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Student Characteristics, School Characteristics, and Educational Aspirations of Six Asian American Ethnic Groups

The authors looked at differences among 6 Asian American ethnic groups in terms of student-level and school-level characteristics and examined factors related to their educational aspirations. The authors provided implications for counselors to help Asian American students achieve academic success in secondary and higher education.

Over the past two decades, Asian Americans have been the nation's fastest growing minority group. In the past decade, the immigration rate from Asia has averaged about 281,740 immigrants per year (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993). It is predicted that the Asian American population could grow to almost 10 million, about 4% of the total United States population by the year 2000 (Gardner, 1992). According to the 1990 Census, the Asian population was approximately 7.3 million, about 3% of the United States population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993).

Although Asian Americans are a small group compared with other minority groups, such as African Americans and Latinos, their potential for growth is enormous for the next decade, given that Asian Americans currently represent approximately 38% of all immigrants to the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993). Therefore, it is not only necessary, but also significant, to examine educational aspirations and needs of Asian American students.

Since the 1960s, the media and press have often portrayed Asian Americans as the model minority, which refers to the stereotype of Asian Americans who have achieved extraordinary success academically as well as economically (Chan, 1991; Sue, 1973; Takaki, 1989; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1980). The general public believes that Asian Americans are well represented or even overrepresented in higher education (Lee, 1991). It is reported in the press that Asian Americans not only have higher college attendance rates but also higher achievement test scores than Caucasians (The Chronicle of Higher Education: Almanac, 1992; Lee, 1991).

However, contrary to this stereotype, many Asian Americans are undereducated and have low socioeconomic status. Asian Americans represent a bimodal mixture of extremely successful higher education attainment and a large undereducated mass. High dropout rates in schools have been reported for Southeast Asians, Filipinos, and Samoans, and academic failure has been reported for Laotians due to the absence of bilingual instruction and counseling services (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1992). The model minority stereotype emphasizes Asian Americans who are college graduates, who have high status occupations and incomes, or both. But the stereotype often ignores the substantial number of uneducated, illiterate Asians, and those who have low-paying jobs (Sue & Okazaki, 1990; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1980). Despite the perpetuation of the myth of Asian Americans' educational and economic success, the fact is that the cohort as a whole has not enjoyed the same occupational or financial success as Caucasians. A large proportion of Asian Americans have occupations that are not

consistent with their levels of education (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1980; Kan & Liu, 1984). Asian Americans earn incomes that are lower than those of Caucasians with the same level of education (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1980; Hsia & Hirano-Nakanishi, 1989).

Because of the disparity between the myth and the truth, the model minority stereotype has adversely affected Asian American students. Indeed, by focusing on the academic success, the stereotype has resulted in a lack of studies addressing low academic achievement among Asian American students (Slaughter-Defoe, Nakagawa, Takanishi, & Johnson, 1990). Although the model minority stereotype may be flattering to Asian Americans, it does not help counselors and teachers understand academic difficulties or personal problems that Asian American students face, and it has hindered their receiving adequate student services and support. As a consequence, Asian American students from less advantageous backgrounds tend to get bypassed in terms of supportive services and assistance. Furthermore, the myth of Asian American success seems to have led to neglect of the development of programs and services for Asian American students in need and to have resulted in a lack of the care and attention that they deserve (Kim, 1997). Accordingly, it is important to examine the differences among Asian American students in student-level characteristics and school-level characteristics to achieve a better understanding of Asian American students' educational needs and aspirations.

PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

On the basis of the issues surrounding the research problem, this study sought to examine differences among six Asian American ethnic groups and factors related to Asian American students' educational aspirations. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Are there differences among six Asian American ethnic groups (Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese, Koreans, Southeast Asians, and South Asians) in their educational aspirations, math performance, and socioeconomic characteristics?
2. How are the educational aspirations of the Asian American 10th graders related to student-level factors (socioeconomic characteristics, track placement, math performance, demographic characteristics, parental expectations, peer-influence, and academic self-concept)?
3. How are the educational aspirations of the Asian American students related to school-level factors (type of school, academic climate of school, disciplinary climate of school, racial composition of school, socioeconomic composition of school, and location of school)?

This study helps fill a void in the literature about diverse subgroups of Asian Americans in secondary and higher education. Ultimately, this study could help counselors and teachers (a) understand educational realities of Asian American students better, (b) develop programs and services for Asian American students, and (c) further improve higher education opportunities for Asian American students.

