Career and Work Implications of the Model Minority Myth and Other Stereotypes for Asian Americans

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If the calf of a brindled cow has a coat of one colour and grown horns, would the gods of the mountains and rivers deny it even if men have reservations about its suitability?

— The Analects of Confucius, Chapter 6, Verse 4 (Confucius, 400 B.C./1997)

The Model Minority myth encompasses a broad, largely positive stereotype that describes Asian Americans as a perseverant, intelligent, academically and socioeconomically successful people who have built a comfortable and desirable lifestyle in the United States despite their minority status. However, the widespread acceptance of this viewpoint has led to the perception of Asian Americans as robotic, emotionless workers and human beings, subsequently affecting their ability to gain cultural and societal acceptance and achieve upward economic and social mobility. This chapter specifically explores the impact of the Model Minority myth in the workplace and its resulting implications for career development. The description begins with a general discussion of the nature of stereotype development and evaluation, helping to set the stage for a more specific explication of the Model Minority myth and other relevant Asian American stereotypes. The final half of the work discusses the potential consequences of the Model Minority Myth on various processes of normal organizational functioning, including selection, organizational entry and socialization, personnel training, performance appraisal, and mentoring. The chapter closes with a brief discussion of future research questions for the field with the goal of continuing to shed new light on the phenomenon and possible ways in which the Model Minority myth can be overcome in organizations.

In the original sense of the word, a *stereotype* referred to an early method of printing used by publishing companies in which a solid plate of type was pressed onto a piece of paper to form an exact duplicate of the prearranged text. Like many lexical developments in the English language though, the term gradually spread into the common vernacular and was quickly put towards a different use. By 1850, stereotype had come to mean an "image perpetuated without change," and shortly after the turn of the 20th century the term had finally adopted the more familiar, modern denotation as a "preconceived and oversimplified notion of [the] characteristics typical of a person or group" (Harper, 2001). Through all this, though, it still seems quite fitting that the "original" form of the stereotype can trace its origins directly back to the work environment, for it is often in the workplace where the effects of this "new" concept of the stereotype is commonly experienced. The aim of the present chapter is to bring to light some of the less well known stereotypes faced by Asian Americans in their daily experiences, and ultimately to examine the consequences of those stereotypes on the career and work adjustment of the so-called "Model Minority."

Stereotypes—The Nature of the Beast

Before delving any further into the issue at hand, though, it seems pertinent to begin with a brief discussion on how and why stereotypes originate and the common forms they adopt in order to better understand how they operate in society in general and their impact in the workplace. As previously stated, at its most basic level a stereotype is a depiction or belief that attempts to describe a large body of information. Where human beings are the topic of concern, a stereotype is defined as a generalized representation of the physical, psychological, and/or behavioral characteristics of a defined group of people (Stangor, 2000). Although they have taken on a negative connotation as a result of popular discourse, stereotypes are not always the harmful, derogatory, or negative creations they are portrayed to be. In fact, many researchers contend that stereotypes are a natural outcome of an extremely adaptive information processing technique called *social categorization*, a self-occurring cognitive "shortcut" which serves to efficiently organize information about the people we encounter in our long-term memory (Allport, 2000; Stangor, 2000; Stangor & Lange, 1994; Tajfel & Forgas, 2000; Taylor, Friske, Etcoff, & Ruderman, 1978). To better capture the idea of social categorization, consider the act of washing your laundry at the laundromat. Rather than sorting out and washing each and every piece of clothing singularly because of its unique combination of style, shape, fabric, etc., all items similar enough to be washed together (e.g., all dark-color clothes) are grouped into a single larger pile. The clothes, then, are recognized and sorted only on the basis of the differences *between* the groups, with little consideration made to distinguish anything *within* a given pile.

In much the same fashion, social categorization occurs when, rather than considering a single person as a unique *individual* with their own attributes and tendencies, they come to be viewed merely as *members of a larger group*. Thus, information is gathered, opinions are formed, and generalizations are made concerning these collective groups (i.e., establishing the "pile") and

individuals are then simply placed into whichever group deemed most appropriate. By performing this routine, the cognitively demanding task of observing, learning, and encoding into memory the distinctive features of an individual is effectively circumvented by using the characteristics of the "pile" (or, more appropriately, stereotype) as a replacement. By doing so, the amount of information one needs to gather and remember about any single person is minimized, helping to free up room in our cognitive "think tanks" for other uses. All that is required is some base recognition of an individual and how they fit into a preconceived stereotype; after that, a pre-packaged, ready-made representation of the individual is supplied, complete with a full line of physical, attitudinal, and emotional characteristics (Bargh, 1994, 1999).

One final point before moving to the stated topic of this chapter concerns the nature of stereotype appraisal and its relation to group membership. When stereotyping occurs, no cognitive evaluation is necessarily made concerning the characteristics of any specific individual per se; rather, the characteristics that describe a group (i.e., the cognitively constructed representations of the group's attributes) are imbued with these judgments. Subsequently, the evaluated characteristics are transferred to a member of the stereotyped group during the categorization process (Stangor, 2000; Tajfel & Forgas, 2000). To elaborate the process, consider the following overlapping syllogisms outlining the way in which stereotypic characteristics are believed to be appraised:

Minor Premise (1): (I believe) Group Y possesses Characteristic A.
Major Premise (1): I like/dislike Characteristic A.
Conclusion (1): Group Y possesses the liked/disliked Characteristic A.

