

Analyzing The Model Minority Stereotype

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Abstract

This paper will critique the stereotype that all Asians are smart, otherwise known as the Model Minority stereotype. It will show that the stereotype is very relevant in the lives of everyone through examples in the media. Through these examples, such as the popular American TV show Glee, and advertisements from leading brands such as Verizon and Domtar Paper, it will become apparent that Asians are portrayed in the media this way. This paper will also use personal testimonies, along with research data conducted by the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF), to show how the stereotype negatively affects people of Asian descent by raising the standards for them to get into college or to get a job, causing them to not ask for help due to being embarrassed for not fitting the stereotype, causing mental health problems. It will also use data collected from the students at South Lyon High School to show that the stereotype is prevalent within the school. The paper will propose solutions to the problem in order to rid the stereotype, such as helping people to realize that race does not define someone, and everyone is a human being that should not have assumptions made about them. It will encourage the media needs to stop this specific portrayal and allow Asian actors to play other roles.

Word count: 223

Introduction

From magazines, to newspapers, commercials, movies, and tv shows, Asians are portrayed very consistently throughout all mediums of media. This consistency implies one thing about their culture and people: they are all extremely smart. The pattern of how we view Asians in the media is that they are all over-achievers, A plus students, in “smart” career paths, and child geniuses. This portrayal is often viewed as the “Model Minority Stereotype.” It implies that every single person of Asian descent is more obedient, over-achieving, hard working, smart, or independent than other races. Through many popular sources of media, as well as research, it will be shown that this stereotype is very real, and present in our lives.

Figure One:



Domtar Paper advertisement

In figure one, Domtar Paper has promoted a stereotypical image to display their company. They used an image of a young Asian boy, around the age of seven, who appears to be in a classroom holding an A+ paper. This advertisement suggests that age doesn't matter, for a certain race to be intelligent. To add on, particularly they used an Asian boy out of all the possible races that could of been portrayed. In the advertisement it says, “PAPER because it's easier to learn.” With this slogan, and the image of the child of Asian descent, the advertising

persuades us to believe that Asians learn easier and to be as smart as an Asian, (retain information easier) you must use Domtar Paper.

Figure Two:



Time Magazine cover

In figure two, Time Magazine has created an Asian based representation for their front cover of their product. The picture shows Asians in a range of ages who are not only dressed to be successful, but they are also referred to as “Whiz Kids.” This image not only implies that this specific race can only achieve high standards, but they are only capable of being the smart individual everyone sees them as. Their future is only about living up to the standards that their stereotype portrays them to be. Even in a magazine as widely-read as TIME, Asians face extreme racism that discourages them from their full potential since it is implied that all they will ever be is a “Whiz Kid.”

The American Drama Series, *Grey's Anatomy*, broadcasted on ABC, portrays the Asian stereotype of model minority with one of its main characters. Cristina Yang, played by the Korean-Canadian actress Sandra Oh, is immediately recognized by having outstanding academic success and a strong work ethic. In the first episode, Cristina confidently reveals her BA from Smith, PHD from Berkeley, and her MD from Stanford, where she had finished first in her class. Using Cristina's accomplishments to introduce her character, automatically allows the audience

to associate her academic success with her Asian background. The show implies that being Asian allows that specific race to have the ability to receive multiple academic achievements from well known institutions.

In the popular television series, *Prison Break*, another portrayal of the model minority is seen through the character Roland Glenn in season four. Glenn is a convict that was busted for building a device that can steal all the information off any electronic device within a close proximity. He was added to a team of other convicts, by the federal government to take down a terrible and powerful group known as the Company. In the operation, he is the smart “tech guy” and knows how to rewire, hack, or outsmart any type of technology. In one of the episodes, he explains to another character that both of his siblings are doctors and that all of them have always had good grades, but he just liked tech. His parents had always pushed them to have successful careers that require a lot of schooling, so he feels like a failure for the life that he lives. This implies that because he and his siblings have an Asian background, they have grown into having successful careers that involved many years of schooling and is the reason that he knows all that he does about technology.

In the television series *Glee*, the model minority stereotype is very obviously portrayed through its two Asian characters, Mike Chang and Tina Cohen-Chang. We can especially see this in episode three of the third season, in which Mike is very stressed out as he tells Tina that he got an “Asian F.” Tina replies with, “You got an A-?” in a very surprised tone. This implies that an A- is the same thing as failing to Asians because they are expected to only get straight A’s. Mike’s parents are very upset by this grade, which follows the stereotype that Asian parents play

a large role in being strict about their children's academic success. Overall, this episode is extremely racist and shows the Model Minority stereotype perfectly.

