


January 2000

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Recommended Citation

Amy Strage. "Predictors of college adjustment and success: Similarities and differences among Southeast-Asian Americans" *Education* (2000).

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PREDICTORS OF COLLEGE ADJUSTMENT AND SUCCESS: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES AMONG SOUTHEAST-ASIAN-AMERICAN, HISPANIC AND WHITE STUDENTS.

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The role of students' family backgrounds and rapport with instructors and peers as predictors of five indices of the adjustment and success were examined, for a cohort of 150 Southeast-Asian-American, Hispanic and White college students. Ethnic differences emerged for nearly all predictor and outcome measures. Discussion of these patterns includes consideration of the origins of a learned-helpless profile characteristic of many of the Asian-American students and of a mastery orientation characteristic of many of the Hispanic and White students.

The last decade has seen significant advances in clarifying the links among the achievement motivational profiles of adolescents from different ethnic backgrounds and their home and school environments. The purpose of the present study was to begin to address the following four questions with respect to college students: (1) To what degree, and by what measures, do Southeast-Asian-American, Hispanic and White college students differ in their academic adjustment and success? (2) To what degree do college students from these backgrounds report differences in their parents' values, beliefs and practices? (3) To what degree do they differ in their comfort level with peers and instructors on campus? and (4) Do the sorts of patterns linking parenting practices and academic adjustment and success observed in studies of adolescents persist in college students from each of these three ethnic groups?

Understanding ethnic group differences in college success

The literature documenting ethnic group differences among college students in academic adjustment and achievement is extensive. Against a backdrop of changing demographics and large increases in the minority population of most areas of the United States, college entrance, retention and graduation rates for students of color remain low and relatively unchanged (Astin, 1982; Duran, 1994; Irvine, 1990; Justiz, 1994; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Suzuki, 1994; Tinto, 1993).

By the end of the 1980's, researchers had compiled a fairly clear picture of the formulas of success for "traditional" college students, that is 18-22 year old non-minority students from middle-class backgrounds whose parents had attended college. This formula included consideration of the adequacy of students' academic preparation, the appropriateness of their

educational expectations and career goals, the "anticipatory socialization" (Weidman, 1989) they had received from parents, peers and others prior to entering college, and their assimilation into their new milieu upon matriculation. (See, for example, Pascarella and Terenzini's 1991 encyclopedic volume.) Recently, however, several scholars have called into question the universality of some of these patterns and urged that more research be conducted so as to better understand the dynamics at play among the less "traditional" and more diverse populations now making their way to and through college (Astin, 1998; Kramer, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998; Rendon, 1994; Stage, 1993; Tierney, 1992). The hypotheses they have proposed span the gamut. Some researchers have focused on elements in the broader community backgrounds and experiences of minority youth which place them at a relative educational disadvantage. Such elements include the absence of role models, the perception that educational achievement will not guarantee economic advantage down the road, and financial pressures and family responsibilities that make pursuing college impossible (e.g., Ogbu, 1992; Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986). Other researchers focus on the more elusive macrosystem values (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that obtain in different communities. Such values include the degree to which academic education is prioritized (as opposed to moral or religious education, or knowledge of one's cultural heritage), as well as the degree to which community youth are encouraged to pursue formal education (e.g., Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995). Still others examine

family attitudes and daily practices relating to children's education and schoolwork (e.g., Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts & Fraleigh, 1987; and Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts & Dornbusch, 1994). A more recent tac has been to focus on the specific knowledge and resources contained in the social and academic "capital" parents invest in their children (Connor & DeVos, 1989; Cooper, Azmitia, Garcia, Ittel, Lopez, Rivera & Martinez-Chavez, 1994; Duran, 1994; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995; Mehan, 1992; and Phelan, Davidson & Cao, 1991). Still other researchers have focused on the contribution of variables such as the comfort level of the student on campus, and the degree to which they feel accepted and validated in their college world (Green, 1989; Lang & Ford, 1992; Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez & Trevino, 1997; Tinto, 1993). By underscoring the importance of students' family and community backgrounds as well as the fit they perceive in their college milieu, this body of research suggests several intervention approaches, to better ensure the success of minority college students.

Indices of academic achievement and achievement motivation

The preponderance of research on college students conceives of success in relatively broad strokes, such as whether or not the student remains enrolled, whether or not they complete a degree program in a certain period of time, and what sorts of grades they earn in the process. In contrast, much of the literature on younger students' achievement and achievement motivation adopts a more analytical per-

spective on assessing student outcomes, one which might be quite useful in assessing and fostering college students' success as well. More specifically, researchers have distinguished two motivational profiles: one type of student, those labeled "mastery oriented", welcomes challenge, and is able to maintain focus and persist in the face of obstacles; a second type of student, labeled "learned helpless", shies away from challenges they fear they will not be able to meet and is easily distracted by fears of inadequate performance (Covington, 1984; Dweck, 1985; Dweck, 1986; Dweck and Elliott, 1993; Dweck and Leggett, 1988; Hayamizu & Weiner, 1991; Nicholls, 1984). Typically, "mastery-oriented" and "learned helpless" students do not differ greatly in GPA, although "learned helpless" students appear to earn their high grades at a cost of significant stress and fear of failure, while the "mastery-oriented" students appear to enjoy rising to the challenges inherent in their school work.

