

NATIVITY-BASED DISCRIMINATION: THE EXPERIENCE OF ASIAN AMERICANS IN THE WORKPLACE

*Daniel Zhao, Flintridge Preparatory School, 4543 Crown Avenue, La Cañada Flintridge, CA 91011,
24zhaod@flintridgeprep.org*

Lei Lai, California State University, Dominguez Hills, 1000 East Victoria Street, Carson, CA 90747, 310-243-3843, llai@csudh.edu

ABSTRACT

The perpetual foreigner stereotype casts Asian Americans as foreigners and portrays them as un-American regardless of their citizenship status, birthplace, or length of residency. Based on the perpetual foreigner stereotype of Asian Americans, this paper aims to investigate the relationship between nativity, perception of foreignness, and discrimination against Asian Americans. The lack of research on Asian Americans does not imply that workplace discrimination is inconsequential for them, but instead represents a serious gap in the discrimination. This research attempts to narrow the gap by examining perpetual foreignness as a specific stereotype that may uniquely explain discrimination against Asian Americans.

While stereotypes may prompt discriminatory behavior, individuating information that contradicts a stereotype may reduce its negative impact. We hypothesize an interaction of nativity and race on perception of foreignness, such that Asian Americans with unknown U.S.-nativity status are more likely to be viewed as foreign than are Asian Americans who are clearly U.S.-native and Whites regardless of nativity condition.

The perception of foreignness is the intermediate psychological process that directly drives the labor-market discrimination, such that higher foreignness perception leads to negative labor-market outcomes. Being U.S.-educated (vs. foreign-educated) signals a lower level of foreignness which further drives the nativity advantage discussed previously. We hypothesize that perception of foreignness is negatively associated with hireability, such that a job candidate who is perceived as more (vs. less) foreign is less likely to get hired.

We designed two studies to test two sets of hypotheses. Using the 2000 Pilot National Asian American Political Survey data, Study 1 demonstrated that U.S.-born Asian Americans were less likely to report experience of discrimination than were foreign-born Asian Americans in getting jobs and promotions. Using experimental methods, Study 2 showed that Asian Americans that failed to provide explicit information about their nativity were more likely to be perceived as foreign than were U.S.-born Asian Americans and Whites regardless of nativity condition. Further, the perception of foreignness negatively impacted the evaluator's propensity to hire the candidate.

This research contributes to the understanding of underlying mechanisms that attribute to workplace discrimination against Asian Americans. We find that perceived foreignness was another mechanism that may affect Asian Americans negatively in hiring, and Asian Americans themselves also reported differential experiences in getting jobs and promotions by their nativity status. This study also contributes to the understanding of the role that the perpetual foreigner stereotype plays in workplace discrimination on both the target (Asian Americans) and the perceivers (Whites). We find that the harm associated with the perception of foreignness extends beyond the target's

psychological adjustment. In addition, the complementary nature of the two studies is a major strength of this research.

This research has practical implications for both Asian Americans job candidates and organizational recruiters. That is, providing explicit information about their U.S.-nativity status may help Asian American job candidates to fend off perceptions of foreignness and nativity-based discrimination.

Keywords: Asian Americans, discrimination, perpetual foreignness, nativity, workplace