

# Strategies for Managing Impressions of Racial Identity in the Workplace

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This article deepens understanding of the workplace experiences of racial minorities by investigating racial identity-based impression management (RIM) by Asian American journalists. Racial centrality, directly or indirectly, predicted the use of 4 RIM strategies (avoidance, enhancement, affiliation, and racial humor). Professional centrality also predicted strategy use, which was related to life satisfaction and perceived career success. By shedding light on proactive strategies that individuals use to influence colleagues' impressions of their racial identity, we contribute to research on diversity in organizations, impression management, and racial identity.

**Keywords:** diversity, impression management, racial identity, stereotype threat, organizational behavior

In increasingly diverse organizations, people must learn how to effectively navigate interracial interactions in order to construct positive professional images and strong work relationships. Underrepresented, devalued racial minorities are often subjected to negative stereotypes, heightened scrutiny, social isolation, and harsher evaluations in the workplace (Biernat, Fuegen, & Kobrynowicz, 2010; Roberson & Kulik, 2007; Rosette, Leonardelli, & Phillips, 2008), which can increase racial minorities' sensitivity toward others' perceptions of them during interracial interactions (Shelton & Richeson, 2006). Minorities may engage in impression management to strategically display their strengths and deflect association with negative stereotypes about their racial groups (Roberts, 2005; Harvey Wingfield, 2010). In the current study, we sought to understand the impression management strategies that Asian American journalists use to influence colleagues' perceptions of their racial identity, factors that influence their strategic use, and outcomes of these strategies.

This article is organized as follows. First, we review literature on Asian American journalists and racial devaluation in the workplace. Second, we define racial identity-based impression management (RIM) and present four key RIM strategies. Third, we present our hypotheses regarding RIM use, identity centrality, and outcomes. Fourth, we present our study methods and findings. Last, we discuss the implications of this research and explain how investigating RIM by Asian American journalists can help theory

building on diversity in work organizations, by capturing one of many types of overlooked samples of diverse individuals.

## Asian American Journalists' Experiences With Racial Devaluation in the Workplace

There is a widespread myth that Asian Americans do not face challenges around race—that they are not a devalued social identity group. Perhaps because of this myth, very few studies of racial minorities' workplace experiences have focused on Asian Americans (Cheng & Thatchenkery, 1997). Over the past two decades, only five articles in seven leading management journals (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Bachrach, & Podsakoff, 2005) mentioned Asian Americans, beyond listing the proportion of Asian American participants. Yet, Asian Americans, like other racial minorities, confront prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination in their day-to-day social interactions in schools, residential communities, and the workplace (Bell, Harrison, & McLaughlin, 1997; Chen, Young, Greenberger, & Edwards, 2001; Grossman & Liang, 2008; Yoo, Steger, & Lee, 2010). The current study contributes to research on racial devaluation by examining how Asian American journalists manage these dynamics in their interracial interactions at work.

Journalism is an appropriate context for research on managing impressions of racial identity by Asian Americans, whose minority status tends to make their racial identity, and racial stereotypes, highly salient as they interact with non-Asian American coworkers and sources. Asian Americans represent just under 6% of the U.S. population (Garofoli, 2012), but only 2.9%, 2.9%, and 0.8% of newsroom employees in daily newspapers, TV, and radio, respectively (American Society of News Editors, 2012; Papper, 2012)—a total of roughly 2,000 Asian American journalists. Asian Americans and other racial minorities may experience discrimination in journalism, such as being passed over for significant assignments and promotions (Morgan, 1994; Roach, 2001), contributing to racial minorities leaving journalism at disproportionately high rates (Funabiki, 1991; Tenore, 2012).

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Asian American journalists routinely encounter situations in which they are conscious of, and may seek to influence, others' impressions of their racial identity. Journalism requires extensive social interaction with informants and colleagues (Hall, 2005; *The Princeton Review*, 2013). Racial stereotypes may harm the career prospects of Asian American journalists, by obstructing their ability to navigate these social interactions effectively. Asian Americans are stereotyped as low in sociability, interpersonal warmth, assertiveness, and leadership qualities (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Leong, 1985; Oyserman & Sakamoto, 1997). Further, they are often presumed to be culturally very different from the mainstream, a stereotype known as the "perpetual foreigner syndrome" (Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Devos & Banaji, 2005). Another stereotype, that Asian Americans comprise a driven "model minority" group that no longer faces discrimination, implies a positive view of Asian Americans in the work domain. However, this stereotype can also produce negative outcomes for Asian Americans by eliciting envy and social rejection (Fiske et al., 2002; Lin, Kwan, Cheung, & Fiske, 2005; Oyserman & Sakamoto, 1997) and by putting pressure on Asian Americans to live up to high performance standards (Shen, Wang, & Swanson, 2011). Such stereotypes are believed to impede the careers of Asian Americans in journalism (Stuelpnagel, Linton, Chow, Lou, & Hillard, 2004).

### Strategies for Managing Impressions of Racial Identity in Interracial Interactions

Racial identity-based impression management (RIM; Roberts, 2005) is the process of strategically manipulating racial identity display cues (e.g., physical appearance, public affiliations) and verbal disclosures in order to influence perceptions of racial identity group membership and characteristics.

Prior research on navigating interracial interactions has featured two RIM strategies for counteracting racial devaluation at work, which we term avoidance and enhancement. Avoidance involves actively suppressing or downplaying race, to avoid racial categorization at work. Enhancement involves attempts to create more positive meanings around one's racial group through publicly embracing the identity, educating others about the positive attributes of the identity, and advocating on behalf of the group (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Thomas, 1993). These RIM strategies are purported to favorably influence the outcomes of intergroup interactions, and thereby decrease the likelihood of being the target of future prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination (Major, Quinton, McCoy, & Schmader, 2000; Roberts, 2005). It is therefore important to further examine the use of RIM in diverse workplaces.

The current study advances understanding of RIM in two ways. First, the study provides a deeper investigation of RIM in the workplace for members of underrepresented, devalued racial groups by examining its usage among Asian American journalists. Studies of college students (e.g., Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010) have advanced understanding of race and impression management, but field research on working adults' use of RIM in work contexts is sparse. One survey study examined RIM among Black medical students (Roberts, Settles, & Jellison, 2008), but this research has not been extended empirically to other racial minority groups or professions. The current study is the first, to our knowledge, to examine the use of RIM among Asian Americans in the workplace.