Minor Premise (2): Individual X is a member of Group Y.
Major Premise (2): Group Y possesses the liked/disliked Characteristic A.
Conclusion (2): Individual X possesses the liked/disliked Characteristic A.

Of note here, *no attribute of the individual is directly appraised at any point*; instead, the connection between the stereotyped characteristic (Characteristic A) and the individual is established *indirectly* on the basis of his/her membership to a particular group. Thus in terms of the argument diagrammed above, Conclusion (2) is only valid if group membership can be equated to group homogeneity in the characteristic of interest—that is, the group must define all characteristics of the individual such that there is no variability across its members AND be such that the correlation between group membership and prevalence of the characteristic is a perfect one-to-one relationship. However, these conditions are typically never met because the denoted group category (e.g., Blacks, Females, the elderly) is simply too broad to support the claim of homogeneity across most stereotyped attributes. Thus the error in assuming that evaluative, stereotypic characteristics at the group level may be attributed to members at the individual level is one of misspecification, which can lead to faulty and incorrect conclusions concerning a "true" evaluation of the individual.

For example, in keeping with the clothing analogy, consider a person who believes that all sweaters are itchy (a characteristic associated with a particular "clothing group") and who dislikes the feeling of itchy clothing (an evaluation of the "clothing characteristic"). It should follow then that if this person were presented with a sweater of which they knew nothing about (an individual member belonging to the "clothing group"), he/she is likely to assume this particular sweater possesses the same undesirable itchiness attributed to all sweaters. Intuitively, the argument follows a rational thought process, perhaps suggesting why stereotypes are so salient and powerful in everyday life (Stangor, 2000). However, if the person had examined the sweater in question more closely, he/she might have found that the sweater was not itchy at all due to its unique fabric, size, cut, etc. But because of the level at which the evaluative appraisal is made (the group), the stereotype is incorrectly propagated down to the individual. This

misspecification error offers one explanation as to why individualization of group members often leads to a decrease in the saliency of a stereotype's validity (Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990).

An often understated point concerning the manner in which stereotypes are appraised is that the attributes describing a single stereotype can be both positive and negative (Allport, 2000). For example, we would likely consider some of the stereotypic traits associated with women (such as being affectionate, gentle and attractive) generally favorable, while certain others (fickle, nagging and fussy) would likely be considered less desirable (Williams & Bennett, 1975). In the many cases where a stereotype possesses both positive and negative characteristics, the determination of whether the group as a whole is viewed positively or negatively is influenced by a great many factors. Though they are far too many and complex to discuss here, such variables include one's overall endorsement of the stereotype (Devine, 1989), the context in which the stereotype is activated (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Steffen, 1984), and the amount of additional information available about the individual group member in question (Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990), among others. In any case, the existence of a stereotype about a particular group does not necessarily equate with a disdainful or disapproving outlook of the targeted group (Allport, 2000)—in fact, as in the case of the Model Minority myth, quite the opposite may be true.

The Model Minority—A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

As Stangor (2000) echoes, many scholars contend that a stereotype would likely not stick around for very long if it did not possess at least some "kernel of truth;" and as though lifted from the very definition of poetic justice, such is also the case concerning the "stereotype" about stereotypes. Despite the arguments made in the preceding section, the common perception of stereotypes as negative portrayals with potentially damaging and harmful consequences is often

true, even when the representation itself possesses no obviously malicious content. This paradoxical set of circumstances is perhaps nowhere better exemplified than by the Model Minority myth, a stereotype which has troubled Asian Americans for well over 100 years.

Though the conceptual basis for Asian American stereotyping in the United States can be traced as far back as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (U.S. National Archives & Records Administration, 2007), the actual labeling of Asian Americans as the Model Minority only dates back to 1966, following an article published by William Petersen in the New York Times Magazine. In the editorial, Petersen praised the hard work and discipline of the Japanese people who had immigrated and built their livelihoods in the United States despite the poor treatment and unrelenting discrimination they faced. As a result of their educational and economic successes (and their avoidance of becoming, as the Times article states, a "problem minority"), Petersen commended the works of their group to the fullest extent: "By any criterion of good citizenship that we choose, the Japanese Americans are better than any other group in our society, including native-born whites" (p. 21). Having thus laid the foundation for their archetypal status, the media, general public, and policy makers alike have since held the strong conviction that Asian Americans indeed epitomize the "spirit of America" (Reagan, 1984), and stand as an exemplar for other immigrant groups to emulate (Le, 2007; Tang, 1997).

But what is it about Asian Americans that has elevated their group to the level of Model Minority and enabled them to hold such a position for so long? Undoubtedly, the most convincing and frequently cited evidence for the claim lies in the statistics used to depict socioeconomic health (Tang, 1997). For example, according to data obtained from the 2000 U.S. Census, Asian Americans were tops among the five major ethnic groups (Whites, Blacks, Hispanic/Latinos, and Native Americans) in many socioeconomic achievement indicators, including rate of college degree attainment (42.9%), advanced degree attainment (6.5%),

percentage of population in the labor force (65.3%), percentage holding a high skill occupation (34.6%), median socioeconomic index score (49.0), and median family income ($59,000) (Le, 2007). In addition, the Asian American population tends to exhibit low rates of juvenile delinquency, criminal activity, and divorce (Sue, Sue, Sue, & Takeuchi, 1995). Taken together, these numbers paint the picture of a successful, high-achieving people who are well adjusted and integrated into American industry, culture and society.

