



Stereotypes cloud judgment: Why anti-Asian discrimination goes unrecognized at work

RESEARCH BRIEF

New research shows that observers often fail to identify probable instances of anti-Asian discrimination not because they lack concern, but because Asian-Americans are rarely seen as prototypical targets of racism.

Why it matters

- ▶ Asian Americans experience discrimination at work, but that discrimination is often **harder** for others **to notice**. When decision makers do not recognize bias, they are less likely to correct it, which lets discrimination persist.
- ▶ Awareness and reporting systems that depend on observers identifying discrimination may be **less effective** for Asian employees than for other groups.
- ▶ Allyship efforts that **do not explicitly include** Asian Americans are likely to miss a real and persistent workplace problem.

How we know

The researchers conducted **6 studies**. Studies 1&2 examined lay observers' prototypes of racial discrimination targets through *open-ended descriptions* of workplace discrimination incidents and *preregistered trait nomination*. Study 3 tested if observers attributed an identical hiring rejection to discrimination for Asians (vs. Blacks). Study 4 extended the test to multiple Asian subgroups and study 5 examined organizational ally work as a downstream consequence of discrimination. Study 6 analyzed Equal Employment Opportunity Commission discrimination charges by claimant race.

What researchers found

- ▶ Observers were less likely to attribute an instance to racial discrimination when the target was Asian rather than Black.
- ▶ Prototypicality major driver of this difference; lower recognition of discrimination partly driven by a mental picture of a typical victim.
- ▶ The prototype of a discrimination victim was less Asian than Black or White; holds true for East, South, and South East Asians alike.
- ▶ Asian claimants were less likely to receive favorable outcomes, across charge type, employer size, industry, and state.

What this means

- ▶ **For HR leaders and DEI practitioners:** If managers cannot readily recognize discrimination, they are less likely to take corrective action. Systems that rely on observer judgment or complaints alone will undercount anti-Asian discrimination.
- ▶ **For managers and allies:** Support for Asian employees should be built into allyship and reporting practices, not treated as an afterthought.

Now what?

- ▶ **Update** discrimination recognition training to explicitly include Asian-Americans as targets of racial discrimination.
- ▶ **Make sure** training and policy examples include multiple Asian subgroups.
- ▶ **Do not rely** solely on observer reports or bystander intervention systems to surface anti-Asian discrimination. Even professionals with hiring experience were less likely to identify an identical hiring rejection as discriminatory when the candidate was Asian.

LINK TO THE STUDY

