


Racism and the Pinkerton syndrome in Singapore: effects of race on hiring decisions

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Original Article

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to examine racism and the Pinkerton syndrome in Singapore. Specifically, the study examined the effects of race on hiring decisions in a simulated hiring decision task. Participants were 171 (61% males) Singaporean Chinese undergraduates from a private university in Singapore. They were randomly assigned into one of nine groups and asked to review a resume of a job applicant. The study used a 3 (Academic qualifications: strong, moderate, or weak) × 3 (Race: White, Chinese, or Malay) between-subjects design with perceived warmth, competence, applicant suitability and recommended salary as the dependent variables. The results showed that while Chinese participants discriminated against Malay applicants (racism), they discriminated in favor of White applicants (the Pinkerton syndrome). The results provided a potential explanation to the economic disparities between Malays and the other races, and first experimental evidence for racism and the Pinkerton syndrome in Singapore.

In a recent survey of 2,000 Singaporeans, 53% indicated that racism is not an important problem in contemporary Singapore (Mathews, 2016). It is unclear whether this optimism is justified. Although racism has been extensively investigated in other countries since the 1900s (Allport, 1954), there are little to no experimental investigations of racism in Singapore (Chew, 2018). In addition, it has been observed that some Singaporean women tended to exclusively date and marry White men (Hudson, 2015; Kuah, 1997; Lim, 1995). This phenomenon is referred to as the Pinkerton syndrome,¹ and the derogatory term *Sarong Party Girls* is often used to describe these women. In this article, we argue that the observation is a narrow, overt manifestation of a general tendency for Asians to be prejudiced and to discriminate in favor of Whites. While a similar phenomenon has been investigated in other countries (David & Okazaki, 2006b; Utsey, Abrams, Opore-Henaku, Bolden, & Williams, 2015), there are little to no experimental investigations of the Pinkerton syndrome in Singapore.

Racism

Racism refers to “the differential treatment enacted by an individual, group, or organization on individuals based on assumptions of a group’s phenotypic, linguistic, or cultural differences” (Gamst, Liang, & Der-Karabetian, 2011, p. 251). There are two forms of racism: (a) overt racism, characterized by open hostility, aggression, and discrimination; and (b) covert racism, characterized by expressing prejudice or discriminating others in subtle, socially justifiable manners. It has been argued that both forms of racism have always been expressed concurrently throughout history and that a distinction between the two is redundant (Leach, 2005). In contrast, others have argued that covert racism has replaced overt racism due to the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Katz, 1981; McConahay, 1986; McConahay & Hough, 1976).

Aversive racism is a form of covert racism where individuals “endorse egalitarian values and regard themselves as nonprejudiced but who nonetheless discriminate in subtle, rationalizable ways” (Hodson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2002, p. 460). In one study, 78 White undergraduates were asked to review applications to the university with either strong, moderate, or weak academic qualifications (Hodson et al., 2002). There was no discrimination against Black applicants with either strong or weak academic qualifications. However, highly prejudiced White participants discriminated against Black applicants with moderate qualifications. Evidence for aversive racism has also been found in a simulated hiring decision task. In this study, 194 White undergraduates were asked to review the credentials of a potential job applicant with either strong, moderate, or weak qualifications (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). A similar pattern of results was found. White participants discriminated against Black applicants with moderate qualifications but not those with either strong or weak qualifications. Both studies showed that the ambiguous nature of moderate qualifications allowed White participants to rationalize their discriminatory behavior.

The negative effects of racism have been well documented. For example, the relationships between self-reported perceived racism and a range of negative physical and mental health outcomes have been documented in several literature reviews (Brondolo, Gallo, & Myers, 2009; Paradies, 2006; Williams & Mohammed, 2009) and at least two meta-analyses (Paradies

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et al., 2015; Pieterse, Todd, Neville, & Carter, 2012). Racism has also been linked to reduced employment opportunities. Field experiments have been conducted where fictitious resumes, containing either a White name or a Black name, were sent in response to job advertisements (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Pager, Western, & Bonikowski, 2009). The results indicated that resumes with a Black name are less likely to receive a positive response (e.g., a call for an interview) from employers. Overall, a review of field experiments concluded that a Black job seeker is “50 to 500 percent less likely to be considered by employers as an equally qualified White job applicant” (Pager, 2007, p. 114).