METHOD

Sample and Data Source

This study was based on the First Follow-Up Survey of the 1988 National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS:88; U.S. Department of Education, 1992). The data are for students who were in 10th grade in 1990 and who were members of six major Asian American ethnic groups in the United States. They are Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese, Koreans, Southeast Asians (Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian, and Thai), and South Asians (Asian Indian and Pakistani). The total number of these Asian American 10th graders in the sample was 973:257 Chinese, 210 Filipinos, 151 Koreans, 67 Japanese, 188 Southeast Asians, and 100 South Asians. The sample weight was used in this study for producing weighted 10th grade student statistics in the cross-sectional analyses.

Measurement of Variables

Independent variables. The independent variables of this study can be divided into two groups, student-level and school-level factors. First, student-level factors included socioeconomic characteristics, track placement, math performance, demographic characteristics, parental expectations, peer influence, and self-concept. Socioeconomic characteristics were determined from parents' occupation and education. To quantify the status of each of the occupations, Duncan's Scale of Socioeconomic Index (SEI; Duncan, 1961) was used. Parents' occupational status was recorded as the higher of the status of the mother's occupation and father's occupation. Parents' education was recorded as the higher of the number of years of schooling of the mother and father. Track placement had four possible responses: (a) general program, (b) academic program, (c) vocational/ technical program, and (d) other programs. Math performance was measured by students' self-reported math grades. Demographic characteristics were ascertained from the students' ethnic background and sex. Parental educational expectations for children was recorded as the higher of the numbers of years of schooling of mother's expectations and father's expectations. Peer influence was obtained by students' answers to the question, "Among the friends you hang out with, how important is it to continue their education past high school?" Academic self-concept was obtained by students' answers to the question "How do you feel about the following statement?: I am able to do things as well as most other people"; and the question "Think about how you see the future. What are the chances that you will go to college?" Academic self-concept was measured as an average score of these two questions.

Second, school-level factors included type of school, academic climate of school, disciplinary climate of school, racial composition of school, socioeconomic composition of school, and location of school. Types of school were public, Catholic, and non-Catholic private. Academic climate of school was measured from responses to the question "Do teachers press students to achieve?"; the question "Are students expected to do homework?"; and the question "Is teacher morale high?" Academic climate of school was measured as an average score of these three questions. Disciplinary climate of school was measured from responses to the question "Is discipline emphasized at this school?" Racial composition of school was measured by the percentage of White students in school. Socioeconomic composition of school was measured by the percentage of the total student body receiving free or reduced-price school lunch. Locations of school were urban, suburban, and rural.

Dependent Variable. The dependent variable, educational aspirations, was obtained from the students' answers to the question "How far in school do you think you will get?" Each response category was transformed into the actual or approximate number of years of schooling.

RESULTS

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Scheffe's multiple comparison were conducted to determine if there were significant differences among six Asian American ethnic groups. Table 1 indicates that there were significant differences among six Asian American ethnic groups in terms of math performance, educational aspirations, parents' educational level, and parents' occupational status.

Tables 2 through 5 display the results for Scheffe's multiple comparison. As shown in Table 2, on average, South Asian students tended to express the highest educational aspirations, followed by Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, and Southeast Asian students. Statistically significant differences were found between South Asians and Chinese, South Asians and Filipinos, and South Asians and Southeast Asians with respect to educational aspirations.

Table 3 shows that, on average, South Asian students tended to have the highest math performance, followed by Chinese, Southeast Asian, Korean, Filipino, and Japanese students. However, no differences were statistically significant with respect to math performance.

As shown in Table 4, on average, South Asian parents tended to have the highest level of education, followed by Korean, Japanese, Filipino, Chinese, and Southeast Asian parents. The differences between the educational levels of South Asian parents and those of other Asian parents were statistically significant. The differences between the educational levels of Southeast Asian parents and those of other Asian parents were statistically significant.

Table 5 indicates that, on average, South Asian parents tended to have the highest status of occupation, followed by Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Chinese, and Southeast Asian parents. Statistically significant differences were found between Southeast Asian parents and other Asian parents with respect to occupational status. The differences between South Asian parents and Chinese parents were also statistically significant.

Stepwise regression analysis was used to examine factors related to educational aspirations of Asian American students. Table 6 shows that factors associated with Asian American students' educational aspirations were somewhat different according to their ethnic background.

For Chinese students, having a good math performance, being male, receiving high-educational expectations from parents, having a positive self-concept, and attending a school with competitive academic climate were positively related to having higher educational aspirations. On the other hand, attending public school was negatively related to educational aspirations of Chinese. For Filipino students, having a good math performance, getting high educational expectations from parents, and having a positive self-concept were positively associated with having higher educational aspirations. On the other hand, attending a school with a low socioeconomic composition was negatively associated with educational aspirations of Filipinos.

