

Dominant East Asians face workplace harassment, says study

May 8 2012

When they don't conform to common racial stereotypes, such as being non-dominant, even people of East Asian descent are "unwelcome and unwanted by their co-workers," says a new paper from the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management.

They have been stereotyped as a "model minority."

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The study shows there is a difference between "descriptive" racial stereotypes – what people believe to be true about members of a particular group – and "prescriptive" [racial stereotypes](#) – how people want members of a particular group to behave.

One experiment showed that participants held descriptive stereotypes of East Asians as being competent, cold, and non-dominant.

A second showed that the most valued expectation of East Asians was that they "stay in their place," and don't take a dominating role. A third experiment showed that participants preferred a white co-worker over an East Asian co-worker if that co-worker had a dominant personality.

"In general, people don't want dominant co-workers but they really don't

want to work with a dominant East-Asian co-worker," says Jennifer Berdahl, a Rotman professor who co-authored the study with graduate student Ji-A Min, after conducting similar research into workplace gender stereotyping.

A fourth study, found that East Asians who exhibited a dominant personality at work reported higher levels of harassment than other workers. Those who "stayed in their place" did not.

Although stereotypes support the interests of the group that dominates in a society, Prof. Berdahl says, "Everyone buys into them to some extent ... even the group that they hurt." That may explain why the study's East Asian participants also seemed to hold the same limiting stereotypes about other East Asians.

"If you stay in your place – as a woman or as a minority – the workplace may not be actively hostile to you," says Prof. Berdahl. "But that in itself is a form of social coercion."

"The first step to remedying the bamboo ceiling created by these prescriptive stereotypes of is to be aware of them and how they can lead to backlash against those who defy them," says Prof. Berdahl. "Holding East Asians to different standards than whites – reacting negatively to them when they engage in leadership behaviors – holds them, and all those who might benefit from their leadership, back."

More information: The study is forthcoming in an issue of *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*.

Provided by University of Toronto, Rotman School of Management

Citation: Dominant East Asians face workplace harassment, says study (2012, May 8) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-05-dominant-east-asians-workplace.html>

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