Racism Research in Singapore

Singapore is a multiracial society consisting of four races: 74.1% of the population are Chinese, 13.4% Malays, 9.2% Indians, and 3.3% Others (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2010). Since the 1980s, Malays have been underperforming on educational achievement and economic indicators compared to Chinese and Indians (Musalib, 2011). These racial disparities have not been resolved. According to the latest population census, only 5.1% of Malays had obtained a university qualification compared to 22.6% of Chinese and 35% of Indians (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2010). In addition, the median monthly household income for Malays was \$3,844 compared to \$5,100 for Chinese and \$5,370 for Indians. Lastly, only 2.8% of Malays live in condominiums and landed properties compared to 18% of Chinese and 16.3% of Indians. Such disparities are often explained using the concept of meritocracy – Malays are not talented or hardworking enough to achieve educational or financial success. This explanation is unsatisfactory given the problems inherent with meritocracy. For example, meritocracy assumes that everyone is provided with equal opportunities to succeed (i.e. regardless of race, socioeconomic status); this assumption is not supported by the literature (Barr & Low, 2005; Koh, 2014; Moore, 2000; Tan, 2008). Instead, these disparities seem to suggest the presence of racism against Malays in Singapore (Lee, 2004).

Racism is prohibited by two laws in Singapore: The Seditious Act of Singapore (The Statutes of the Republic of Singapore, 1948) and Penal Code Chapter 224 (The Statutes of the Republic of Singapore, 1871). In particular, the Seditious Act makes it an offence for anyone to “to promote feelings of ill-will and hostility between different races or classes of the population of Singapore” (The Statutes of the Republic of Singapore, 1948, p. 2). Given that the Seditious Act has been used to arrest individuals for racist comments (AsiaOne News, 2012; The New Paper, 2008), it is likely that racism in Singapore would be covert, instead of overt, in nature. However, the limited research on racism in Singapore has not taken covert racism into consideration.

Racism research in Singapore has been dominated by narrative reviews (Barr, 2006; Barr & Low, 2005; Chua, 2003; Moore, 2000; Musalib, 2011; Teo, 2005; Walsh, 2007). These reviews tended to adopt a historical narrative, tracking policies from the 1960s to explain how Malays are marginalized in Singapore. Some of these policies include the Speak Mandarin Campaign for the Chinese but an absence of similar campaigns for the respective languages of the other races (Teo, 2005). Also, primary school English textbooks in the 1980s tended to depict Malays in menial jobs (e.g. a street sweeper) but Chinese in skilled jobs (e.g. a doctor; Barr, 2006). Lastly, the recurring pattern of Malays requesting equal treatment and the government’s resistance to such requests has been documented (Musalib, 2011). Taken together, these reviews provided a plausible account of institutionalized racism in Singapore.

In contrast, the small number of quantitative researches suggests that there is little racism in Singapore (Chin & Vasu, 2012; Mathews, 2013, 2016; Ooi, 2005). For example, two large-scale studies administered questionnaires using a set of survey questions at the homes of Singaporeans to examine racial harmony (Mathews, 2013, 2016). Overall, although there was some evidence of racism, the results from both studies provided support for racial harmony in Singapore. However, these studies focused on self-reported racial attitudes and perceived racial discrimination. The validity of the results is in question because the items used in the studies (e.g. “People from all races should be treated equally”) promote a socially desirable response. This limitation and the lack of experimental evidence precluded a conclusion on whether racism exists in contemporary Singapore.