Second, we identify a broader range of RIM strategies than previously theorized in the literature. We examine the use of two additional RIM strategies, affiliation and racial humor. Similar to avoidance, affiliation seeks to change one's categorization by colleagues. In the case of affiliation, a person attempts to emphasize commonalities in the work relationship and/or work group. Consistent with research on positive intergroup contact, focusing on commonalities helps to change people's representations of distinctive identity groups to a more inclusive common group (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Racial humor, similar to enhancement, involves attempts to change racial meanings through joking or other racial identity enactments that call forth laughter or mirth. In general, humor can serve as an ingratiation tactic (Cooper, 2005) that can be used by minorities to reduce conflict in diverse settings (Smith, Harrington, & Neck, 2000). Racial humor can serve as a tool for minorities to subtly challenge racism, by appropriating racist language and narratives, and pointing out inconsistencies between stereotypes and reality (Barnes, Palmory, & Durrheim, 2001; Burma, 1946; Weaver, 2011).

Affiliation and racial humor differ from avoidance and enhancement in that they directly attempt to build cohesion with colleagues of other racial groups. Building cohesion with colleagues is crucial to professional success, as work relationships are the basis of social capital and networks that can facilitate career advancement (Ibarra, 1995; James, 2000). The need to build cohesion with colleagues may be especially salient to Asian Americans because they are negatively stereotyped in ways that cast doubt on their social skills (Fiske et al., 2002). As a result, RIM strategies that simultaneously reduce race-based devaluation and help build cohesion with colleagues from other racial groups may be particularly attractive to Asian Americans. We locate the four RIM strategies along the two dimensions of cohesion and approach to reducing devaluation in Figure 1.

It is important to note that avoidance and enhancement may indirectly foster cohesion. Avoidance minimizes others' awareness of potentially divisive racial differences, an obstacle to cohesion. Enhancement may disclose personal views on racial identity, promoting a sense of intimacy (Clark & Lemay, 1998).

|                                  |     | Approach to Reduce Devaluation  |   |
|----------------------------------|-----|---|---|
|                                  |     | Change how one is categorized   | Change racial meanings  |
| Direct Attempt to Build Cohesion | No  | <b>Avoidance</b> - attempting to avoid categorization in a racial group by minimizing race-related communication  | <b>Enhancement</b> - attempting to create more positive social meanings around one's racial group through education, advocacy, or selective confirmation of stereotypes |
|                                  | Yes | <b>Affiliation</b> - attempting to increase the extent to which one is viewed as a member of, and to affiliate with, a work relationship or work group by emphasizing commonalities | <b>Racial humor</b> - attempting to reduce negative meanings around one's racial group, and to build cohesion with colleagues, by making racial jokes                   |

Figure 1. Strategies for managing impressions of racial identity in interracial interactions.

We developed a RIM scale to measure enhancement, avoidance, affiliation, and racial humor among Asian American journalists. We investigated how racial and professional centrality affect the use of RIM strategies. We also examined the implications of RIM for life and job satisfaction and perceived career success.

### Predictors of RIM: Racial Centrality and Its Interaction With Professional Centrality

Racial identity has multiple dimensions, including cognitive associations with the racial group, evaluations of the group and of one's membership in the group, and beliefs about how members of the group should think and behave (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). Behavioral expressions of racial identity are often, but not always, a manifestation of these cognitions and evaluations regarding race. Other social identities, personal goals, and situational characteristics may also influence racial identity displays (Bell, 1990; Thomas, 1993). By conceptually and operationally decoupling racial identity and racial enactments, RIM research allows for the examination of the relative influence of racial identity on impression management use.

We investigated the influence of racial centrality—the importance of race within one's overall self-concept—on RIM. We draw primarily from Sellers and colleagues' conceptualization of racial centrality (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997; Sellers et al., 1998), as well as research by Luhtanen and Crocker (1992), Stryker and Serpe (1994), and Ashmore, Deaux and McLaughlin-Volpe (2004) in the current study. Racial centrality refers to “the extent to which a person normatively defines himself or herself with regard to race” (Sellers et al., 1998, p. 25). This examination of racial centrality is based upon a phenomenological perspective that privileges the individual's conscious, subjective appraisal of how important race is to his or her self-definition. Racial centrality is a stable property of one's racial identity; it remains relatively constant across situations (Shelton & Sellers, 2000). Racial centrality can change gradually throughout one's life span as a result of one's social environment, developmental forces, and intense situations or encounters, which can lead one to position one's racial group membership as being relatively more or less important than other identity groups to which one belongs (Sellers et al., 1998). Our emphasis is on the current state of a person's racial centrality, and how it correlates with racial identity enactment.

Racial identity research (Cross, 1991) and previous RIM research (Roberts et al., 2008) support that individuals with high racial centrality will be more likely to use RIM strategies that publicly claim or embrace, and less likely to use strategies that suppress, their racial group membership during interracial encounters, to satisfy needs for self-expression and self-concordance (Baumeister, 1989; Bono & Judge, 2003). We therefore predict:

*Hypothesis 1a:* Racial centrality is positively related to enhancement.

*Hypothesis 1b:* Racial centrality is negatively related to avoidance.

To extend research on RIM, we also examined how racial centrality relates to racial humor. We predict that racial centrality is negatively related to racial humor, because people who identify strongly with their racial group will consider racial jokes, and the

stereotypes they invoke, to be especially threatening to their sense of self. Racial jokes typically reproduce a racist stereotype while conveying the speaker's feelings about the stereotype. For example, an individual can state a racial stereotype in a mocking tone (Barnes et al., 2001). In doing so, the speaker may succeed in convincing others that the stereotype is foolish and inaccurate. However, such humor can be misinterpreted as racism (Barnes et al., 2001), and the risk of being seen as racist can further threaten the self-concept of individuals with high racial centrality. We therefore predict:

*Hypothesis 1c:* Racial centrality is negatively related to racial humor.

Affiliation, in which individuals seek to build cohesion with colleagues from other racial groups by emphasizing commonalities, can involve either suppressing or claiming one's racial identity (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2007, 2009). For example, an individual can focus a conversation on common experiences, while avoiding any mention of race or racial differences. Alternatively, an individual can build cohesion with colleagues by sharing how his or her cultural traditions have parallels with American traditions. Thus, we do not offer a prediction regarding a main effect of racial centrality on affiliation.