It would seem the case, then, that the Model Minority thesis concerning Asian Americans is largely an encouraging and optimistic representation, highlighting a comfortable and desirable lifestyle earned through perseverance and economic and educational accomplishment. However, harkening back to the argument presented at the beginning of this section, even a positive stereotype may mask very negative consequences, and the Model Minority representation is no exception. For example, as a result of their achievements and perception as hard-working students and industrious workers, Asian Americans have been imbued with an almost infallible, "robotic" quality—they can do anything they set their mind to with little or no guidance, do not feel the emotional strains of everyday life, and do not need the kind of help an average person would to reach a high level of performance (Brand, 1987; Lee, 1996; Media Action Network for Asian Americans, n.d.). Because of these expectations, many Asian Americans are unfairly held to unrealistic standards of performance set for them by teachers, peers, employers, etc. Under such extreme pressure to achieve these goals, the Asian American community tends to display a larger than expected prevalence of mental health problems. The situation is doubly compounded by the fact that, in attempting to fulfill the model stereotype, Asian Americans often do not seek treatment for these disorders for fear of appearing weak and unable to meet the high expectations bestowed upon them. Furthermore, such services are seldom explicitly offered or extended to the

Asian community because they are thought to be unnecessary (Smedley, Stith & Nelson, 2002; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

The stereotype of the efficient, hard-working, and productive Asian American has even had a lasting impact on the one place where such qualities are typically desired—the workplace. The same pride and skill which many Asian cultures tend to place on educational endeavors is often translated into performance on the job as well (Elmasry, 2005). Consequently, Asian Americans are often perceived as valuable employees because of their dedication, productivity, and ability to perform well on many different tasks (Xin, 1997). In addition to creating yet another set of unfair performance demands, these characteristics can often result in backlash from co-workers who feel intimidated by the purported work ethic and ingenuity of their Asian American counterparts. Even as early as the late 19th century the Asian people were regarded as threats to the livelihoods of White, European Americans in the workforce. As implied by the

Figure 1. A late 19th century political cartoon depicts the "threat" of the Asian American worker

cartoon in Figure 1 entitled “What shall we do with our boys?,” the mythos surrounding the Asian ability to work faster, more efficiently, and with a near “supernatural quality” unjustly portrays Asian Americans as inhuman, greedy, job-stealing employees with the capability to make other workers obsolete (Lee, 1996; Media Action Network for Asian Americans, n.d.). The resentment generated by stereotypes of the Asian American employee has resulted in a great many damaging consequences, ranging from subtle forms of discrimination and obstacles to career advancement (Xin, 1997) to outright acts of prejudice and, in some cases, violence (Yip, 1997).

It is clear, then, that the Model Minority image has a profound impact on many aspects of Asian American life, an impact often significantly more detrimental than anticipated. Despite its benign outward appearance, even this “positive” stereotype suffers from the same problem as its more “negative” counterparts—through the process of categorization, the uniqueness of the individual is lost among the perception of the collective. Just as no two females, doctors, or pieces of laundry share the exact same characteristics, not all Asian Americans exhibit the qualities embodied by the Model Minority stereotype. However, as long as the perception exists, the Asian American population will continue to be cast as the stoic, overachieving, hypercompetitive, and emotionally stunted rendition of the “greatest” American success story of our time—for better or for worse (Lee, 1996).

Beyond the Model Minority—More than Meets the Eye

Perhaps one of the most intriguing and complex aspects of stereotypes (and what makes them so difficult to accurately study) is the constantly evolving, dynamic interplay that exists between the traits and qualities contained within our self-constructed social categories. In this sense, most scholars perceive stereotypes as a type of cognitive *schemata*, a web of interrelated characteristics that describe an associated representation (Stangor, 2000). Thus, though certainly

one of the most far-reaching, the label of Model Minority is only one of the many sets of traits that exist within the stereotype for Asian Americans; others include "genius," "uninterested in fun," "submissive" and "poor or non-English speaking," just to name a few (Lee, 1996). While smaller in scope and less pervasive, these additional attributes can result in circumstances as equally troubling as those created by the Model Minority perception.

Of these traits, two in particular have the potential to make a substantial impact in the job environment and would thus benefit from a brief discussion in light of the present chapter's topic. The first concept centers on the issue of *ethnic gloss,* or the overgeneralization of large ethnocultural groups (such as Native Americans, Hispanics and Asian Americans) such that the unique differences that exist among various subgroups are ignored; simply put, ethnic gloss "presents the illusion of homogeneity where none exists" (Trimble & Dickson, 2005). Ethnic gloss can also be considered an extreme form of social categorization, in which the categorizing of individuals is so broad that the classifications can only be used to distinguish one group from another. Ronald Takaki (1998) describes this phenomenon quite poignantly in his book *Strangers from a Different Shore*: "There are no Asians in Asia, only people with national identities, such as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indian, Vietnamese, and Filipino. But on this side of the Pacific, there are Asian Americans" (p.502).