The Pinkerton Syndrome

Since the 1990s, it has been observed that some Singaporean women tended to exclusively date and marry White men (Hudson, 2015; Kuah, 1997). Lim (1995) speculated that this could be due to the perception that White men are novel, interesting, socially refined, and intelligent. In other words, Singaporean women might discriminate in favor of White men because of the positive stereotypes associated with Whites. This phenomenon is referred to as the Pinkerton syndrome, and the derogatory term *Sarong Party Girls* is often used to describe these women. However, it seems that the preference for Whites is not restricted to interpersonal attraction. A cursory search of Singapore’s online media showed that the Hokkien dialect term *Ang Mor Tua Kee*, literally translated as “Westerners Big Shot”, is often used when there is a perception that Whites receive preferential treatment in a wide variety of situations. Accordingly, we redefine the Pinkerton syndrome broadly as the tendency for Asians to be prejudiced and to discriminate in favor of Whites; it is an unusual form of racism perpetuated by the majority against themselves for a specific minority. The Pinkerton syndrome is probably caused by two factors: colonial mentality and colorism.

Colonial mentality is conceptualized as “a form of internalized oppression, characterized by a perception of ethnic or cultural inferiority”, due to a history of colonization by Western powers (David & Okazaki, 2006b, p. 241). Colonial mentality is characterized by within-group discrimination (preference for more westernized Asians), a desire for the physical characteristics of Whites, colonial debt (belief that Asians should be grateful to their colonizers), cultural shame and embarrassment, and internalized cultural inferiority. Evidence for colonial mentality has been found among Filipino Americans (David & Okazaki, 2006b) and Ghanaians (Utsey et al., 2015); both the Philippines and Ghana have a history of colonization by Western powers. The negative effects of colonial mentality have been well documented. For example, colonial mentality is positively correlated with depression and anxiety, and negatively correlated with self-esteem and collective self-esteem (David & Okazaki, 2006b; Utsey et al., 2015). In addition to colonial mentality, a history of colonization could also lead to colorism.

Colorism is defined as “the system that privileges the lighter skinned over the darker skinned people within a community of color” (Hunter, 2002, p. 176). While some researchers have argued that colorism is a direct result of colonization (Hunter, 2002, 2007), others have maintained that colorism predates colonization (Ashikari, 2005; Li, Min, Belk, & Shalini Bahl, 2008; Wagatsuma, 1967). Either way, colorism predicts that there will be a preference for lighter skinned individuals, resulting in both between- and

within-group discrimination. Indeed, a literature review showed that darker skinned individuals are disadvantaged in education and housing, and for darker skinned women, in dating and marriage (Hunter, 2007). Unsurprisingly, darker skinned individuals are also disadvantaged in employment. For example, darker skinned Latinos, Mexican Americans, and African Americans had a lower annual income than their lighter skinned counterparts (Hunter, 2007).

Singapore was a colony of the United Kingdom from 1819 to 1942 before gaining independence in 1965 (Lepoer, 1989). The long history of colonization could have resulted in colonial mentality and colorism. Consequently, the Pinkerton syndrome should be prevalent among Singaporeans. Yet, despite the research on colonial mentality and colorism in other countries, and the observations of some Singaporean women preferring White men, there has been little to no experimental investigations of the Pinkerton syndrome in Singapore.

The Current Study

Overall, there are two research gaps in the literature. First, there are little to no experimental investigations of racism in Singapore (Chew, 2018). Most studies on racism were conducted predominantly in the United States and it is currently unclear whether the results are generalizable to samples from other countries. Furthermore, the generalizability of those results may be limited since racism is a highly contextualized phenomenon. For example, the strict laws in Singapore might serve to minimize or eliminate racism (e.g. The Statutes of the Republic of Singapore, 1871, 1948). While there is racism research in Singapore, these studies tended to be either narrative or descriptive, both of which are susceptible to biases (e.g. researcher bias). Second, there are little to no experimental investigations of the Pinkerton syndrome in Singapore. The preference for an out-group is not a new phenomenon. While most individuals would exhibit in-group favoritism and out-group derogation, minorities tend to exhibit in-group derogation and out-group favoritism (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). However, the Pinkerton syndrome predicts a new phenomenon where Asians, a majority group, would discriminate against themselves for Whites (i.e. a minority group in Asia). In addition, the Pinkerton syndrome is distinct from colonial mentality and colorism. Those two constructs tended to focus on within-group discrimination (David & Okazaki, 2006a, 2006b; Hunter, 2002, 2007) whereas the Pinkerton syndrome focuses on between-group discrimination.