Next, we investigated the effect of professional centrality—the importance of one's profession within one's overall self-concept (Ashmore et al., 2004)—on individuals' use of RIM strategies. Individuals with high professional centrality want to be seen in terms of their professional identity, which is generally a socially valued identity (Roberts, 2005). For such individuals, being viewed in terms of their professional identity provides them with a sense of social validation and legitimacy that is important for their self-image (Ibarra, 1999).

Affiliation involves attempting to increase the extent to which one is viewed as a member of a work relationship or work group. Shifting the focus to commonalities in work relationships may increase the salience of one's professional identities as a work group member, organizational member, and/or relational partner (Chatman, Polzer, Barsade, & Neale, 1998). When an individual is viewed as a member of a work relationship or work group in a news organization, this perception naturally frames the individual in terms of his or her work role, thus enhancing the extent to which the individual is viewed as a journalist. We therefore predict that individuals with higher (vs. lower) professional centrality will use more affiliation.

*Hypothesis 2a:* Professional centrality is positively related to affiliation.

In addition to the main effect of professional centrality on affiliation proposed above, we predict that professional centrality will have a stronger positive effect on affiliation when racial centrality is high rather than low, because affiliation allows for the creation of dual identities (Dovidio et al., 2009) that maintain the salience of race while building commonality across difference. Thus, affiliation may be used more often by those people who identify strongly with their profession and their race.

*Hypothesis 2b:* Professional centrality and racial centrality interact to influence affiliation, such that professional central-

ity has a stronger positive relationship with affiliation when racial centrality is high.

As a second strategy (beyond affiliation) to increase the extent to which colleagues view one in terms of one's professional identity, individuals with low racial centrality may also use avoidance, which can shift attention from one's racial identity toward one's professional identity. We argue that professional centrality will increase the use of avoidance by low (but not high) racial centrality individuals, because minimizing racial identity is consistent with the low importance of racial identity for low (but not high) racial centrality individuals.

*Hypothesis 2c:* Professional centrality and racial centrality interact to influence avoidance, such that professional centrality is positively related to avoidance when racial centrality is low.

### Outcomes of RIM: Perceived Career Success, Life Satisfaction, and Job Satisfaction

A person's expression or suppression of race has the capacity to influence interpersonal interactions and may be an important factor that contributes to individual and organizational success (Thomas, Phillips, & Brown, 1998). We investigated three factors that we theorize are outcomes of RIM: perceived career success, life satisfaction, and job satisfaction.

#### RIM and Perceived Career Success

The purpose of RIM is to counteract racial devaluation by creating more positive impressions of oneself in the eyes of colleagues from other racial groups (Roberts, 2005). Individuals who have a positive professional image are likely to receive greater respect and recognition at work, increasing their likelihood of promotions and other opportunities for career advancement (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1991; Gardner & Martinko, 1988). Thus, greater usage of any RIM strategy should contribute to perceived career success.

*Hypothesis 3a:* Enhancement is positively related to perceived career success.

*Hypothesis 3b:* Avoidance is positively related to perceived career success.

*Hypothesis 3c:* Racial humor is positively related to perceived career success.

*Hypothesis 3d:* Affiliation is positively related to perceived career success.

In addition to the main effects of RIM strategies on perceived career success proposed above, we propose that (a) the interaction of enhancement and racial centrality and (b) the interaction of racial humor and racial centrality also influence perceived career success. Recent studies suggest that enhancement attempts by minorities with high racial centrality can result in both positive and negative reactions from White colleagues. Whites may treat such individuals positively during the hiring process, in order to avoid the appearance of prejudice (Barron, Hebl, & King, 2011), and yet privately hold negative attitudes toward such individuals, who are

seen as rejecting existing status arrangements in society (Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009). These negative attitudes may undermine the professional images of high racial centrality individuals, thus reducing the positive impact of enhancement on perceived career success.

*Hypothesis 3e:* Enhancement and racial centrality interact to influence perceived career success, such that enhancement has a stronger positive relationship with perceived career success when racial centrality is low.

Racial humor can threaten the self-concept of individuals with high racial centrality. Feelings of threat restrict cognitive processing (Janes & Olson, 2000); the reduced ability to process information may then undermine the job performance of individuals with high racial centrality. Therefore, using racial humor should be less beneficial to the career success of individuals with high versus low racial centrality. We therefore predict:

*Hypothesis 3f:* Racial humor and racial centrality interact to influence perceived career success, such that racial humor has a stronger positive relationship with perceived career success when racial centrality is low.

#### RIM and Life and Job Satisfaction

Claiming an identity at work can promote a sense of self-expression and empowerment to counter devaluation for those who identify strongly with that identity (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Roberts, 2005). When individuals with high racial centrality use enhancement to claim their racial identity at work, the experience of expressing their authentic selves is likely to produce positive emotions (Roberts, Cha, Hewlin, & Settles, 2009), which in turn contribute to their overall sense of well-being. We therefore predict that enhancement will be positively related to life satisfaction for individuals with high racial centrality.

*Hypothesis 4a:* Enhancement and racial centrality interact to influence life satisfaction, such that enhancement is positively related to life satisfaction when racial centrality is high.

Avoidance, which involves active attempts to suppress or "disappear" one's racial identity, may create feelings of identity conflict, leading to stress, frustration, and emotional exhaustion (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005; Hewlin, 2003, 2009). Underrepresented minorities often experience heightened visibility of racial identity, which may counteract attempts to suppress the identity (Chrobot-Mason & Thomas, 2002), exacerbating stress and frustration and further undermining their overall well-being. We therefore predict:

*Hypothesis 4b:* Avoidance is negatively related to life satisfaction.

The negative stereotypes invoked by racial jokes, along with the threat of being seen as racist, are likely to threaten the self-concept of high racial centrality individuals, unleashing negative emotions that undermine life satisfaction. Therefore, we expect:

*Hypothesis 4c:* Racial humor and racial centrality interact to influence life satisfaction, such that racial humor is negatively related to life satisfaction when racial centrality is high.



