

# Young whites at elite colleges see Asian-Americans as more competent than other minorities

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Asian-Americans are stereotyped as "cold but competent"—and more competent than blacks and Hispanics—by young white students at elite colleges, according to a Baylor University study.

For decades, media have put forth Asian-Americans as a prime example of non-white people who are upwardly mobile because of characteristics that supposedly are less evident in other [racial minorities](#), researchers say. They wanted to determine whether people commonly believe that.

"Now we have some concrete evidence that some [white people](#) tend to think that," said Jerry Park, Ph.D., an associate professor of sociology in Baylor's College of Arts & Sciences.

Those perceptions are important because they may affect such behavior as how people vote or behave in the workplace, he said.

The study, published in *Social Psychology Quarterly*, was limited to white students because "many of these respondents come largely from environments of privilege and likely will have significant influence in many quarters of American society," researchers wrote. "Knowing their attitudes about race will illuminate our understanding of the attitudes of the future 'ruling class.'"

Data for the study came from the National Longitudinal Survey of

Freshmen, a large panel survey of 898 participants from 27 prestigious universities across the country.

Respondents were asked to rate their opinions of Asian-Americans, African-Americans and Latino Americans separately on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being "strongly agree." The perceptions were based on three characteristics: competence, intelligence and perseverance. Participants who perceived and rated Asian-Americans as more intelligent, hard-working and perseverant than blacks and Latinos were more likely to agree with such statements as "Blacks need to work harder to move up" and similar statements about Latinos.

"That kind of statement is about whether responsibility for racial differences in upward mobility is a result of natural tendencies—as opposed to structural inequities in educational opportunity, access to good health care, jobs and other areas," Park said.

An unexpected finding was that students in elite colleges—presumably from families that are well to do and relatively educated—might be expected to think more critically about society, including considering such factors as education and socioeconomics rather than solely individual tendencies, Park said.

Provided by Baylor University

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