The stereotype is not only widely portrayed in the media, but is also very relevant in society. Asians are held at much higher standards than other races when applying to college. According to a study conducted by Princeton sociologists, colleges expect that Asians SAT scores be 140 points greater than whites, 270 points greater than Latinos, and 450 points greater than blacks to have an "equal" chance of being selected. This shows that Asians' success is diminished and not celebrated, due to the fact that they are held to these high standards. This can be a problem for those of Asian descent who struggle in school, because their stereotype can prevent them from getting into the colleges they dream to attend (CACF.org).

Not only does this stereotype affect Asians in their college career, but as well as their professional career when applying for jobs. According to a study done by Gundemir, "Asian-Americans didn't serve longer terms as CEOs than whites during a company's struggles, and their tenure (2.8 years) was less than half as long as white CEOs (6 years) during successful periods" (2018, para.8). This information suggests that Asians are more likely to be hired to be the CEO of a company only in its time of failure and let go when the company is back on its feet. This reinforces the stereotype that Asians are only looked at for their intellect, because companies are willing to take advantage of it only in their times of need. In other words, they will hire other races even if they lead the company into failure, but only hire Asians to use them.

The expectation of being smarter than most other races affects more than college acceptance and a professional career, but it also shows to affect the mental health of Asians. In a study mentioned by Nashi, of 174 Asian-Americans, all responded with similar problems that are

the source of their mental health issues: pressure to live up to the Model Minority stereotype, parental pressure to succeed in academics, and discrimination due to racial and cultural backgrounds (n.d, para.5). Living up to the Model Minority stereotype leads Asians to feeling overwhelmed and stressed, which in the long run may lead to even further mental health issues.

The Model Minority stereotype also negatively affects Asians by making them feel as though they are held captive to living up to it. There is an immense amount of pressure for Asian students to get good grades by themselves, and this pressure discourages them from seeking the help that they need. In a study referenced by the APA, it was found that Asian Americans are more likely to seek help from close relationships such as family, friends, or groups for their mental health or academic problems, rather than from a teacher, tutor, or medical professional (Nishi). In an interview with an anonymous female Asian American student by the Journal of Intercultural Studies, she said, “The Model Minority [myth] causes teachers to see us all the same...But we aren’t. It might be a shock to some people but there are real problems among Asian [youth]. But people don’t care...We aren’t all into math and science. Those are my worst subjects...We don’t all want to be doctors when we grow up. We have other interests too.” (Chae, 2004, p. 67). This testimony demonstrates how the stereotype is truly very prevalent within the lives of Asian American students. Although it is not a bad thing to call someone else smart, putting this umbrella over an entire group of people can actually negatively affect them, and pressure them to live up to the assumption. However, this comes with consequences and in this case, many Asian Americans struggle with mental health issues, and feeling as though they should not and cannot ask for help.

After seeing how the Asian race is portrayed in the media, as well as how research has shown that Model Minority stereotype negatively affects Asians with economic, professional, and mental health problems, we set out to conduct research of our own to see if the stereotype was prevalent within our school. We hypothesized that the stereotype would be very prevalent in our school due to how much it is represented in the media and seen throughout the world.

Research Methods

In order to find how our peers reflected the Model Minority stereotype, we conducted two surveys. Our first survey consisted of a list of 29 words, some of which supported the stereotype in question, such as: smart, good at tests, and independent, and some of which did not, such as: dumb, carefree, and troublemaker. It was created in a Google Forms template and sent out to multiple classes within the school for each student to take. They were instructed to select all the words they believed were associated with the average Asian person or family. With the 116 responses we received, it was visually clear how many students believed the stereotype that all Asians are smart and how many did not. Our first 80 responses came directly from Mrs. Hoffman's Reading and Writing for the College Bound classes. The rest of the data was developed through Mrs. McCloskey's first hour accounting class. The results of the survey are shown below in figure four.

In our second survey, we created a Google Forms template with five different people on it, each of different races: American, Asian, Hispanic, African American, and Indian. Each of the people are well known in the math and science fields, and considered very smart. We then proceeded to have the same group of people from the first survey, as well as students from Ms.

Colley's classes, fill out the survey. The question they were to answer was which of the people looks the smartest. The objective of our survey was to see if the picture of an Asian man received the most votes out of the five races, the first image being number one and the last being number five. The pictures of the people in the survey are shown below in figure three, and the results to this survey are shown in figure five.