Affiliation involves emphasizing one's commonalities with colleagues from other racial groups. Making similarities salient can increase liking (Cialdini, 2001), helping to build relationships. High quality relationships with work colleagues foster positive emotions (Heaphy & Dutton, 2008), contributing to overall well-being. We therefore predict:

*Hypothesis 4d:* Affiliation is positively related to life satisfaction.

Next, we theorize that each RIM strategy will affect job satisfaction in the same way we theorized that the strategy would affect life satisfaction above. Studies have found evidence of "spillover" between life satisfaction and job satisfaction, such that overall feelings of well-being can permeate feelings about one's job (Bowling, Eschleman, & Wang, 2010). In other words, we predict that each RIM strategy will affect life satisfaction as theorized in Hypotheses (H) 4a–d and that the resultant level of life satisfaction will then spill over to result in a parallel level of job satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 5a:* Enhancement and racial centrality interact to influence job satisfaction, such that enhancement is positively related to job satisfaction when racial centrality is high.

*Hypothesis 5b:* Avoidance is negatively related to job satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 5c:* Racial humor and racial centrality interact to influence job satisfaction, such that racial humor is negatively related to job satisfaction when racial centrality is high.

*Hypothesis 5d:* Affiliation is positively related to job satisfaction.

## Method

### Procedure and Participants

Paper-and-pencil surveys were completed by 240 Asian American journalists attending an annual meeting of the Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA). Surveys were included with conference registration materials, and collected at the conference and by mail. Respondents received candy and were entered into an instant raffle for small prizes. The study was conducted in compliance with the appropriate university internal review board. Of the respondents, 68% were female. The average respondent age was 31 ( $SD = 8.4$ ); average work experience in journalism was 7.3 ( $SD = 7.0$ ) years. Participants represented diverse ethnic subgroups of Asian Americans, including Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and Korean, and worked for diverse media outlets: newspapers (52%), TV (33%), magazine (6%), radio (3%), online/new media (3%), and other media types (3%).

### Measures

**Scale development.** We developed a 14-item scale of RIM for this study that measured avoidance, enhancement, affiliation, and racial humor. We developed an initial pool of 30 items that is relevant to and representative of RIM strategies of diverse racial groups, based on previous studies of RIM (Morgan, 2002; Roberts et al., 2008) and other related literature (e.g., Bergsieker et al.,

2010), and our exploratory qualitative interviews of 31 Asian American journalists. We then examined the initial factor structure of the items based on an online survey of 206 racially diverse national respondents of a paid subject pool, administered by a New England business school. An exploratory factor analysis (principal axis factoring with varimax rotation) was conducted on the 30 items. Parallel analysis (O'Connor, 2000) and the 5% rule (e.g., Polo, Zychinski, & Roundfield, 2012) suggested that a four-factor solution best fit the data. Of the 30 items, 16 were deleted because of low face validity, low loadings, and/or high cross-loading, leaving 14 items for the four factors.

Next, we tested the construct validity of the RIM scale and subscales based on an online survey of 320 additional, racially diverse participants from the same subject pool. We found evidence of internal consistency reliability, concurrent validity, and discriminant validity. A confirmatory factor analysis of the RIM scale was conducted using Mplus 7.0 with a robust maximum likelihood estimator to account for non-normality of the data (Muthén & Muthén, 2012). The proposed four-factor model provided a satisfactory fit to the data:  $\chi^2(71) = 143.28$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 2.01$ ; CFI = .96; RMSEA = .060; 90% CI [.046, .074]; SRMR = .057.

Finally, we found evidence of test–retest reliability and discriminant validity using a social desirability measure, using an online survey taken twice (2 weeks apart) by 74 undergraduate students in an introductory management course at a New England university who received course credit for participation. The RIM scale's test–retest reliability, .68, was satisfactory. As expected, social desirability was not significantly related to total RIM (T2) or any of the subscales ( $r$  ranged from  $-.13$  to  $-.04$ ,  $ns$ ).

The 14 RIM scale items are listed in the Appendix. Participants rated the extent to which they tried to use each strategy when interacting with colleagues from racial groups other than their own on a 6-point scale from 0 (*not at all like me*) to 5 (*very much like me*). Cronbach's alpha for the affiliation, enhancement, avoidance, and racial humor scales was .63, .70, .71, and .80, respectively. The alpha for the three affiliation items was slightly low at .63, probably because this reliability coefficient was influenced by the low number of items (Schmitt, 1996). If we had, for example, six items comprising the subscale, the alpha would have been .77, according to the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula.

**Control variables.** We controlled for several variables related to personal, racial, and professional identity that are likely to influence image concerns, RIM strategies, and our outcomes of interest, including: years in journalism, age, gender, multiracial identity, and the first generation of one's family to be born in the United States. We controlled for stigma consciousness, as concerns with stereotyping influence RIM (Roberts et al., 2008; Steele, 2010). We used three items from the Stigma Consciousness Questionnaire (Pinel, 1999;  $\alpha = .61$ ). Professional centrality was a primary predictor, but was also controlled for in the outcome analyses.

**Predictors of RIM use.** *Racial centrality* was measured using three items adapted from the centrality subscale of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (Sellers et al., 1997;  $\alpha = .86$ ). *Professional centrality* was measured using three items from Hackman and Lawler's (1971) adaptation of Lodahl and Kejner's (1965) work involvement scale ( $\alpha = .77$ ).

**Outcomes of RIM use.** *Perceived career success* was measured using one item adapted from [Turban and Dougherty's \(1994\)](#) perceived career success scale; participants rated "How successful you think your career has been, on a national scale" on an 7-point scale from 1 (*not at all successful*) to 7 (*completely successful*). *Life satisfaction* and *job satisfaction* were measured using the items: "Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your life?" and "How satisfied are you with your current job situation?" on an 8-point scale from 1 (*not at all satisfied*) to 8 (*extremely satisfied*).

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

Mean scores, standard deviations, and correlations for all study variables are presented in [Table 1](#). Among the four RIM strategies, affiliation was most used, and avoidance was least used. In support of the RIM framework in [Figure 1](#), the tactics for building cohesion—affiliation and racial humor—were positively correlated ( $r = .26, p < .01$ ). Avoidance and enhancement were negatively correlated ( $r = -.17, p < .05$ ). The tactics for recategorization—affiliation and avoidance—were positively correlated ( $r = .17, p < .01$ ), and the tactics for changing racial meanings—racial humor and enhancement—were positively correlated ( $r = .35, p < .01$ ).