For Japanese students, having parents with high occupational status, receiving high educational expectations from parents, and having friends who plan to go to college were positively related to having higher educational aspirations. On the other hand, attending a school with a low socioeconomic composition and attending a school in an urban area were negatively related to educational aspirations of Japanese. For Korean students, being enrolled in an academic program (compared with technical/vocational and general programs) and getting high educational expectations from parents were positively associated with having higher educational aspirations. No school factors were statistically significant in explaining Korean students' educational aspirations. For Southeast Asian students, being enrolled in an academic program, receiving high educational expectations from parents, and having a positive self-concept were positively related to having higher educational aspirations. On the other hand, attending a school with a low socioeconomic composition was negatively related to educational aspirations of Southeast Asians. For South Asian students, getting high educational expectations from parents was positively related to having higher educational aspirations. No school characteristics were statistically significant for South Asian students.

Overall, stepwise regression analysis indicated that parental educational expectations had the greatest impact on educational aspirations of Asian American students, regardless of ethnic origin of the students. Some of the institutional variables in this study, such as racial composition of school and disciplinary climate of school, did not explain educational aspirations of Asian American students. Among the school-level factors, type of school, location of school, academic climate of school, and socioeconomic composition of school seemed to be those that explained educational aspirations of Asian American students. The student characteristics in this study, such as track placement, socioeconomic characteristics, math performance, parental expectations, self-concept, and peer-influence, were highly associated with educational aspirations of Asian American students.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELORS

The common image of Asian American students in schools and colleges is that they are whiz kids, the best and the brightest, and math and science majors (Bagasao, 1989) who are "from families that are financially stable if not affluent" (Magner, 1993, p. A32).

However, as the findings of this study clearly indicate, Asian Americans are not homogeneous in terms of academic performance, educational aspirations and attainment, and socioeconomic characteristics. We found that factors related to Asian American students' educational aspirations are somewhat different according to their ethnic background. Indeed, the most apparent fact about Asian Americans is the diversity among them.

The primary focus of this study was an examination of the differences among six Asian American ethnic groups in student and school characteristics. Furthermore, this study examined factors associated with educational aspirations of six Asian American ethnic groups. We concluded from this study that unlike the generally held perception, the achievement of Asian American students as a group is not shared by all Asian American students, and they are indeed diverse and heterogeneous in many aspects. Although Asian American students may seem to be highly successful as a group, there are a large number of Asian American students who need

assistance, support, and encouragement from teachers and counselors (Kim, 1997). The intention of this study is neither to undermine the educational needs and aspirations of non-Asian American students nor to make generalizations about Asian American ethnic groups. Rather, this study intends to acknowledge the reality of Asian American students and to help counselors understand difficulties and problems that Asian American students face academically as well as personally.

Academic climate of school, track placement, academic performance, parental expectations, self-concept, and peer influence were found to be among the factors explaining educational aspirations of Asian American students in this study. The findings of the study provide significant implications for counselors, given that these factors can be substantially improved by academic counseling, personal counseling, or both. To have a better understanding of Asian American students, counselors should develop multicultural counseling competencies and skills. Counselors should be aware of their own values and biases, understand life experiences and cultural heritage of the multicultural students, be respectful of and sensitive to the students' culture, and value bilingualism (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). Counselors should recognize the existence of diversity among Asian American students and avoid the myth of cultural uniformity (Betz, 1993). In addition to the competencies and skills of counselors, development of theory and research in multicultural counseling is essential in helping the diverse student population achieve academic success in schools and colleges. With the competencies and skills based on empirical research and training, counselors could serve Asian American students better by developing and providing academic, career, and personal counseling programs and services that respond to the educational needs and aspirations of Asian American students.

TABLE 1

One-Way Analysis of Variance on Educational Aspirations, Parents' Occupation, Parents' Education, and Math Performance by Six Asian American Groups in the Nationwide Sample of 10th Graders

Source	df	F
Between Groups		
Educational aspirations	5	9.98 [***]
Parents' occupation	5	18.20 [***]
Parents' education	5	20.85 [***]
Math Performance	5	8.74 [***]

[***]p > .0001.