Without question, the Asian population is one of the most ethnically, culturally, and industrially diverse groups on the planet, ranging from fast-paced, high-tech metropolis dwellers to tradition-based villagers of subsistence living. Nevertheless, much of the statistical information gathered on Asians living in the United States is scooped straight from the "Asian American melting pot" described by Takaki; it is even from this collective that much of the supporting evidence for the Model Minority image is gleaned. However, once the effects of ethnic gloss are removed and the various Asian nationalities living in America are dissected, the

portrait of Asian American "success" is much less convincing (Tang, 1997). As one small example, the rate of college degree attainment for Korean, Japanese, and Indian Americans is nearly twice that of Vietnamese Americans and almost four to five times greater than the rates for Laotians, Cambodians and Khmer. In addition, in certain parts of the country, upwards of 40% of Southeast Asian immigrants require government assistance to sustain their households (Le, 2007)

Even through just these few insights, there appears to be substantial evidence of a bimodal distribution of Asian American success in the United States—the first group being the high income, highly educated, "Model Minority" Asians (e.g., Korean, Chinese, Japanese and Indian Americans) and the second, comparatively less successful Southeast Asian groups. When the achievements of these two distinct "peoples" are aggregated, the averaging effect it produces places the socioeconomic status of the Asian American population on par with the larger White, European American populations, an exaggerated claim in the case of many Asian immigrants. Ethnic glossing, then, provides the means through which the Model Minority image can continue to thrive—and the method through which the severely discriminated and disadvantaged Asian American populations may be overlooked and ignored. As Le (2007) points out, "Just because many Asian Americans have 'made it,' it does not mean that *all* Asian Americans have made it."

The final trait of the Asian American stereotype, though likely a direct outcome of one of the most hardwired characteristics of human nature, is nonetheless one of the most common causes of prejudice and discrimination directed towards Asian Americans (Yip, 1997). Despite having many generations of family members born and raised in the United States, no other people has been quite as commonly, or fervently, labeled as foreigners than Asian Americans. Owing to this "second-class" status, many Asian Americans often find it difficult to gain acceptance from the significantly larger non-Asian population in the United States and thus

never fully adjust and assimilate to American culture. Though certainly not the only cause, such treatment has the potential to result in fewer opportunities for social networking, career development, and achieving positions of political significance (Takaki, 1998). Exacerbating the issue is the fact that, unlike many immigrants from Europe, Asian Americans are *visually* distinct from the majority of White Americans. Many of the stereotypes associated with the Asian appearance, such as being slant-eyed, short, and "yellow," instantly distinguish them as Asian, rather than American (Chin, 2001; Lee, 1996). Thus, Asian Americans are not even afforded the opportunity to simply "blend in with the crowd" in order to avoid their foreigner status.

Much of the troubles that arise from this visual discrimination are similar to the processes observed during in-group/out-group interactions. As any introductory psychology textbook is likely to mention, the power and influence of in-group versus out-group distinctions drives much of human behavior to a significant degree. Though more complicated than described here, in short, individuals actively strive to become members of social groups they admire and wish to be a part of, typically by behaving positively towards their "in-group" and negatively towards other "out-groups" (Myers, 2005). In this sense, a visually distinctive foreigner is the "ultimate" of all out-group members—not only do they not resemble members of the majority, they do not even fall in the same social category. With few other options to turn to, Asian Americans often form extremely tight-knit communities with members of their own ethnicity, further solidifying their status as non-integrated Americans. Thus, even American-born individuals of Asian heritage who do not relate strongly to Asian culture are displaced from the White majority and face the same discriminations and prejudices as Asian-born immigrants (Le, 2007; Petersen, 1966; Takaki, 1998).

Impact of Stereotypes on Asian Americans in the Workplace

In discussing the career and work implications of the model minority myth and other stereotypes on Asian Americans, we would like to highlight the impact of these stereotypes within several major organizational functions and processes within organizations. Whether the primary mission of an organization is to produce a product or provide a service, it requires personnel to do the work and hence the first organizational function is that of **selection**. As these selected personnel undertake the process of **organizational entry**, **socialization** occurs in terms of the cultural learning of the official polices and procedures as well as the informal norms and practices. Typically, organizations will also provide some form of on-the-job **personnel training** as well as on-going professional development activities. To evaluate employee performance and identify individuals for promotion and increase responsibility, organizations use **performance appraisal systems**. The results of these evaluations will in turn influence the career advancement and job satisfaction/job turnover of the employees. Finally, **mentoring** has been found to be a significant factor in the work adjustment and career advancement of employees in organizations.

Selection

Selection is the process by which employers combine sets of predictors or tests to make hiring decisions (Levy, 2006). The selection process generally begins with a job analysis, in which the primary work tasks, organizational environment, and the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) necessary to perform the job are identified. One or more assessment tools (i.e., interview, ability test, work sample, etc.) are then developed and validated to measure the previously identified job-specific KSAs. Finally, criteria and/or cutoff scores are established and applicants are screened for the position based on their predicted work performance as measured by the selection battery (Levy, 2006).

It should be noted that most organizational researchers think of selection as selection for entry into an organization. However, there is really a primary and secondary selection process which occurs. Primary selection is selection for entry into an organization. Secondary selection occurs after organizational entry and usually involves selection for special or management training or fast track career paths. In general, given the model minority myth and Asian Americans high performance in objectives tests (such as SAT, ACT, GRE, GMAT, LSAT), primary selection does not appear to be a problem. Actually, Asian Americans have been highly successful in gaining entries into our top universities and colleges given their academic achievements. Many of the universities in California have over 25% enrollment of Asian Americans. Indeed, a backlash actually occurred at the University of California at Berkeley when concern for the "excessive numbers" of Asian Americans getting into this prestigious university prompted some administrators to try to adjust the test scores (i.e., raising the SAT Verbal Score where Asian Americans are known to score lower) in order to control how many Asian Americans were getting admitted. A similar pattern of Asian Americans' successes in getting selected into medical schools or doctoral programs have been found. This level of success among Asian Americans in getting selected actually led to the National Science Foundation as well as the Ford Foundation to designate Asian Americans as NOT one of the under-represented ethnic minorities that should receive special funding reserved for other ethnic minorities (see also, Leong & Serafica, 1995; Wu, 1997).

