



EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF POWER DYNAMICS ON MULTIRACIAL PERCEPTIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

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The psychology of person perception is crucial to understanding how people interact with others. Those psychological processes are what lead people to be friendly to those that they like, and cold to those they are wary of. Perception is a deeply useful tool in many aspects of our lives, and is worth studying so that we may better understand how it can guide our behavior. One area of person perception that has been growing recently is the study of multiracial person perception, meaning how people perceive individuals who are more than one race. This is an important area to look at due to the changing demographics of the United States, which have shifted to include a large and quickly growing population of multiracial individuals. In this study, we sought to look closer at perceptions of multiracial Asian-White individuals and also examine whether or not these perceptions, which we know can be affected by context, could be affected specifically by power dynamics in the workplace. We expected to see Asian-White individuals rated more like monoracial Asians in the coworker condition (smarter and less dominant), and more like monoracial Whites in the leader condition (warmer and more dominant).

The survey produced for this study was comprised of resumes (containing a picture and text) paired with a section asking participants to rate each candidate in terms of specific traits. These resumes can be viewed in Figure 1. The resumes were both male and female, with a pairing for each racial variable (monoracial White, monoracial Asian, multiracial Asian-White). Each picture and resume text was pretested for equivalency. The trait section involved a scale with descriptors that we later coded into the traits Team player, Trust, Smart, Considerate, and Assertive.

Figure 1: Resumes



Following data collection, we ended up with a sample of $N = 102$. Of the 102, 57.8% were male, 39.2% female, and 2.9% gender nonbinary. Further, 72.5% identified as white, 9.8% black, 6.9% Asian, 5.9% Latinx, 2.0% American Indian or Alaskan native, 2.0% multiracial, 1.0% native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and a majority of participants were between ages 21-29 (88.2% 21-29, 8.8% 18-20, 1% 30-39, 1% 40-49, 1% 50-59, 1% 60+).

Once results were coded and analyzed, we were able to assess that our monoracial Asian and White candidates were indeed viewed stereotypically. The White male was preferred over the Asian male in traits that are more associated with leadership, such as being a team player ($p < 0.01$) and assertiveness ($p < 0.01$), while the Asian male was considered more trustworthy ($p < 0.01$), smart ($p < 0.01$), and considerate ($p < 0.01$). We saw a similar pattern for the female targets, but the Team player trait was the only one with a significant difference ($p < 0.01$).

We were unable to find an interaction effect for the male candidates, but there was one for the female candidates: in the coworker condition, participants rated the Asian female > White female > Asian-White female in terms of assertiveness, ($p < .01$) and in the leader condition, participants rated the Asian-White female > White female > Asian female on assertiveness, ($p < 0.01$). There was also a difference in how the Asian-White male and female were rated in comparison to their monoracial counterparts. The Asian-White male was preferred over the Asian male and White male on all traits, appearing to be a positivity bias in favor of the Asian-White male. Meanwhile, the Asian-White female was stereotyped in between Asian and White targets on being a team player and being considerate. There was only a positivity bias for the AW female for the traits Trust ($p < 0.01$) and Smart ($p < 0.01$), in which she was preferred over the A female and W female.

Our results (finding stereotypical differences in monoracial targets but not for multiracial targets) suggest that Asian-White stereotypes are not the same as either monoracial Asian or monoracial White stereotypes, and that they likely differ in terms of each trait. They also suggest that context is important when studying stereotypes, especially stereotypes of multiracial individuals. For future studies, it is worth noting that the Asian-White male was rated higher than both the Asian male and the White male on all traits, which may have been due to how attractive or likeable the participants considered the Asian-White male to be compared to the other two male candidates. Asking for a rating of attractiveness may be informative were we to replicate the study. Another area that may be worth exploring in future studies is whether or not the power dynamic interaction comes into play with other multiracial make-ups, or if it is specific to Asian, White, and Asian-White women.