

How Name-Based Discrimination Affect Minority Groups

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Abstract. According to Pikhart, people with Chinese ethnicity usually use English names while living and studying in North America to foster connections and relatedness to the local culture, to help them integrate faster into mainstream society. This study aims to investigate whether name-based microaggression and name-based group-specific stereotypes towards the Asian population are rooted in North American culture. In a research done by Arai, Bursell, and Nekby in 2008, researchers compared employer's attitudes towards CVs of equal observable quality between Arabic names and Swedish names in Sweden, it was found that Arabic men suffered most from name-based discrimination by receiving fewer interview offers, the results of employers' subconscious decision-making show that implicit name-based microaggression is a serious problem that deprives competent individuals of having the equal opportunities they deserve. In order to address this problem, interventions from different aspects can undermine it, whether in the workplace, at school, or in renting market. It is crucial for organizations such as schools, companies, and government to implement measures to enhance people's awareness of name-based discrimination.

Keywords: Discrimination; stereotype; minority; name.

1. Introduction

Name is usually the first thing people introduce to each other when they first meet. The power of a name should not be underestimated, it allows people to make immediate judgments and assumptions about others. Names may activate various social category information: they could reveal a person's race, gender, age, social class, etc., which could also give rise to name-based stereotyping and discrimination [1].

In recent decades, a growing number of Chinese students are choosing to study abroad for higher education, especially in developed Anglophone countries such as Canada and the United States. An unusual phenomenon occurs upon Chinese students' arrival on campus: they usually use self-assigned English names as their preferred nicknames. Several reasons have been suggested for this adoption of English names. According to one study, the adoption of English names grants them mobility from the Eastern world to the Western communities. Thus having two names facilitates their transition between two cultures [2]. Another significant reason is that an English name is a convenient tool for smoother communication in a predominantly White multicultural society. English names enable ethnic minorities such as Chinese to better integrate into the local culture. Aside from a positive perspective, Chinese students often adopt English names to avoid name-based discrimination. This paper proposes to investigate how ethnic names influence North Americans' perception of Asian minorities as name-based discrimination is embedded in North American culture and it also activates group-specific stereotypes. The goal of this paper is to find feasible solutions to mitigate such discrimination, so that individuals from minority groups can experience less name-based discrimination.

1.1. Partial In-Group Members

Social identity theory explains that individuals consider themselves to be members of groups, their sense of who they are within groups in society, they make comparisons across groups, and individuals tend to favor members of their own group ("we"), they identify the most with their "in-group" members [3]. Social identity theory induces in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination. A study done by Friesen et al. found that when Caucasian Canadian children were asked to allocate stickers in a dictator game, they were more altruistic towards recipients of the same race than East

Asian or South Asian groups, which could be used to suggest that people categorize foreigners and ethnic minorities [4]. These categorizations can lead to in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination, therefore, seeing adopted English names, ethnic majority group members (White) could take ethnic minorities (Asian) as partial in-group members, which could avoid name-based discrimination.

1.2. Past Research on Name-Based Discrimination

Prior research has been done to prove the existence of racial discrimination based on names. In an experiment studying the influences of different ethnic names regarding the probability of receiving an interview offer, it was found that there is a sizeable racial gap in the number of offers received between Chinese and English names for both low-skilled and high-skilled jobs. White first names with Chinese last names received nearly double the number of offers compared to full Chinese names [5]. Yet, another study done by Chowdhury in the same year examined the existence of racial discrimination in university marking. They found that bias exists at grade thresholds: students with Chinese full names or English first names with Chinese last names were less likely to receive a mark above the threshold, which counters his previous findings [6]. In addition, neither of the studies above has interpreted the potential reasons behind the discrimination. Whether the interviewers assume that people with Chinese names might not be able to communicate with them as effectively as White people remains unclear. The underlying reason may relate to assumptions such as Chinese people do not speak English well enough and Chinese people may not collaborate well together due to cultural differences. As for university making, whether points were deducted because the instructors did not think students with Chinese ancestry were proficient enough in language use is questionable. From the moment instructors saw the names, they might hold expectations that the academic performance of Chinese students would be different from it of white students. The motivations behind those decisions have yet been studied well. Therefore, it is necessary to gather resources to investigate name-based discrimination and explore the causes of discriminating decisions.