It is in the secondary selection process where Asian Americans have experienced the negative impacts of stereotypes. For many years, the first author of this chapter conducted diversity training within organizations and found in his conversations with Asian Americans that there was a pervasive pattern of by-passing qualified Asian Americans in these secondary selections. Whether the secondary selection is for management training or some special

assignment, many of these Asian American perceived that they were overlooked because they did not have the "right stuff" and this usually translated into lacking the linguistic and cultural competence to be a good leader or good manager. Studies examining managerial positions have identified that the requisite characteristics of a good manager or good leader are those traits synonymous to being male. For Asian Americans, it seems that the corollary is that requisite characteristics of a good manager or good leader are those traits synonymous to being a **White European** male. The stereotype of the Asian Americans as quiet, reserved, and unassertive certainly contributes to this bias in the secondary selection process. When many of the Asian Americans confronted their supervisors for being overlooked, they were usually told that they excelled in the technical side of the work but really do not have the necessary skills to be good managers or leaders. Sometimes these supervisors added insult to injury by pointing out that since the Asian American workers had been quiet and undemanding, they assumed that the workers were quite satisfied and did not have any aspirations to move up in the organizations even when these workers had the same or higher levels of experience and qualifications than those who were chosen in the secondary selection.

Schneider's (1987) Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) model provides a useful framework with which to understand the impact of stereotypes on the secondary selection process with Asian Americans. According to Schneider (1987) organizations develop a particular culture or climate because they undergo a process he labeled as the ASA cycle. Through the processes of attraction (who chooses to join the organization), selection (who is admitted into the organization), and attrition (who chooses to leave the organization), organizations eventually develop a very distinctive character. Through the ASA cycle, organizations also become very homogenous and resistant to change, which Schneider considers dysfunctional.

According to Schneider (1987), the ASA cycle is how organizational climates and cultures develop and also accounts for the difficulty in organizational change. He has provided more evidence supporting the ASA cycle in organizations in a more recent update (Schneider, Goldstein & Smith, 1995). For instance, in their review of relevant studies, there is evidence to suggest that organizations define the characteristics of people who enter it, which provide strong support for the homogeneity hypothesis. There are several social psychological processes that support the development and maintenance of the ASA cycle. The first component of ASA, that creates this tendency towards homogeneity and resistance to change in organizations, is the "group-think" phenomenon described by Janis (1972). Another important component supporting the ASA cycle is Byrne's (1971) similarity-attraction model. According to this model, we are more likely to like and be attracted to individuals who are similar to us in attitudes, beliefs, and values than those who are dissimilar.

Whereas the objective nature of the process as well as legal safeguards in place minimize the role of stereotypes in the primary selection process into an organization, the more subjective and informal aspects of secondary selection provide room for the ASA cycle to work. As described by Schneider, it is therefore not surprising that managers, through the ASA cycle, select individuals for management training or fast track career paths who are similar to themselves and tend not to select those who are either demographically or culturally dissimilar. More specifically, there is evidence from the educational arena to suggest that the expectations for success that individuals in positions of authority hold for those under their influence may be closely tied to perceived cultural barriers (cf. Tom & Cooper, 1984). For example, Morishima (1981) cites that as a result of acculturative differences, Asian Americans can often be less verbally assertive, more uncomfortable with common American business customs (i.e., greeting a customer/client with direct eye contact and a firm handshake, etc.), and unfamiliar with

colloquial Western expressions. In turn, employers who believe that an Asian American who exhibits these cultural tendencies can not be successful in the Western corporate world would be less likely to select that person for higher level positions where such qualities are seen as important, regardless of their previous performance records.

Occasionally, someone who is demographically dissimilar is selected through this secondary process but through the attrition process (lack of fit or lack of acceptance by the peer group), they often end up not completing or feeling dissatisfied with the management training and development program. For example, some researchers have theorized and found evidence to suggest that minority members' (including Asian Americans) level of acculturation is predictive of their perceptions of upward career mobility, such that those individuals who are better accustomed to the dominant culture are more likely to believe they will attain prominent organizational positions and achieve higher levels of success in their career (Daley, 1998; Sherman, Smith & Sherman, 1983; Thatchenkery & Cheng, 1997). This implies then, that Asian Americans who do receive and benefit from special management training are only those who have adopted more European-American beliefs and attitudes. Based on firsthand experience in training workshops conducted by the first author, it does appear to be the case that highly acculturated Asian Americans (those with most Western-oriented value systems and most similar to the dominant in-group) are more often selected for these special training programs or opportunities than their less acculturated counterparts. Interestingly, some of the less acculturated Asian American have actually lamented that "it is unfair that they have to give up their Asianness in order to get ahead in corporate America."

Organizational Entry and Socialization

Upon entering an organization, a new employee is subjected to a socialization process which is defined as "the process by which an individual acquires the attitudes, behavior, and knowledge needed to participate as an organizational member (Levy, 2006, p. 235)." Socialization into the workplace may occur through more formal and structured organizational methods or as a result of less standardized processes. For example, companies may provide human resource-sponsored employee orientation meetings and offer policy workshops, while co-workers might hold social gatherings for the new employees and give guided tours of the organizational facilities and operations. Socialization and entry into the workplace is a very important transition period for employees, as impressions of the organizational culture are formed, the written and "unwritten" rules of the work environment are learned, and the procedures and expectations for work performance are established (Levy, 2006).