Accordingly, the current study aims to address the research gaps by examining racism and the Pinkerton syndrome in an experiment. Given that racism in Singapore is probably covert in nature, the current study adopts the aversive racism framework (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986) to examine the effects of race on hiring decisions in a simulated hiring decision task (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). Hiring decisions were examined because of the potential economic implications of the results. Consistent with the framework, we expect Chinese participants to discriminate against Malay applicants with moderate qualifications but not those with either strong or weak qualifications. Specifically, we hypothesized that Chinese participants will rate Malay applicants with moderate qualifications to be less competent (Hypothesis 1a), less suitable for the job (Hypothesis 1b), and will recommend a lower salary (Hypothesis 1c) than equally qualified Chinese applicants.

In contrast, the Pinkerton syndrome is generally not considered as racism in Singapore. Hence, due to the perceived acceptability of the Pinkerton syndrome, we expect Chinese participants to

Table 1. Variation of elements in the resume to manipulate the strength of academic qualifications

Strength	GPA	Skill in SPSS	Volunteer role	Role in university's psychological society
Strong	6.0 / 7.0	Proficient	Volunteer coordinator	President
Moderate	5.0 / 7.0	Adequate	Volunteer leader	Secretary
Weak	4.0 / 7.0	Basic	Volunteer	Member

discriminate in favor of White applicants, regardless of the strength of academic qualifications. Specifically, we hypothesized that Chinese participants will rate White applicants to be more competent (Hypothesis 2a), more suitable for the job (Hypothesis 2b), and will recommend a higher salary (Hypothesis 2c) than equally qualified Chinese applicants.

Method

Construction and Evaluation of Resumes and Names

Three resumes were constructed in consultation with the Career Counsellor of the university. Elements of the resumes were varied to manipulate the strength of the academic qualifications. Some of these elements are listed in Table 1. In addition, we generated four names for each of the three races, resulting in a total of 12 names.

Eighteen Singaporean Chinese undergraduates were randomly assigned to receive one of the three resumes without names (i.e. either strong, moderate, or weak in academic qualifications). The participants reviewed the resume and completed the Perception of Warmth and Competence Scale (Bloodhart, 2009; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002) and the Hiring Decision Scale (Barrick, Swider, & Stewart, 2010). Subsequently, they recommended a monthly salary for the job applicant given the starting salary range of \$2,800 to \$3,562 for a psychology graduate in Singapore (Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2015). Lastly, participants were randomly presented the 12 names, one at a time, and identified the race of the individual using five options: Chinese, Malay, Indian, White, and Others. Preliminary analyses suggested that participants were able to discriminate between strong, moderate, and weak academic qualifications in terms of perceived competence and applicant suitability, and recommended salary. Also, they were able to correctly identify the race of the individuals based on the names presented.

Participants

Participants were a convenience sample of 175 Singaporean Chinese undergraduates from a private university in Singapore. Data from four participants were removed because they were multivariate outliers. The final sample consisted of 171 participants (61% males). Their ages ranged from 17 to 43 years ($M = 24.08$, $SD = 3.02$).

Instruments

Perception of Warmth and Competence Scale.

This scale is an eight-item instrument designed to assess two factors: (a) Perception of Warmth (e.g. "How friendly do you think the candidate is?") and (b) Perception of Competence (e.g.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations of perceived competence and applicant suitability, and recommended salary by academic qualifications (strong, moderate, or weak) and race (White, Chinese, or Malay) of the candidate