1.3. Relationship between Names and Group-Specific Stereotypes

It has been well evidenced that names that are associated with ethnic minorities activate group-specific stereotypes. It was reflected in a study where stereotypical Asian and Hispanic names were being assigned for participants to imagine their physical formidability, and it was found that participants' envisioned physical aggressiveness was greater for Hispanic names because Hispanic men in the United States are stereotyped as physically violent [7]. This study also aims to explore the possible impacts of group-based stereotypes (e.g., Asians are good at math) with regard to name-based discrimination.

2. Why is name-based discrimination a problem?

A lot can be influenced by name-based discrimination. If one has an ethnic minority background, it may reduce his/her chances of being shortlisted for a job, getting a college degree, or even renting an apartment, etc.

Studies mentioned above have shown that employers exclusively prefer job applicants with White names to Asian names. Name-based discrimination in the workplace not only applies to Asian names but also to Latino names, Black names, and names from all minority groups. While individuals have equal qualifications for jobs, they are being treated very differently. Discrimination tilts the scales against minorities long before applicants have a chance to demonstrate their ability; as long as name-based discrimination exists, it decreases the possibility of equality. Besides not getting equal chances of being awarded an offer, even if minority group applicants did get in, they will very likely suffer from more discrimination in the workplace. Their co-workers may make fun of their names' pronunciation, and minorities would experience the embarrassment of the need to correct their colleagues' pronunciation. In a study done by Triana et al. in 2015, the results showed that perceived

racial discrimination based on name was negatively associated with job attitudes, as well as one's physical and psychological health, which implies that workplace name-based discrimination can be costly for employers [8]. Long-term name-based discrimination can lead to losses in productivity and an increase in absenteeism.

As for apartment renting, a study done by Carpusor and Loges in 2006 illustrates that individuals with Arabic names were much more likely to be denied access to rental apartments than people with English names [9]. Furthermore, individuals with an African American names were four times more likely to be rejected than an individual with an English name. Without even looking at their credit or proof of income, landlords were screening them out based solely on their names. Name-based discrimination in the renting market could make more people homeless, which could lead to severe health issues for them, and additional economic costs for the country.

According to a study done by Alexandre Flage in 2018, in the rental housing market, candidates with Arab/Muslim female names were more likely than Arab/Muslim male names to be chosen as an agent [10]. It is worth noticing that name-based stereotypes not only differ in race, but they could also differ in gender. Men from minority groups can bear a lot of pressure if they are the only ones in the family who can afford to work and who must support the expenses of the entire family. This kind of problem can even affect the life quality of the next generation, so it must not be ignored.

Not only adults, but kids could also suffer from name-based discrimination. In Kohli and Solórzano's study in 2012, many minority students of color encountered cultural disrespect at school regarding their names [11]. Teachers' performance could be extremely important for young kids. If a teacher unconsciously causes racial microaggressions that result in the child feeling humiliated, for instance, by mispronouncing the kid's ethnic name, it would encourage microaggressions from the kid's classmates. The negative influence will last for a long time. Therefore, teachers could be contributing to minority children's alienation at school. Enduring these subtle experiences of name-based discrimination and racism can have a lasting negative impact on the kid's self-perception, which could shift the worldviews and values they endorse in many aspects.

3. Why is group-specific stereotype a problem regarding name-based discrimination?

Names have the potential of activating race stereotypes automatically, therefore, it is inevitable that people make decisions based on names when thinking of the stereotypes the names can be related to. It can have negative impacts on the stereotype-targeted individual. For instance, the stereotype of Asians being good at math is well-known and can make a professor overestimate an Asian student's academic performance. If the student cannot make it to the professor's expectation, he/she will be likely to be disappointed at the student and leads to a negative impression of the student, which is inappropriate and unfair.

