

LGBTQ Asian-Americans seen as more 'American'

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The [fastest-growing racial group](#) in the United States—Asian Americans—is also one that is consistently perceived as "foreign."

But for Asian Americans who are gay or lesbian, their [sexual orientation](#) may make them seem more "American" than those who are presumed straight. A new University of Washington study, the latest in research to examine stereotypes, identity and ideas about who is "American," focuses on how sexual orientation and race come together to influence others' perceptions.

"Research on race is often separate from research on sexual orientation. Here we bring the two together to understand how they interact to influence judgments of how American someone is considered," said Sapna Cheryan, a UW associate professor of psychology.

Cheryan in 2017 authored a related study, which showed how stereotypically American traits, such as being overweight, made Asian Americans seem more "American." The new research by Cheryan and her students, a collection of four studies, was published June 27 in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

Research has shown that [Asian Americans](#), and [people of color](#) in general, are seen as less American than white Americans, and face prejudice and discrimination throughout various aspects of life. Regarding sexual orientation, studies have found that, relative to countries such as Japan and South Korea, the United States has

[implemented more civil rights and anti-discrimination legislation](#), and is seen as [more LGBTQ-friendly](#).

The new UW research involved four separate, diverse groups of participants drawn from the UW student population, all of whom were asked to answer questions related to brief, written descriptions of hypothetical people or scenarios.

In the first study, participants were randomly assigned to read a brief descriptive phrase of a person named John, identified either as "an Asian American man" or "a gay Asian American man." They were then asked to rate, using a seven-point scale, how American they considered him through questions such as "How fluently do you think this person speaks English?" and "How integrated is this person in American culture?"

Researchers found that the hypothetical "gay Asian American man" was perceived as significantly more American than the hypothetical "Asian American man," whose sexual orientation wasn't specified.

The second study used similar questions, but included a greater variety of hypothetical people: men, women, whites and Asian Americans. Sexual orientation was noted as "gay" or wasn't listed. Researchers assigned "American" names to the fictional people—names that were popular in the United States in the 1980s: Matt, Chris, Michael, Jessica, Jennifer and Ashley. The same results emerged: Asian Americans identified as gay were perceived to be more American than Asian Americans whose sexual orientation was not identified.

Whites were perceived as American no matter their sexual orientation.

"These studies demonstrate once again the widely-held assumption that whites are the most American. Though being gay increased perceptions of Asian Americans' 'Americanness,' it was still not nearly enough to

close the gap in perceptions between Asian Americans and whites," said Linda Zou, a UW graduate student and study co-author.

The other two studies focused on perceived differences between "American culture" and "Asian culture," and how LGBTQ-friendly the cultures appear to be. In one study, researchers wrote descriptions of fake countries that were either presented as less welcoming and accepting of gay people than the U.S. or equally welcoming and accepting.

Participants rated Asian culture as less LGBTQ-friendly, and a gay person as more American if they were associated with a country of origin that was less LGBTQ-friendly. "American culture is perceived as more accepting of gay people compared to Asian [culture](#). As a result, gay Asian Americans are perceived as more likely to be American than their straight counterparts," the authors wrote.

But that doesn't mean LGBTQ Asian Americans face less discrimination, Cheryan said. While sexual orientation may affect a person's perceived "foreignness," it doesn't protect against other forms of discrimination and harassment, she added.

"One possible extension of this work is that gay Asian Americans may be less likely to have their American identities questioned than straight Asian Americans," said Cheryan. "At the same time, being gay puts people more at risk for other forms of prejudice based on sexual orientation."

The research lends itself to comparisons with other races, ethnicities and countries, the authors wrote, such as exploring the intersection of sexual [orientation](#) and race in the context of cultures that are believed to be more or less LGBTQ-friendly.

Other co-authors on the study were Mika Semrow and Shuyang Liu of the UW.

More information: Mika Semrow et al, Gay Asian Americans Are Seen as More American Than Asian Americans Who Are Presumed Straight, *Social Psychological and Personality Science* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/1948550619849426](https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550619849426)

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