	Competence		Applicant suitability		Recommended salary	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Strong academic qualifications						
White	19.40	3.36	17.40	2.30	3293.33	205.17
Chinese	19.36	1.95	17.00	1.75	3125.00	190.90
Malay	17.33	3.74	15.50	2.73	2969.44	115.22
Moderate academic qualifications						
White	17.67	1.80	15.90	1.22	3061.90	168.75
Chinese	16.89	2.91	14.39	2.66	2963.89	141.22
Malay	14.94	2.66	13.35	3.00	2888.24	116.63
Weak academic qualifications						
White	16.56	2.36	14.61	1.54	3021.56	183.04
Chinese	14.52	2.50	12.96	2.90	2934.78	119.12
Malay	13.67	3.06	11.59	3.23	2840.30	184.38
Academic qualifications (collapsed across race)						
Strong	18.60	3.27	16.55	2.44	3119.15	216.08
Moderate	16.59	2.67	14.64	2.55	2977.68	160.37
Weak	14.72	2.91	12.85	2.98	2920.24	178.21
Race (collapsed across academic qualifications)						
White	17.78	2.69	15.89	1.98	3112.74	213.75
Chinese	16.53	3.16	14.45	3.01	2992.73	164.55
Malay	15.08	3.48	13.21	3.40	2890.94	157.21

Note: Mean scores that are significantly different after post hoc tests are bolded.

“How skilled do you think the candidate is?”; Fiske et al., 2002). Responses are made on a 9-point Likert-type scale that ranges from 0 = *not at all* to 8 = *extremely*. Higher scores indicate higher perception of warmth and competence. A study omitted the confidence item (i.e. “How confident do you think the candidate is?”) because it loaded equally on both Warmth and Competence, and reported internal consistencies of .93 and .91 for the two factors respectively ($n = 144$; Bloodhart, 2009).

Hiring Decision Scale.

This scale is a four-item instrument designed to assess perceived applicant suitability (e.g. “On the basis of his/her qualifications, I feel this applicant would be a good hire for this job”; Barrick et al., 2010). Responses are made on a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranges from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Higher scores indicate higher perception of applicant suitability. The study reported an internal consistency of .93 for the instrument ($n = 189$).

Procedure

Upon arrival at the research lab, participants were asked to play the role of a human resource consultant assisting a company in hiring decisions. In order to conceal the true purpose of the study, participants were told that the study aims to examine the effects of warmth perception on hiring decisions. First, participants were provided with a job description containing both the responsibilities

and requirements of a research assistant. Second, participants were randomly assigned into one of nine groups – Academic qualifications (strong, moderate, or weak) \times Race (White, Chinese, or Malay) – and reviewed the relevant resume. We manipulated race by assigning the following names to the resumes: David Allan Smith (White), Wong Junjie (Chinese), and Muhammad Ashraf Bin Abdullah (Malay). Finally, participants completed the Perception of Warmth and Competence Scale (Bloodhart, 2009) and the Hiring Decision Scale (Barrick et al., 2010), recommended a salary for the job applicant using the salary range of \$2,800 to \$3,562 (Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2015), and completed a demographics form. At the end of the experiment, participants were debriefed about the true purpose of the study and received course credit for their time. This procedure was approved by James Cook University’s Human Research Ethics Committee.

Results

All results were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted using principal axis factoring extraction and Promax rotation ($K = 4$) to examine the underlying structure of the Perception of Warmth and Competence Scale and the Hiring Decision Scale. Two factors were extracted for the Perception of Warmth and Competence Scale and a simple structure was obtained, with all items loading substantially on only one factor.

Table 3. Effects of race on perceived competence and applicant suitability, and recommended salary

	<i>F</i> (2, 162) =	Partial Eta Squared
Competence	12.35	.13
Applicant suitability	13.71	.15
Recommended salary	27.79	.26

Note: The alpha level was corrected using a Bonferroni adjustment (i.e. $\alpha = .05/3$ analyses = .017). All tests are significant, $p = .000$.

However, the confidence item (i.e. “How confident do you think the candidate is?”) loaded on the Warmth factor instead of the Competence factor. Accordingly, the item was omitted for subsequent analyses. In addition, only the Competence factor was used in subsequent analysis due to its relevance to the aims of the current study. The internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha) of the factor was .89. One factor was extracted for the Hiring Decision Scale and a simple structure was obtained, with all items loading substantially on the factor. The internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha) of the instrument was .91.