TABLE 2

Scheffe's Test for Mean Differences of Educational Aspirations Among Six Asian American Groups in the Nationwide Sample of 10th Graders

	South Asian	Korean	Japanese
South Asian		0.79	1.43
Korean	0.79		0.63

Japanese	1.43	0.63	
Chinese	1.44[*]	0.65	0.02
Filipino	1.87[*]	1.07	0.44
Southeast Asian	1.96[*]	1.17	0.53
M	18.80	18.01	17.37
	Chinese	Filipino	Southeast Asian
South Asian	1.44[*]	1.87[*]	1.98[*]
Korean	0.65	1.07	1.17
Japanese	0.02	0.44	0.53
Chinese	0.42	0.51	
Filipino	0.42		0.09
Southeast Asian	0.51	0.09	
M	17.35	16.93	16.84

[*] p < .05.

TABLE 3

Scheffe's Test for Mean Differences of Math Performance Among Six Asian American Groups in the Nationwide Sample of 10th Graders

	South Asian	Chinese	Southeast Asian
South Asian		0.11	0.20
Chinese	0.11		0.09
Southeast Asian	0.20	0.09	
Korean	0.35	0.24	0.15
Filipino	0.86	0.75	0.66
Japanese	1.17	1.06	0.97
M	6.81	6.70	6.61
	Korean	Filipino	Japanese
South Asian	0.35	0.66	1.17
Chinese	0.24	0.75	1.06
Southeast Asian	0.15	0.66	0.97
Korean		0.51	0.61
Filipino	0.51		0.30
Japanese	0.81	0.30	
M	6.46	5.95	5.64

TABLE 4

Scheffe's Test for Mean Differences of Parents' Educational Levels Among Six Asian American Groups in the Nationwide Sample of 10th Graders

South Asian Korean Japanese

South Asian		2.55[*]	2.64[*]
Korean	2.55[*]	0.09	
Japanese	2.64[*]	0.09	
Filipino	3.05[*]	0.50	0.40
Chinese	3.05[*]	0.50	0.41
Southeast Asian	4.48[*]	1.93[*]	1.84[*]

M 18.60 16.04 15.95

	Filipino	Chinese	Southeast Asian
South Asian	3.05[*]	3.05[*]	4.48[*]
Korean	0.50	0.50	1.93[*]
Japanese	0.40	0.41	1.84[*]
Filipino		0.01	1.43[*]
Chinese	0.01		1.43[*]
Southeast Asian	1.43[*]	1.43[*]	

M 15.55 15.54 14.11

Note. See Table 2 Note.

[*] $p < .05$.

TABLE 5

Scheffe's Test for Mean Parents' Occupational Status
Among Six Asian American Groups in the Nationwide
Sample of 10th Graders

	South Asian	Japanese	Korean
South Asian		2.24	9.33
Japanese	2.24		7.09
Korean	9.33	7.09	
Filipino	9.55	7.31	0.22
Chinese	10.85[*]	8.61	1.52
Southeast Asian	23.97[*]	21.73[*]	14.64[*]

M 60.20 57.95 50.87

	Filipino	Chinese	Southeast Asian
South Asian	9.55	10.85[*]	23.97[*]
Japanese	7.31	8.61	21.73[*]
Korean	0.22	1.52	14.64[*]
Filipino		1.30	14.42[*]
Chinese	1.30		13.12[*]
Southeast Asian	14.42[*]	13.12[*]	

M 50.64 49.35 36.23

Note. See Table 2 Note.

[*] $p < .05$.

TABLE 6

Stepwise Regression Model on Educational Aspirations of Six Asian American Groups in the Nationwide Sample of 10th Graders--Backward Elimination Method
Standardized Beta

Variable	Standardized Beta		
	Chinese[a]	Filipino[b]	Japanese[c]
Math performance	0.2212[*]	0.1370[*]	
Being male	0.1349[*]		
Parental expectations	0.4246[*]	0.3952[*]	0.3473[*]
Academic self-concept	0.2331[*]	0.3088[*]	
Public school	-0.2691[*]		
Academic climate	0.1301[*]		
Low socioeconomic composition	-0.2262*	-0.2915[*]	
Parents' occupation	0.3148*		
Peer influence	0.2917*		
Urban school setting	-0.3974*		
Academic program			

Variable	Standardized Beta		
	Korean[d]	Southeast Asian[e]	South Asian[f]
Math performance			
Being male			
Parental expectations	0.4913[*]	0.4027[*]	0.6834[*]
Academic self-concept		0.4037[*]	
Public school			
Academic climate			
Low socioeconomic composition		-0.1663[*]	
Parents' occupation			
Peer influence			
Urban school setting			
Academic program	0.3909[*]	0.2016[*]	

[a] $R^2 = 0.4859$.

[b] $R^2 = 0.4535$.

[c] $R^2 = 0.5056$.

[d] $R^2 = 0.3898$.

[e] $R^2 = 0.6391$.

[f] $R^2 = 0.4672$.

[*] $p < .05$.

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