### Hypothesis Testing

**Predictors of RIM use.** We tested H1 and H2 using hierarchical multiple regression analyses and followed the moderated regression procedures recommended by [Aiken and West \(1991\)](#). [Table 2](#) shows the results for four sets of regression models predicting the use of RIM strategies. For each model, years worked in journalism, gender, multirace, U.S.-born generation, and stigma consciousness were entered at the first step as control variables. Racial centrality and professional centrality

were entered at the second step as independent variables. The interaction term of professional centrality and racial centrality was entered at the final step in each model. We created the interaction term by multiplying the mean-centered variables.

H1 was supported. Consistent with H1a–c, there were significant relationships between racial centrality and enhancement ( $\beta = .25, p = .00$ ), avoidance ( $\beta = -.29, p < .001$ ), and racial humor ( $\beta = -.20, p = .01$ ). H2 was supported. Consistent with H2a, professional centrality was positively related to affiliation ( $\beta = .17, p = .03$ ). Consistent with H2b, there was a significant interaction effect between racial centrality and professional centrality in predicting affiliation ( $\beta = .16, p = .04$ ). To interpret the form of the interaction effect, we plotted the simple slopes at one standard deviation above and below the mean and tested whether each simple slope was statistically significant ([Aiken & West, 1991](#)). As predicted, professional centrality had a stronger positive relationship with affiliation when racial centrality was high ([Figure 2a](#)). Consistent with H2c, there was a significant interaction effect between racial centrality and professional centrality in predicting avoidance ( $\beta = -.16, p = .03$ ). As predicted, professional centrality was positively related to avoidance when racial centrality was low ([Figure 2b](#)).

**Outcomes of RIM use.** To test H3–H5, we again used hierarchical multiple regression analyses and the moderated regression procedures ([Aiken & West, 1991](#)). For each outcome, age, stigma consciousness, and professional centrality were entered at the first step as control variables. One of the four RIM strategies and racial centrality were entered at the second step as independent variables. Finally, the interaction term of the RIM strategy and racial centrality was entered. [Table 3](#) shows the results for the regression models predicting perceived career success, life satisfaction, and job satisfaction, in turn.

H3 was partially supported. Enhancement (H3a), avoidance (H3b), racial humor (H3c), and affiliation (H3d) were not

Table 1  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between Variables

| Variables                     | Mean  | SD   | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4     | 5      | 6      | 7      | 8     | 9     | 10    | 11   | 12    | 13    | 14   |
|-------------------------------|-------|------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|------|
| 1. Age                        | 30.61 | 8.40 |        |        |        |       |        |        |        |       |       |       |      |       |       |      |
| 2. Years worked in journalism | 7.28  | 7.02 | .90**  |        |        |       |        |        |        |       |       |       |      |       |       |      |
| 3. Gender                     | 0.68  | 0.47 | -.34** | -.29** |        |       |        |        |        |       |       |       |      |       |       |      |
| 4. Multirace                  | 0.13  | 0.34 | -.02   | .04    | .10    |       |        |        |        |       |       |       |      |       |       |      |
| 5. U.S.-born generation       | 2.12  | 1.05 | -.01   | .06    | -.05   | .14*  |        |        |        |       |       |       |      |       |       |      |
| 6. Stigma consciousness       | 1.94  | 0.93 | -.02   | -.03   | .06    | -.13  | -.02   |        |        |       |       |       |      |       |       |      |
| 7. Racial centrality          | 5.26  | 1.37 | .08    | .12    | -.09   | -.09  | .04    | .27**  |        |       |       |       |      |       |       |      |
| 8. Professional centrality    | 4.79  | 1.25 | .01    | -.04   | -.05   | -.02  | -.02   | -.08   | .11    |       |       |       |      |       |       |      |
| 9. Life satisfaction          | 6.11  | 1.45 | .09    | .11    | .02    | .02   | -.05   | -.18** | -.03   | .09   |       |       |      |       |       |      |
| 10. Job satisfaction          | 4.90  | 1.97 | .19**  | .24**  | .01    | .02   | -.15*  | -.12   | -.02   | .19** | .48** |       |      |       |       |      |
| 11. Perceived career success  | 3.77  | 1.79 | .41**  | .37**  | -.15*  | .03   | -.12   | -.13   | .03    | .07   | .28** | .35** |      |       |       |      |
| 12. Affiliation               | 3.53  | 1.11 | .02    | .02    | .01    | -.04  | -.05   | -.03   | -.03   | .13   | .04   | .01   | -.01 |       |       |      |
| 13. Enhancement               | 2.74  | 1.09 | -.02   | -.05   | .00    | -.02  | -.22** | .29**  | .31**  | .12   | .03   | -.01  | -.07 | .25** |       |      |
| 14. Avoidance                 | 1.48  | 1.05 | .06    | .01    | -.18** | -.16* | .02    | -.07   | -.25** | .06   | -.18* | -.02  | -.10 | .17** | -.17* |      |
| 15. Racial humor              | 2.49  | 1.39 | -.03   | -.07   | -.07   | .00   | -.24** | .06    | -.11   | .03   | -.09  | .01   | .03  | .26** | .35** | -.02 |

Note. Max  $N = 233$ .

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 2

Regression of Racial Identity-Based Impression Management Strategies on Predictors