Once again, it is important to distinguish between formal and informal socialization processes. The former is more structured and governed by official human resources department policies and therefore less subject to biases, prejudices, and discrimination. Informal socialization processes, on the other hand, are less structured and more subjective. It is driven by personal attitudes, values, and preferences and therefore more open to biases, prejudices, and discrimination. It consists of things like who asks whom to lunch, to gets invited to play golf on weekends, and who hangs out with whom at the company picnics. At the same time, racial and ethnic minority employees may also have a need to spend time together for social support and reaffirm each other's cultural identity. For example, Beverly Tatum (2002), in her book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* described this process in the school system and the naturally occurring affinity groups. These affinity groups also exist in the workplace and

they sometimes add to the stereotypes that these persons of color do not want to be included in the interactions that make up informal socialization practices.

These stereotypes, whether they arise from the majority group's personal backgrounds or are stimulated by the affinity groups, create cultural distances and gaps between majority and Asian American workers. This in turn leads to uneven informal socialization of Asian Americans in the workplace. Being excluded from these informal networks where socialization occurs costs Asian American in terms of social capital and often leads to social isolation which also increases the movement towards one's affinity groups. To counter the stereotypes that often lead to the social exclusion and lack of socialization, Asian Americans are often faced with the unpleasant choice of conforming culturally and acting more like the dominant group. For recent Asian immigrant workers, the added dimension of xenophobia among the majority workers and supervisors adds further to this process of social exclusion and isolation within the workplace. Finally, these socialization failures of Asian Americans has costs not only for the individual workers but also for the organization in terms of uneven social integration and socialization of its workforce in the form of work stress, underemployment, and turnover (see also Leong &.Serafica, 1995; Wu, 1997).

Friedman and Krackhardt (1997) attempted to capture one aspect of the reduced socialization faced by Asian Americans by examining differences between Asians and non-Asians' ability to convert educational attainment into social capital (defined as the standing an individual maintains in a social network and their ability to draw on that reputation to influence others in the network) in the workplace. The authors posit that one of the primary methods of developing more social capital is to achieve higher levels of education. In relation to the workplace, greater education translates into the individual having more resources available to them that other co-workers do not have but may need to successfully complete their job—this, in

turn, makes the educated individual important within the social framework. Differences in social capital between Asians and non-Asian of the same education level, then, might indicate that something else is occurring in the organization that prevents the educated individual from becoming involved or socialized into the network, such as discrimination, bias or some other form of social exclusion.

To examine this hypothesis, Friedman and Krackhardt (1997) conducted a series of network analyses in the computer services division of a large U.S. investment bank. Network analysis is a methodological technique that allows researchers to assess how and to whom individuals communicate and share information with. The researchers asked a total of 61 individuals (25 of which were Asian) across five different work teams to indicate from whom in their workplace they sought advice about work-related matters (advice centrality) and feedback concerning their personal work performance (feedback centrality). By comparing differences in the frequency with which an individual was indicated as a contact point for these relatively personal and confidential pieces of information, the authors were able to assess differences in social capital returns as a result of race and education level and determine one's level of involvement in the organization. In line with the logic of social capital theory, the results of their analyses indicated that higher education levels predicted greater advice and feedback centrality for European Americans in this organization. However, for Chinese workers, higher levels of education were associated with *lower* levels of advice and feedback centrality, thus indicating that better educated Chinese were more socially isolated from their co-workers relative to these matters of social import. This finding is particularly striking in the context of the Model Minority myth, as it provides yet another example of how a seemingly positive achievement for Asian Americans (higher education attainment) can result in unexpected negative consequence (diminished socialization).

Personnel Training and Development

Personnel training is multi-million dollar undertaking for organizations in order to ensure effective work performance among its workers. According Levy (2006), training consists of "the formal procedures that a company utilizes to facilitate learning so that the resultant behavior contributes to the attainment of the company's goals and objectives" (p. 216). The training process generally begins with a formal assessment of training and development needs, which may include analyses of the organization, specific job tasks, and the trainee. Prior to the delivery of training, the learning context is established by organizing the overall goals and procedures of the training program to ensure maximum transfer of training. Finally, employees are guided through the training program, evaluated, and offered feedback on their strengths and weaknesses. Career advancement in the organization depends on the worker's successful completion of training and development activities as represented in effective job performance after the completion of training.

Whether one is being trained to be an insurance salesperson or a bank manager, there is the task aspect of the job and the interpersonal aspect. It is in the interpersonal aspect that stereotypes of Asian Americans are more likely to have an impact on training and development activities. Most training programs tend to be based on learning theory and behavioral principles that operate within a "uniformity myth" paradigm where workers are all assumed to be the same. Cultural differences in communication and interpersonal styles tend to be ignored or misunderstood. When Asian Americans undergo training, their cultural differences in the interpersonal aspects of their job tend to be stereotyped as ineffective or problematic since it is the dominant group's interpersonal style which is used as the frame of reference. Often Asian Americans undergoing training are evaluated as performing well on the task aspects but not the interpersonal aspects of the job. For example, at a large mid-western university with a significant

group of Asian Americans in medical school, students were evaluated as performing extremely well during their first year of training (where rote memorization and book learning related to anatomy and biochemistry was essential). Interestingly enough, as soon as this group embarked on their second year rotations (in the hospital wards and clinics), their performance ratings deteriorated significantly because they were now being evaluated primarily on the interpersonal aspects of their jobs (i.e., "bedside manner" or interpersonal relations with patients and with co-workers) (see also, Leong & Serafica, 1995; Wu, 1997).