The means and standard deviations of perceived competence and applicant suitability, and recommended salary are presented in Table 2. A 3 (Academic qualifications: strong, moderate, or weak) \times 3 (Race: White, Chinese, or Malay) between-subjects multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted with perceived competence and applicant suitability, and recommended salary as the dependent variables. Pillai’s trace was used to interpret the results due to violations of the homogeneity of covariance assumption and the homogeneity of variance assumption for perceived applicant suitability.

There was no statistically significant interaction effect between academic qualifications and race on the combined dependent variables, $F(12, 486) = 1.12$, $p = .34$, Pillai’s trace = .08. There was a statistically significant main effect of academic qualifications, $F(6, 322) = 10.63$, $p = .000$, Pillai’s trace = .33, partial eta squared = .17; and a statistically significant main effect of race, $F(6, 322) = 8.99$, $p = .000$, Pillai’s trace = .29, partial eta squared = .14, on the combined dependent variables. Given the aims of the current study, follow-up analyses only focused on race as the independent variable. The dependent variables were considered separately and the results are presented in Table 3.

Post hoc tests were conducted using Tukey HSD (honest significant difference) test to examine the effects of race on each of the dependent variables. For perceived competence, Whites ($M = 17.78$, $SD = 2.69$) and Chinese ($M = 16.53$, $SD = 3.16$) had higher perceived competence than Malays ($M = 15.08$, $SD = 3.48$), $p = .000$, 95% CI [1.48, 3.92] and $p = .02$, 95% CI [.23, 2.66] respectively. For perceived applicant suitability, Whites ($M = 15.89$, $SD = 1.98$) had higher perceived applicant suitability than Chinese ($M = 14.45$, $SD = 3.01$) and Malays ($M = 13.21$, $SD = 3.40$), $p = .01$, 95% CI [.29, 2.58] and $p = .000$, 95% CI [1.57, 3.79] respectively. Also, Chinese had higher perceived applicant suitability than Malays, $p = .02$, 95% CI [.14, 2.35]. Lastly for recommended salary, Whites ($M = 3112.74$, $SD = 213.75$) had a higher recommended salary than Chinese ($M = 2,992.73$, $SD = 164.55$) and Malays ($M = 2,890.94$, $SD = 157.21$), $p = .000$, 95% CI [47.22, 192.81] and $p = .000$, 95% CI [151.07, 292.54] respectively. Also, Chinese had a higher recommended salary than Malays, $p = .002$, 95% CI [31.40, 172.18]. The remaining pairwise comparisons were not statistically significant.

Discussion

There was no significant interaction effect between academic qualifications and race. The results showed that Chinese participants rated Malay applicants as less competent, less suitable for the job, and recommended a lower salary than equally qualified Chinese applicants. However, this effect was found regardless of the strength of academic qualifications, providing partial support for Hypotheses 1a, 1b and 1c. The results also showed that Chinese participants rated White applicants as equally competent, more suitable for the job, and recommended a higher salary than equally qualified Chinese applicants, providing no support for Hypothesis 2a, but support for Hypotheses 2b and 2c.

The finding that Chinese participants discriminated against Malay applicants regardless of the strength of academic qualifications is inconsistent with the aversive racism framework (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986) and previous studies that found discrimination only against applicants with moderate qualifications (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Hodson et al., 2002). The inconsistency suggests that either the aversive racism framework is not applicable to the Singaporean context or the participants were displaying overt racism. Either way, the discrimination observed in the current study could be explained by Chinese participants acting on their negative stereotypes of Malays (i.e. less competent). Consequently, the negative stereotype resulted in lower perceived applicant suitability and a lower recommended salary for Malay applicants.

The results provided a potential explanation to the economic disparities between Malays and the other races (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2010). First, given their lower perceived competence and applicant suitability, Malays will be less likely to be hired and more likely to be retrenched by organizations. Second, Malay applicants were recommended a monthly salary that is \$101.79 less than equally qualified Chinese applicants. This income gap will probably widen over time. Lastly, while admittedly speculative, such discrimination might also occur when making promotion decisions. For example, a Chinese manager might choose to promote and increase the salary of a Chinese employee over an equally qualified Malay employee. Taken together, these discriminatory behaviors would maintain or even exacerbate the current economic disparities.