Figure Three:



Pictures used in the second survey

Results

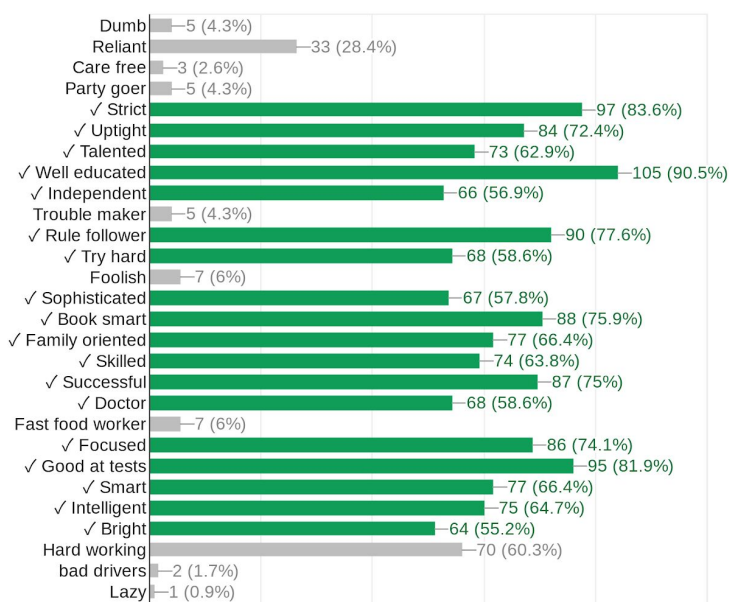
The results found from the first survey, connecting words with the average Asian person or family, showed that the students of South Lyon High School believe that the model minority stereotype is true. As seen in figure four, the words highlighted in green support the model minority stereotype, and are by far the most selected words. Out of 116 responses, 105 people selected well educated as a word that describes the average Asian person and only five people selected dumb. This shows that the great majority of students believe that Asians seek to get a good education, which connects them to being smart. Another large contrast in the findings is that 97 people thought all Asians are strict, while only three people selected carefree to describe the race. This is probably due to the stigma that all Asians feel an immense pressure to be

successful at school, and don't really do anything else, such as hanging out with friends or partying.

Figure Four:

Select all the words that you associate with the average Asian person/family.

0 / 116 correct responses

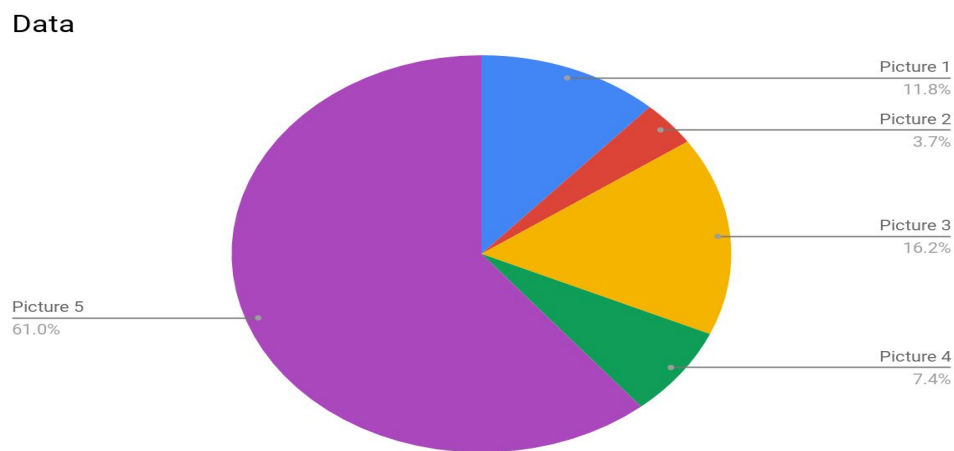


Survey one, selecting words that associate with the average Asian

After viewing our data collected for the second survey, it was clear that the image of the Asian (purple portion of graph five) was selected as the smartest race, more often than any other. As seen in figure five, of the 120 students to participate in our survey, 60.1% or 72 students chose the Asian image, leaving 39.9 percent of the participants choosing all other races. When looking at the graph it is also shown that only 3.7% of the students chose the second image,

being the least selected image, and only 16% selecting the third image, which was the second most image selected. Both of these percentages are drastically far from the 60.1% that chose the Asian image. This shows that an overwhelming amount of the students in South Lyon high School follow the Model Minority stereotype.

Figure Five:



Survey two, choosing the face that looks the smartest

Conclusion

The Model Minority stereotype is portrayed all over the media, having strong influence on beliefs of children and even adults. By allowing the media to follow this stereotype that all Asians are smart, hardworking, and responsible, it allows the stereotype to become prevalent in society. After seeing the results from our experiments, it has shown that students at South Lyon High have developed a stereotype reflecting the one of the Model Minority. These results matter, as they show the need for change in society, in order for this particular race to be seen as equal. Television shows should portray all races as the same when assigning roles in order to stop

influencing the stereotype. When this stereotype stops being so prevalent in the media, we may see a change in people's attitudes in the real world as well. Teachers, professors, and heads of companies would start treating all races intellect as the same as well as everyone else. It must be realized that positive stereotypes can have many negative effects on the people targeted by the stereotype. Asians should not have to feel an immense pressure to live up to other people's generalized ideas about them.

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