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## Model Minorities and Asian Stereotypes

At first glance, being labeled a “model minority” might seem like a good thing. It’s usually tied to praise—calling Asian Americans hardworking, high-achieving, and successful in school and careers. But as I’ve learned more, I’ve realized that this stereotype doesn’t lift people up as much as it boxes them in. It creates unrealistic expectations, flattens the diversity within Asian American communities, and masks the real struggles many people face behind the scenes.

A clear example of this shows up in the story of South Asian doctors in the U.S. I was surprised to find out that Indian American physicians alone account for nearly 8% of all doctors in the country. That’s a striking number considering their population size. But this didn’t happen by chance—it’s tied to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which opened the door for educated professionals from countries like India and Pakistan to enter the U.S. Historian Erika Lee explains that the act “remade the demographic landscape of Asian America” by allowing highly trained workers to immigrate (Lee, *The Making of Asian America*).

Over time, the success of these doctors started to shape a narrative about Asian Americans as a whole—that they’re all naturally smart, successful, and self-sufficient. But that narrative is misleading. It leaves out working-class Asians, new immigrants, and anyone who doesn’t fit that mold. And it turns individual success stories into unrealistic community-wide expectations. At the same time, the myth is often used to compare Asian Americans to other racial groups in ways that ignore systemic racism. It becomes a weapon disguised as a compliment.

This kind of stereotype also puts a weird amount of pressure on people. If you’re Asian American, it can start to feel like you’re expected to be successful all the time, with no room to mess up. That expectation builds up quietly. You don’t always notice it at first, but it’s there—in the way people talk to you, in the way you talk to yourself. During the pandemic, things got especially tough. A lot of people in Asian communities were dealing with racism, job loss, and fear, but still didn’t reach out for help. I read that AAPI communities were the least likely to use mental health services, and one reason for that is this pressure to stay strong and silent. If everyone expects you to be okay, it gets harder to admit when you’re not.

And the success part? Even that has limits. Just because a lot of Asians work in high-skilled jobs doesn’t mean they’re leading the teams or running the show. I found out there’s a name for that—it’s called the “bamboo ceiling.” This means a lot of Asian Americans get stuck in mid-level roles and don’t move into leadership. People assume they’re good at doing the work but not making decisions or being in charge. It’s frustrating because it shows that even the “positive” parts of the model minority myth can trap people in place.

So, in the end, the model minority idea ends up doing more harm than good. It turns individuals into a single, polished image and forgets about everything that doesn’t fit. The story of South Asian doctors is part of the picture, but it shouldn’t be the whole thing. There are so many different stories across the Asian American community, and none of them deserve to be

ignored just because they don't match a stereotype. If we want to really understand these communities, we've got to look past the label and start listening for the full story.

## Works Cited

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