The finding that Chinese participants discriminated in favor of White applicants is consistent with the predictions made by colonial mentality (David & Okazaki, 2006b) and colorism (Hunter, 2002), and provides the first evidence of the Pinkerton syndrome in Singapore. The mechanisms underlying the Pinkerton syndrome seem to be different from that of racism. Specifically, it appears that Chinese participants were not acting on the positive stereotypes of Whites since they rated White applicants as equally competent. While it is possible that other positive stereotypes could be activated and acted upon, this explanation is unlikely given that perceived competence was assessed broadly (Fiske et al., 2002). However, despite the perception of equal competence, Chinese participants rated White applicants as more suitable for the job and recommended them a higher salary than equally qualified Chinese applicants. Such results demonstrate the strong negative effects of colonial mentality and colorism.

In an increasingly globalized world, companies in Singapore have access to a wider racial diversity of job applicants. Consequently, Malays face a dual disadvantage of racism (Chinese against Malays) and the Pinkerton syndrome (Chinese for Whites). For example, Malay applicants were recommended a monthly salary that is \$221.80 less than equally qualified White applicants. However, the extent of this disadvantage is revealed by an inspection of the mean

scores across academic qualifications in Table 2. In particular, Malay applicants with *strong* academic qualifications had similar scores on perceived competence and applicant suitability, and a similar recommended salary than White applicants with *weak* academic qualifications. In other words, a Malay applicant has to be outstanding in order to be given the same consideration as a lesser qualified White applicant. Taken together, these findings illustrate the negative effects of the Pinkerton syndrome.

Limitations of the current study should be noted. The study recruited as participants a convenience sample of Singaporean Chinese university students. Also, participants in the study reviewed and rated only one resume. This procedure is inconsistent with hiring decision procedures in the real world, where managers review and compare multiple resumes. The use of a non-representative sample and the low external validity imposes a limit on the generalizability of the results. In future, the procedure might be improved by conducting a field experiment where these resumes, containing either a White name, a Chinese name or a Malay name, are sent in response to job advertisements (Pager, 2007). Subsequently, the responses (or the lack thereof) of the organizations could be used as an indicator of racism.

Those limitations notwithstanding, the current study has high internal validity. The differential perception and treatment can only be attributed to differences in the race of the applicant. Also, the study documented the differences in recommended salaries that provided a potential explanation for economic disparities. Given that salary packages in Singapore are often confidential and only offered to successful applicants, it is challenging for field experiments to estimate the economic implications of racism. Lastly, and more importantly, the study provided the first experimental evidence of racism and the Pinkerton syndrome in Singapore. Accordingly, the study initiated a resolution of the mixed findings between narrative reviews and quantitative research of racism in Singapore. Also, the study established the Pinkerton syndrome as an important social problem that needs to be resolved.

Future research directions include developing a measure to assess both overt and covert racism in Singapore. Such a measure has the potential to clarify the results found in the current study (i.e. non-applicability of the aversive racism framework vs. displays of overt racism). Second, future research could examine which of the two factors, colonial mentality or colorism, is primarily responsible for the Pinkerton syndrome. For example, researchers could manipulate the skin tone of the photographs of White and Chinese models and examine participants' ratings of those photographs. The results have the potential to clarify whether the Pinkerton syndrome is caused by a preference for Whites or a preference for lighter skinned individuals. Lastly, given the negative effects of racism and the Pinkerton syndrome, there is pressing need for well-evaluated interventions to be documented and shared with researchers and policy makers. The goal of resolving the protracted economic disparities between Malays and the other races (Mutalib, 2011) might come to fruition when the negative effects of those constructs are attenuated from the process of hiring decisions.

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Note

1. The term is used in reference to the character B.F. Pinkerton, who married a Japanese girl for convenience but eventually left her for an American wife, in the opera *Madame Butterfly*.

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