4. What can people do to minimize name-based discrimination in education?

Interventions must be given to minimize name-based discrimination since it has existed in society for so long to an extent that it is systematic and cannot be eliminated.

At school, the right remedy for name-based discrimination can begin with imitation in educational interactions (e.g., teacher-student interaction). The issue of how students imitate students unconsciously and unintentionally must be addressed. According to a study by Zhou in 2012, both students and teachers might ignore the essential role of imitation in educational interactions [12]. Students not only learn, but also imitate. Students implicitly imitate the teacher's behavior, so instead of recklessly causing potential embarrassment to minority students by mispronouncing their names, which could lead to the mimicry of the student's peers and resulting in long-lasting negative impacts for the kid, and before reading the student's name in front of everyone, the teachers can ask the student privately about the pronunciation of his or her name. Respect would be shown to the students, and

the method can also elicit a sense of inclusion in the majority culture. More importantly, other students would know the correct pronunciation of the names of students from minority groups, hence the unnecessary discomfort due to mispronunciation of their ethnic names can be avoided.

5. What can people do to minimize name-based discrimination in renting?

As for renting difficulty for minorities, a possible intervention can be done is that online rental platforms can provide users with opportunities to reveal their names only after they had exchanged inquiries and responses with the landlords. Because in this case, a relationship has already been built between the landlord and the tenant, and it is discrimination-free, this method could reduce the likelihood of minorities being discriminated against by landlords based on their names.

6. What can people do to minimize name-based discrimination in the workplace?

To reduce the negative impacts of name-based discrimination on job applicants from minority groups, several strategies can be employed.

Firstly, firms should use structured interviews. Every participant should be treated equally by attending interviews that have the same procedures. In a study by Williamson et al., it was found that unstructured interviews tend to be more job-unrelated and less valid than structured interviews, which are designed to be professional, more job-related, and more valid [13]. Therefore, structured interviews can reduce the adverse impacts interviewers may have on interviewees based on their ethnic names, and their expertise can be better and more equally presented.

Secondly, all employees should complete a name-race Implicit Association Test (IAT) during the hiring process since IAT is a tool used to predict prejudice-based behavior according to van Ravenzwaaij et al.[14]. If the test results show a high degree of implicit racial discrimination, additional scrutiny will be required to determine if the candidate will bring a negative impact on the company's work environment in terms of racial discrimination. It is crucial to examine the potential implicit attitude towards minorities concerning name-based racial discrimination of the employees.

Thirdly, the importance of the training for recruiters/interviewers should be emphasized, programs can be designed targeting the existence of name-based discrimination and the negative impacts it can have in the workplace. An eligible candidate for the recruiter of a company should be someone who does not view foreign names negatively. Interviewers with international working experience and who have positive views towards exotic names should be prioritized. Interviewer characteristics need to be carefully considered, those characteristics could be extremely important determinants of in-group bias, which is that recruiters favor candidates of their own race.

Finally, all recruiters/interviewers should be provided with sufficient amounts of interviewees' individuating information to reduce name-based discrimination. A study by Locksley et al. showed that when individuals have more individuating information about a person, they tend to not use stereotypes, instead, they will use more personal and behavioral information to judge that person [15].

7. Conclusion

Whether it is in an educational setting, the workplace, a rental deal, or any other context, name-based discrimination and group-specific stereotypes need to be brought to attention. Interventions are needed to help reduce name-based discrimination by making people aware of its existence and the impacts stereotypes can have on minority groups. Name-based stereotypes may possibly cause physical damage and even lifelong psychological damage. If minority individuals can feel respected, they will be more active in interacting with people from the majority group. In the meanwhile, with more access to people from minority groups, people in the majority group will have more knowledge of minorities, thus reducing discrimination and prejudice against differences.

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