Essentially, the negative impact of personnel training and development for Asian Americans arises from the fact that they do not fit the prototype of the interpersonally aggressive, confident, and socially poised worker that derives from the stereotype of the White European American male. When compared with such a stereotype, the performances of Asian Americans tend not meet the established criterion, which is often culturally skewed. The stereotypes that White European Americans hold about Asian Americans often contribute to this skewness in criteria. There is some evidence of this skewness in terms of occupational stereotypes of Asian Americans.

Leong and Hayes (1990) empirically evaluated occupational stereotypes that White Americans held about Asian Americans. White participants were presented with the identical biography of a job applicant that varied only in race (White versus Asian) and gender (Male versus Female) and were asked to evaluate how qualified he or she is for certain occupations along three dimensions: (a) probability of success, (b) qualifications of training, and (c) acceptance by others. They found both positive and negative stereotypes with regard to gender and race groupings. In fact, the study found that Asian Americans were stereotyped as less likely to succeed as insurance sale persons. However, on the opposite end, Asians were stereotyped to be more likely to succeed as engineers, computer scientists and mathematicians.

A similar study conducted by King, Madera, Hebl, Knight & Mendoza (2006) asked White male participants to read a fictitious résumé, provide an overall evaluation of the applicant, and judge the person's suitability for 12 different jobs that varied in prestige and societal status. To examine whether occupational stereotypes influenced these ratings, the fictitious applicants were given ethnically stereotypic names to indicate they were Asian, Black, Hispanic or White. Results of the study found that Asian Americans were rated as most suitable for high-status jobs (e.g., chemist, physician, architect, engineer, computer programmer, judge and pilot), and were rated as equally poorly suited for low-status jobs (e.g., custodian, kitchen staff worker, construction worker, public transportation employee, and repairman) as Whites. Furthermore, mediation analyses indicated that these occupational stereotypes of Asians accounted almost entirely for the observed relationship between race and overall applicant evaluation.

Taken together, the findings from Leong and Hayes (1990) and King et al. (2006) suggest that White Americans do indeed hold occupational stereotypes about Asians, and these stereotypes can influence which occupations Whites believe Asians are likely to succeed at. These results are particularly important to decisions regarding personnel training and development. As stated earlier, the expectations for success that managers hold for their employees may significantly impact their willingness to invest time and resources to train employees whom they do not believe will be successful. Thus, future research is needed to assess how widespread the impact of occupational stereotypes is on Asian Americans' career development and how severe the associated occupational and psychological consequences they leave behind can be.

Performance Appraisal

Upon completion of training, workers are then expected to undertake their job responsibilities fully with periodic evaluations of their performance for reward and promotions,

or retraining and dismissal. According to Levy (2006), performance appraisal is "the systematic review and evaluation of employees' job performance, as well as the provision of feedback to the employees" (p. 113). Performance appraisals have many important uses, but three of the most significant are (p. 114):

1. *Making important personnel decisions*. Information from the performance appraisal is often used to determine employee promotions, demotions or firings, employee benefits and salaries, reassignment of workers to new departments, or the opportunity/need for advanced or remedial training.
2. *Developmental purposes*. Evaluations from the performance appraisal are often used to communicate an employee's strengths and weaknesses in order to help employees focus their efforts on areas that need improvement.
3. *Documentation/Organizational purposes*. Maintaining standardized records of employee performance appraisals affords organizations the ability to carefully track and justify their business decisions concerning company personnel (i.e., promotions, firings, etc.).

Performance appraisal has significant consequences for workers since they serve as the basis for pay raises and promotions as well as other rewards (e.g., being selected for special assignments). However, there is also considerable subjectivity to this evaluative activity such that cultural biases can enter into the process. As mentioned above, the judgments regarding the interpersonal aspects of workers' performance either in training or in actual job duties can be skewed towards the majority cultural group such that racial and ethnic minority groups' performance are viewed as either deficient or suboptimal.

Leong (2001) in his study of the impact of acculturation on performance appraisal ratings found indirect evidence of these cultural biases. In this study which examined the role of acculturation on Asian American workers in terms of job stress and job satisfaction, Leong (2001)

also obtained supervisors' performance ratings of the workers. Interestingly, he found a significant positive correlation between the Asian American workers' level of acculturation and the performance appraisal ratings from their supervisors. Theoretically, there should not be a significant correlation between acculturation level and performance ratings. In other words, there is no reason to expect that highly acculturated Asian Americans (i.e., more Western oriented) perform better at their job than those who are low on acculturation (i.e., more traditional and Asian oriented). Incidentally, the measure of acculturation used in the current study categorizes Asian Americans as highly acculturated if they consistently select Western (versus Asian) preferences in language, food, music, and friendships. To the extent that acculturation levels reflect variations in cultural attitudes, value orientations and lifestyle preferences, they should not have an impact at work much in the same way that a worker's religion and political affiliation should not have an impact on his or her job performance ratings. This positive relationship between acculturation level of Asian Americans and performance ratings is akin to Protestant workers receiving higher performance ratings than Catholic workers. Similarly, one would not expect to find Republican workers systematically receiving higher performance ratings than Democrats in any business organization.

