Hi, I’m Angelina Conrow, I’m a student researcher in the Applied Social Cognition Lab and my project is looking at the effect of clothing on stereotypes of Asian women.

What stereotypes come to mind when you think of an Asian woman? There is a long history of such stereotypes in the U.S., ranging from highly sexualized and exoticized to invisible and not fit for leadership positions, with many of these prejudiced attitudes still holding prevalence today. For this project, we were interested in exploring these stereotypes while using clothing as the independent variable. Few studies have looked at stereotypes of Asian women, much less how clothing affects them, so this is why we were excited to research this topic.

In our study, we used clothing to try to mitigate these stereotypes by putting female Asian models in both casual clothing and formal business wear, to see if business clothing could diminish stereotypes of Asian women as invisible, submissive, and not leader-like. Participants, recruited through the SONA website, were randomly assigned to either condition, and saw either three models in business clothing, or saw the same three models in casual clothing. They rated the models on a series of twenty-one descriptors associated with stereotypes of Asian women as well as Asians in general.  We measured prejudice as the dependent variable by grouping these descriptors into four categories: sexualized, submissive, invisible, and non-gender specific Asian stereotypes. We hypothesized that models in the business attire would be rated lower on invisible, submissive, and sexualized stereotypes, and higher in non-gender specific Asian stereotypes, due to the nature of Asians being characterized as intelligent and successful and the fact that business attire can also increase perceptions of being competent and successful.

We used an ANCOVA to compare means between the two conditions. For the 4 stereotype categories, we were able to find significant differences in 3 of the 4 groups, with P values of less than .05. Models in condition 1 were rated higher on non-gender specific Asian stereotypes and sexualized stereotypes, but lower on invisible, powerless stereotypes. Essentially, Asian women in formal business clothing were seen as more stereotypically Asian and more sexualized, but were also seen as more powerful, authoritative, and fit to be a leader. The results are interesting in that the condition did not affect submissive stereotypes, and actually increased sexualized stereotypes. This could be due to individual clothing choices for the models in either condition, or perhaps models in business attire were perceived as putting more effort into their appearance as opposed to models in T-shirts and jeans, and therefore they came off as more attractive. However, our results that business wear significantly negated invisible, powerless stereotypes of Asian women is a key finding.

This research is important because stereotypes caused by prejudice can have negative effects on those targeted. For example, it has been shown that these stereotypes may become internalized, and such discrimination may also have the potential to impact physical and psychological health as well as contribute to stress and depression. Therefore, it is important to understand these stereotypes as well as ways to diffuse them, which we have sought to do in our study. This information is a step in the right direction to better learn how to deal with such prejudice. Thank you for watching!