| Steps                        | Dependent variables |                   |                   |                          |
|------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
|                              | Enhancement         | Avoidance         | Racial humor      | Affiliation              |
| <b>Step 1</b>                |                     |                   |                   |                          |
| Years worked in journalism   | -.04                | -.05              | -.06              | -.002                    |
| Gender <sup>a</sup>          | -.05                | -.17*             | -.11              | -.001                    |
| Multirace <sup>b</sup>       | .03                 | -.15 <sup>†</sup> | .07               | -.02                     |
| U.S.-born generation         | -.18**              | .07               | -.21****          | -.02                     |
| Stigma consciousness         | .33****             | -.09              | .08               | -.04                     |
| R <sup>2</sup>               | .14****             | .06*              | .06*              | .002                     |
| <b>Step 2</b>                |                     |                   |                   |                          |
| Years worked in journalism   | -.05                | -.01              | -.04              | .01                      |
| Gender <sup>a</sup>          | .02                 | -.19*             | -.13 <sup>†</sup> | .002                     |
| Multirace <sup>b</sup>       | .05                 | -.16*             | .06               | -.02                     |
| U.S.-born generation         | -.19**              | .09               | -.21**            | -.01                     |
| Stigma consciousness         | .27****             | -.003             | .13 <sup>†</sup>  | -.004                    |
| Racial centrality            | .25**               | -.29***           | -.20*             | -.07                     |
| Professional centrality      | .10                 | .11               | .04               | .17*                     |
| R <sup>2</sup> (F-change)    | .21 (7.51**)        | .14 (7.63**)      | .10 (3.26*)       | .03 (2.56 <sup>†</sup> ) |
| <b>Step 3</b>                |                     |                   |                   |                          |
| Years worked in journalism   | -.08                | .004              | -.03              | -.004                    |
| Gender <sup>a</sup>          | .02                 | -.20**            | -.13 <sup>†</sup> | .01                      |
| Multirace <sup>b</sup>       | .03                 | -.14*             | .07               | -.04                     |
| U.S.-born generation         | -.20**              | .10               | -.20**            | -.02                     |
| Stigma consciousness         | .27****             | .004              | .14 <sup>†</sup>  | -.01                     |
| Racial centrality (RC)       | .26**               | -.30***           | -.20*             | -.06                     |
| Professional centrality (PC) | .10                 | .09               | .04               | .19*                     |
| RC × PC                      | .09                 | -.16*             | -.08              | .16*                     |
| R <sup>2</sup> (F-change)    | .21 (1.69)          | .17 (5.15*)       | .10 (1.06)        | .06 (4.24*)              |

Note. Standardized coefficients are presented. <sup>a</sup> Gender (0 = female, 1 = male). <sup>b</sup> Multirace (0 = not multirace, 1 = multirace).

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . \*\*\*\*  $p < .0001$ .

significantly positively related to perceived career success. In fact, avoidance was negatively related to perceived career success ( $\beta = -.17, p = .04$ ). H3e was supported. As predicted, the interaction of enhancement and racial centrality was significantly related to perceived career success ( $\beta = -.16, p = .02$ ), and enhancement was positively related to perceived career success, but only when racial centrality was low (Figure 3a). H3f was supported. As predicted, the interaction of racial humor and racial centrality was significantly related to perceived career success ( $\beta = -.15, p = .03$ ), and humor was positively related to perceived career success, but only when racial centrality was low (Figure 3b).

H4 was partially supported. H4a was not supported; the interaction of enhancement and racial centrality was not significantly related to life satisfaction. The results supported H4b (the proposed relationship between avoidance and life satisfaction;  $\beta = -.22, p = .00$ ) and H4c (the proposed interaction effect of racial humor and racial centrality on life satisfaction;  $\beta = -.15, p = .04$ ; see Figure 4). H4d was not supported; affiliation was not significantly related to life satisfaction.

H5 was not supported. Job satisfaction was not predicted by enhancement (H5a), avoidance (H5b), the interaction of racial humor and racial centrality (H5c), or affiliation (H5d).

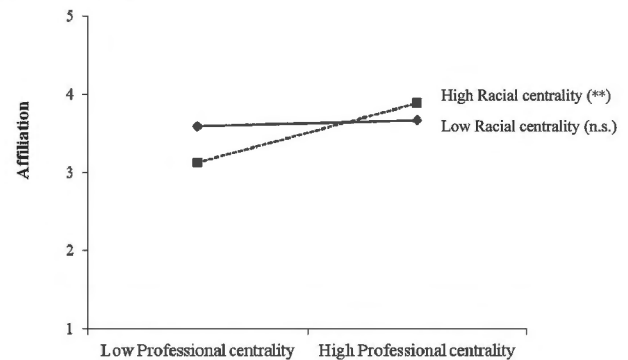
## Discussion

### Theoretical Contributions

The present research contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between the centrality of one's racial identity and the strategic enactment of that identity. Whereas prior research on RIM examined the effect of racial centrality on the use of enhancement and avoidance, we expanded our investigation to examine the use of affiliation and racial humor. Our findings suggest that racial centrality has a distinct relationship with each of the four RIM strategies. Racial centrality directly predicted three of the four RIM strategies, consistent with our theorizing that for individuals with high racial centrality, enhancement enables authentic self-expression, avoidance fosters identity conflict, and racial humor is threatening to the self-concept.

Our findings that racial centrality and professional centrality interact to predict some RIM strategies also contribute to our limited understanding of the intersection of racial and professional identities in the workplace (Holvino, 2010). Professional centrality predicted avoidance only among individuals with low racial centrality, for whom suppressing racial identity does not create identity conflict. Professional centrality predicted affiliation among individuals with high racial centrality, who may use this strategy to

(a) DV: Affiliation



(b) DV: Avoidance

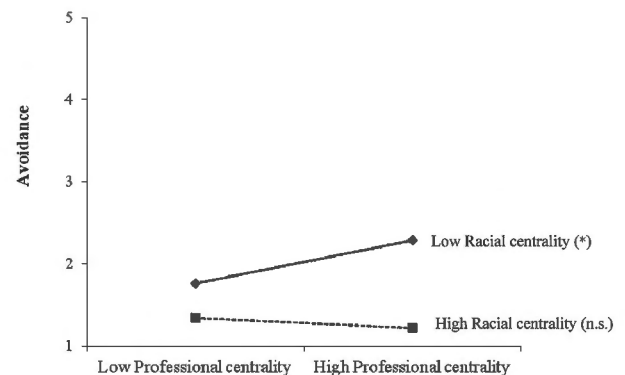


Figure 2. Interaction effect of racial centrality and professional centrality. DV = Dependent Variable; (a) DV: Affiliation; (b) DV: Avoidance; ns = nonsignificant. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 3

