating the Asian community, the focus of the pandemic was turned away from what actually needed to be done in the face of a global health crisis to “who’s to blame”. The virus did not discriminate, but the society and institutions did. Anti-Asian racism – among other forms of racism – has become the invisible symptom of COVID-19, and this remains a sad reality that society and humanity as a whole needs to rectify.

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