As Leong and Chou (1994) had predicted in their formulation, acculturation seems to be related to stereotyping and discrimination with high acculturation Asian American workers perceived as better workers. The data from Leong (2001) support the Leong and Chou (1994) formulations and suggest that stereotyping does occur in relation to acculturation levels such that higher acculturation Asian Americans are rated as better workers and probably also viewed as better prospects for promotions and leadership positions. Hence, there appears to be a cultural similarity bias operating in the workplace not only in terms of secondary selection, socialization and training but also in terms of performance appraisal.

Mentoring

Mentoring has been defined as "the process whereby individuals with advanced experience and knowledge provide support and guidance to their protégés, who are junior organizational members, in order to help them advance their careers (Kram, 1985). Research has demonstrated that mentoring is an important element in the career development of workers in organizations (Kram, 1986). Yet, research has found that there are barriers to cross-racial and cross-ethnic mentoring. In one survey, Smith and Davidson (1992) found that one-third of African American graduate students reported that they had not received mentoring support or guidance in their programs. Indeed, Hill, Castillo, Ngu, and Pepion (1999) observed that some national surveys have documented that this declining trend in ethnic minority graduate student enrollment may be related to limited opportunities for these culturally diverse students to develop meaningful relationships with training faculty and staff (Kohut & Pion, 1990, cited in Hill et al., 1999).

Cultural barriers to effective mentoring for racial and ethnic minority workers can arise from the differences in attitudes, values, and beliefs when the mentor and protégé are from different cultural backgrounds. These differences can often lead to cultural miscommunication and cultural conflicts in cross-ethnic mentoring dyads. Some of the barriers can arise from stereotyping and prejudice when mentors hold racist or ethnocentric attitudes and beliefs. One common stereotype that negatively impact mentoring results from White American mentor's rigid adherence to an individualistic value orientation where assertiveness, autonomy, and self-reliance is highly prized and either explicitly or implicitly denigrates the collectivistic orientation of the Asian American protégé . Such stereotypes, when operative in the mentoring relationship, can often produce social isolation and alienation among the Asian American protégé (see also, Leong & Serafica, 1995; Wu, 1997).

The literature on the mentoring of Asian Americans is extremely limited. Goto (1999) in her chapter on mentoring among Asian Americans made the following observation “If there has been little attention to the mentoring needs of Asian Americans, there has been even less attention to the contributions that Asian Americans might make as mentors or sponsors to others”. In one of only a few empirical studies on Asian Americans, Kim and Goto (2001) examined predictors of Asian American first-year college students' intention to participate in a culturally congruent mentoring program. They found that the students intention to participate was predicted by their belief that participation eases transition to college and also that the program will strengthen their ethnic identity and combat model-minority myth. It appears that mentoring for Asian Americans need to address the issue of their cultural identity and assist them in countering the model minority myth and other stereotypes as postulated by Leong and Chou (1994).

On the other hand, research across racial and ethnic groups have found that there is an ethnic similarity effect in mentoring. Everything else being equal, racial and ethnic minority faculty and professionals prefer to be mentored by someone from their own race or ethnicity (Gonzalez-Figueroa & Young, 2005; Thomas, 2001). Additionally, Johnson and Huwe (2002), in their discussion of mentorship dysfunction highlighted an interesting finding by Thomas (1993, cited in Johnson & Huwe, 2002). Specifically, Thomas found that racial differences in cross-gender dyads were handled either directly or via suppression and denial. Surprisingly, the most productive and functional mentoring dyads were those in which the mentor and protégé shared preferences for the same strategy for handling racial differences and not the strategy per se. Thus, it appears that congruence in racial attitudes and orientations are quite important in maintaining a productive mentoring relationship. Mentoring based on the stereotypes, on the other hand, are likely to produce dysfunctional mentorship as defined by Johnson and Huwe (2002) (see also, Leong & Serafica, 1995; Wu, 1997).

Summary

In discussing the career and work implications of the model minority myth and other stereotypes for Asian Americans, we have sought only to describe the nature of the problems rather than to offer premature solutions. The chapter began with a description of the Model Minority myth and other stereotypes for Asian Americans and followed with a delineation of the impact of these stereotypes on Asian Americans in relation to major organizational functions and processes such as selection, organizational socialization, training, performance appraisal and mentoring. As the opening quotation from Confucius alludes to, the integration of Asian Americans into American culture and industry has been a slow or at times stagnant process owing to the biases and unfair expectations they have faced; however, the unfortunate Catch-22 presented to Asian Americans is that the stereotypes that help sustain these discriminative practices are generally positive, desirable qualities touted as beneficial by the popular majority. Thus the existence of the Model Minority myth has left the Asian American people in a position such that no matter which path they choose to attempt to reach societal or economic success, they are faced with a constant uphill struggle.

Given the dearth of empirical research (Leong, 1991; Leong & Gupta, 2006), we hope that the description of the relationships between these stereotypes and their potential impact for Asian Americans in the workplace will stimulate further research. One potentially fruitful line of research concerns exploring ways in which organizations might adopt practices that "personalize" Asian American workers to other organization members, thus lessening the saliency of the Model Minority stereotype (Stangor, 2000; Tajfel & Forgas, 2000). Diversity and cultural sensitivity training, team building, and experiential learning all offer possible mechanisms through which organizations might begin to shape both Asian Americans' and other organization members' perceptions of ethnic equality and common goal striving. Though these

ideas represent only minor steps towards better understanding and working towards overcoming the influence of racial and ethnic stereotypes in the workplace, their study and implications holds significant promise for overcoming the lingering problems of bias and discrimination that continue to face Asian Americans.

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