*Regression of Outcomes on Racial Identity-Based Impression Management Strategies*

|                           | DV: Perceived career success |             |             | DV: Life satisfaction |             |             | DV: Job satisfaction |           |            |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|----------------------|-----------|------------|
|                           | Step 1                       | Step 2      | Step 3      | Step 1                | Step 2      | Step 3      | Step 1               | Step 2    | Step 3     |
| <b>EN</b>                 |                              |             |             |                       |             |             |                      |           |            |
| Age                       | .41***                       | .40***      | .41***      | .08                   | .08         | .08         | .18*                 | .18*      | .18**      |
| Stigma consciousness      | -.12†                        | -.13†       | -.15*       | -.20**                | -.23**      | -.23**      | -.12†                | -.13†     | -.12       |
| Professional centrality   | .10                          | .09         | .10         | .08                   | .07         | .07         | .20**                | .20**     | .19**      |
| Enhancement (EN)          |                              | .01         | -.01        |                       | .11         | .11         |                      | .05       | .05        |
| Racial centrality (RC)    |                              | .04         | .05         |                       | -.03        | -.03        |                      | -.03      | -.04       |
| RC × EN                   |                              |             | -.16*       |                       |             | .00         |                      |           | .05        |
| R <sup>2</sup> (F-change) | .19                          | .19 (.17)   | .22 (5.69*) | .06                   | .06 (.92)   | .06 (.03)   | .09                  | .09 (.24) | .10 (.56)  |
| <b>AV</b>                 |                              |             |             |                       |             |             |                      |           |            |
| Age                       | .40***                       | .41***      | .41***      | .09                   | .10         | .09         | .18*                 | .19**     | .19**      |
| Stigma consciousness      | -.13†                        | -.14*       | -.14*       | -.19**                | -.19*       | -.19**      | -.13†                | -.12      | -.12       |
| Professional centrality   | .10                          | .12†        | .12†        | .07                   | .09         | .10         | .20**                | .21**     | .21**      |
| Avoidance (AV)            |                              | -.17*       | -.17*       |                       | -.22**      | -.21**      |                      | -.08      | -.08       |
| Racial centrality (RC)    |                              | -.01        | .00         |                       | -.05        | -.04        |                      | -.04      | -.04       |
| RC × AV                   |                              |             | .01         |                       |             | .10         |                      |           | .02        |
| R <sup>2</sup> (F-change) | .19                          | .22 (3.33*) | .22 (.04)   | .05                   | .10 (4.75*) | .10 (1.95)  | .09                  | .10 (.65) | .10 (.09)  |
| <b>HM</b>                 |                              |             |             |                       |             |             |                      |           |            |
| Age                       | .41***                       | .40***      | .41***      | .08                   | .08         | .09         | .18*                 | .18**     | .19**      |
| Stigma consciousness      | -.12†                        | -.13†       | -.15*       | -.20**                | -.19**      | -.21**      | -.12†                | -.12      | -.13†      |
| Professional centrality   | .10                          | .09         | .07         | .08                   | .08         | .06         | .20**                | .20**     | .19**      |
| Racial humor (HM)         |                              | .06         | .06         |                       | -.10        | -.10        |                      | .03       | .03        |
| Racial centrality (RC)    |                              | .05         | .08         |                       | -.02        | .02         |                      | -.02      | .002       |
| RC × HM                   |                              |             | -.15*       |                       |             | -.15*       |                      |           | -.09       |
| R <sup>2</sup> (F-change) | .19                          | .19 (.51)   | .22 (4.77*) | .06                   | .06 (.91)   | .09 (4.38*) | .09                  | .09 (.14) | .10 (1.71) |
| <b>AF</b>                 |                              |             |             |                       |             |             |                      |           |            |
| Age                       | .40***                       | .40***      | .41***      | .09                   | .09         | .09         | .18*                 | .18*      | .18*       |
| Stigma consciousness      | -.13†                        | -.14*       | -.15*       | -.19**                | -.19*       | -.19*       | -.13†                | -.12      | -.11       |
| Professional centrality   | .10                          | .09         | .10         | .07                   | .07         | .07         | .20**                | .21**     | .20**      |
| Affiliation (AF)          |                              | .03         | .03         |                       | .003        | .002        |                      | -.03      | -.03       |
| Racial centrality (RC)    |                              | .04         | .04         |                       | .001        | .001        |                      | -.02      | -.03       |
| RC × AF                   |                              |             | -.09        |                       |             | -.02        |                      |           | .06        |
| R <sup>2</sup> (F-change) | .19                          | .19 (.24)   | .20 (1.56)  | .05                   | .05 (.001)  | .05 (.08)   | .09                  | .09 (.14) | .10 (.74)  |

Note. DV = Dependent Variable.

construct dual identities that embrace commonalities and differences at work.

Finally, racial centrality moderated the effect of using RIM strategies on outcomes. Racial centrality influenced the extent to which enhancement (which can elicit negative reactions from colleagues when attempted by high racial centrality individuals) affected perceived career success, as well as the extent to which using racial humor (given its threatening implications for high racial centrality individuals) affected life satisfaction and perceived career success.

This study also extends our understanding of the experiences of Asian Americans in the workplace. The Asian American journalists in our sample engaged in a substantial amount of RIM, demonstrating a proactive, strategic approach to managing their image. This mindfulness is consistent with the negative stereotyping and underrepresentation faced by Asian Americans, rather than the myth that Asian Americans do not face challenges around race.

At the same time, Asian Americans displayed some differences in their use of RIM from African Americans, which underscores the importance of examining the unique experiences of racial minority groups. For example, Roberts et al. (2008) found main effects of enhancement on outcomes, whereas we did not. We speculate that enhancement may be particularly impactful for Black medical students, who face uniformly negative stereotypes, by facilitating professional image construction. Avoidance nega-

tively affected life satisfaction and perceived career success among Asian American journalists, yet avoidance by Black medical students did not affect depression, medical career commitment, or intention to leave medical school (Roberts et al., 2008). We speculate that for Asian Americans, avoidance may result in losing the benefits of positive stereotypes, and may thus have a more significant impact on the outcomes in this study.

### Generalizability and Directions for Future Research

Our study of RIM was based on attendees of the national AAJA annual conference, who may identify more strongly with race than journalists who did not attend, and therefore may be less likely to use avoidance and more likely to use enhancement. Accordingly, our results indicate that avoidance was used least frequently. Despite this limitation, findings revealed that racial centrality related to enhancement, avoidance, and humor in the expected directions. Affiliation, which was not related to racial centrality, was the most frequently used RIM strategy among our sample of AAJA conference attendees.

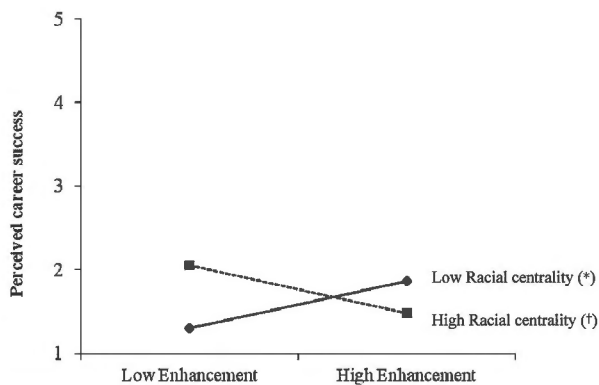
We believe that our findings are likely to generalize to Asian American employees in other fields, given the widespread stereotypes related to Asian Americans' social competence and the general importance of being seen as socially competent in the workplace. However, it is possible that Asian Americans whose



work roles require less social interaction than journalists will use the RIM strategies less than Asian American journalists. To further develop theory, research should continue to examine the generalizability of our findings among other groups of racial minority and majority professionals.

Future studies may investigate other factors that influence individuals' choice of RIM strategies. Notably, females were more likely to use avoidance than were males, and journalists whose families had more generations born in the U.S. were less likely to use enhancement or racial humor than members of families who had immigrated more recently. Other aspects of racial identity such as public or private regard, the ideology one holds about interracial interactions, or one's level of acculturation may affect decisions about RIM at work. The demographic composition of one's work organization (Kanter, 1977), diversity climate of one's work group or organization (Ely & Thomas, 2001), and racial composition of one's network (Ibarra, 1995; Thomas & Gabarro, 1999) may also shape whether individuals use various RIM strategies. For example, advocating on behalf of one's racial group may create the risk of being labeled a "rabble rouser" (Block, Koch, Liberman, Merriweather, & Roberson, 2011; Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998) in less supportive or diverse work contexts.

(a) Enhancement and racial centrality



(b) Racial humor and racial centrality

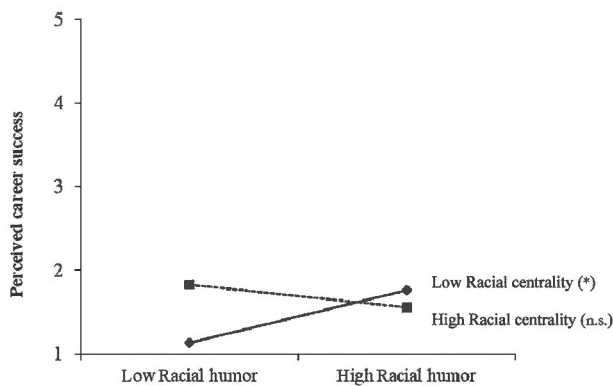


Figure 3. Interaction effect of racial identity-based impression management tactics and racial centrality on perceived career success. (a) Enhancement and racial centrality; (b) Racial humor and racial centrality; ns = nonsignificant. †  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ .

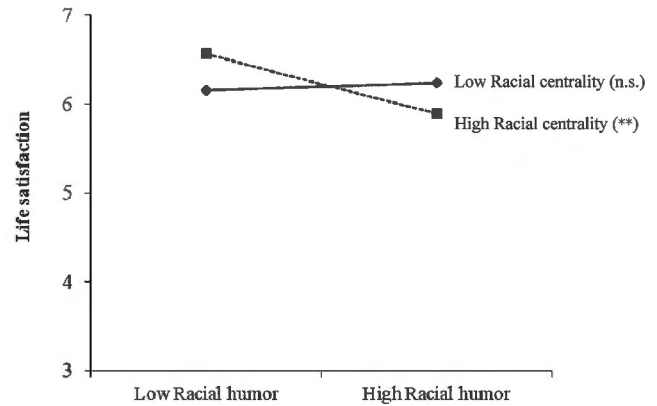


Figure 4. Interaction effect of racial humor and racial centrality on life satisfaction. ns = nonsignificant. \*\*  $p < .01$ .

It would also be valuable to investigate the characteristics of successful versus unsuccessful attempts to use each RIM strategy. None of the RIM strategies directly predicted perceived career success in this study, suggesting that individuals' attempts at RIM vary in their effectiveness. Individuals may be more successful in using enhancement or racial humor, for example, with colleagues with whom they have already built a high quality relationship (which may reduce discomfort around discussing race), versus colleagues who are relative strangers.

Finally, our ability to draw conclusions about the direction of causal relationships is limited by our cross-sectional design and self-report measures, which could have inflated the relationships among variables. To reduce the possibility of common source bias, future studies may seek to collect data on predictors and outcomes from sources other than the individuals reporting on their RIM.

## Conclusion

The workforce is becoming increasingly diverse. RIM provides individuals, especially racial minorities and members of other socially devalued groups, with an agentic framework through which they can challenge stereotyping and build cohesion, by proactively influencing other people's impressions of their racial identity at work. Understanding RIM may increase the likelihood that racial minorities will succeed in mitigating the challenges, and leveraging the benefits, of the diversity they bring to work organizations.

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## Appendix

### Racial Identity-Based Impression Management (RIM) Scale

#### Avoidance

- AV1. Steer clear of engaging in discussions about race/ethnicity issues.
- AV2. Limit discussions of my participation in race/ethnic-focused activities.
- AV3. Avoid writing about topics that might get me pigeonholed as interested only in Asian American/minority issues.
- AV4. Draw as little attention to my race/ethnicity as possible.

#### Enhancement

- EN1. Educate them about the strengths and achievements of members of my racial/ethnic group.
- EN2. Be seen as an advocate for my racial/ethnic group.
- EN3. Take advantage of the assumption that I am an expert on Asia/Asian Americans by turning out great stories on these topics.

- EN4. Use my race/ethnicity to convince supervisors that I will have better access to stories.

#### Affiliation

- AF1. Focus the conversation on things we have in common.
- AF2. Build cohesion so race is less of an issue.
- AF3. Emphasize the experiences or beliefs we have in common.

#### Racial Humor

- HM1. Make jokes about racial stereotypes to defuse them and reduce their potency.
- HM2. Make jokes to show that I am at ease with my race/ethnicity.
- HM3. Use humor to draw attention to racial/ethnic issues.