Indices of family background and parenting characteristics

The literature on children's achievement motivation also documents a connection between parents' values and practices, and students' motivational profiles and adjustment to school, on the other. Baumrind's seminal work clarified the role of authoritative parenting in promoting instrumental competence in young children (Baumrind, 1972, 1979). Since then, she and others have reported significant links between authoritative parenting and positive outcomes for high school and even college students. Parenting that is high in demand, that provides emotional support and that grants

autonomy appears to foster study attitudes and practices consistent with a "mastery orientation on the other (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Fuligni, 1998; Steinberg, 1996; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994; Strage, 1998; Strage and Brandt, 1999). Might some of the ethnic group differences in college students' academic success be attributable to differences in their parents' values and practices, most especially those relating to demandingness, supportiveness and autonomy granting?

The specific analyses reported here sought to identify relationships among students' grades, their motivational profiles, aspects of their family backgrounds, and ratings of their rapport with the instructors and their peers, within and across ethnic groups.

Methods

Participants

The data presented in this report are part of a large-scale investigation of the factors relating to the achievement and achievement motivation of a cohort of 150 students enrolled at a large metropolitan university in California. The sample included 73 White students, 40 Southeast-Asian-American students and 37 Hispanic students. The sample was predominantly female ($n = 132$) and predominantly "commuter" ($n = 130$). Most respondents ($n = 120$) were Child Development majors. All were planning careers in or relating to children and youth (e.g., P-12 teaching, child care, family counseling, parent education).

Measures

Participants completed the *Student Attitudes and Perceptions Survey* (SAPS) during a class meeting of one of their Child Development classes. This inventory consists of items comprising the scales enumerated below. Participation was entirely voluntary, and students received no course credit or remuneration for their participation. Nonetheless, approximately 90% to 95% of the students present on the day of data collection completed the survey. Surveys were anonymous, so as to encourage students to be as candid in their answers as possible.

Indices of family background characteristics

The first section of the SAPS contained items designed to yield a profile of the respondent's family background, including (a) their socioeconomic status, (b) the educational background of their parents and other family members, (c) ratings of the degree to which a variety of specific values were stressed in their families and (d) ratings of the "parenting styles" they experienced, both during their childhood and currently. These latter items were combined to yield three scale scores corresponding to the dimensions of authoritative parenting distinguished by Baumrind. The first scale indexed the degree to which respondents felt their parents encouraged their independence (Autonomy Granting, $\alpha = .55$, 5 items). This scale was equally reliable for respondents from all three ethnic backgrounds (range = .53-.56). The second scale indexed the degree to which respondents felt their parents made high academic demands of them (Demandingness, $\alpha =$

.66, 2 items). This scale was also adequately reliable for respondents from all three ethnic backgrounds (range = .50-.76). The third scale indexed the degree to which respondents felt their parents were emotionally supportive of them (Supportiveness, $\alpha = .75$, 5 items). This scale was also reliable for respondents from all three ethnic backgrounds (range = .65-.79). Respondents' ratings in this and previous studies consistently yielded significant positive correlations between the rating for a given parenting characteristic with respect to childhood and present-day time-frames, suggesting cumulative effects of particular parenting constructs. In order to most conservatively gauge the role of present-day parenting characteristics, the analyses reported here employ "corrected" parenting scores, where childhood scores are partialled out.

Indices of achievement and achievement motivation

Respondents were asked to report their Grade Point Average (GPA), both overall and in their major. The fact that the distribution of grades obtained from the respondents in this study closely approximated that for Child Development majors overall, and the fact that the survey was anonymous should help assuage concerns about the accuracy of students' reports of their own grades. This section of the survey also included items comprising three scales, each of which indexed aspects of a "mastery" achievement orientation to college. The first scale contained items concerning students' confidence in their ability to complete college (Confidence, $\alpha = .75$, 3 items). This scale was also reli-

able for respondents from all three ethnic backgrounds (range = .52-.81). The second scale consisted of items designed to measure the degree to which students would persist in the face of difficulty or failure (Persistence, $\alpha = .82$, 4 items). This scale was also equally reliable for respondents from all three ethnic backgrounds (range = .77-.86). The third scale measured the degree to which students were able to avoid distraction and maintain focus while working on their academic assignments (Task Involvement, $\alpha = .77$, 5 items). This scale was also equally reliable for respondents from all three ethnic backgrounds (range = .68-.80). High scores on these latter three scales reflected a "mastery" orientation. Low scores on these scales reflected the presence of a "learned helpless" orientation.

Indices of students' adjustment to campus life

The fourth part of the SAPS survey contained items designed to measure the students' comfort level with their instructors and their peers. The items were combined into two scales, one containing items relating to the degree to which the respondents felt comfortable with and understood and respected by their instructors (Teacher-rapport, $\alpha = .67$, 5 items) and a second, containing items relating to the degree to which respondents felt comfortable with their fellow students (Peer-rapport, $\alpha = .71$, 3 items). These scales were also reliable for respondents from all three ethnic backgrounds (ranges = .63-.86 and .61-.81, respectively).

Results

1. *(How) do the Southeast-Asian-American, Hispanic and White students in this sample differ in their academic adjustment and success?* To address this question, a MANOVA was performed, with ethnicity as the independent variable and grades as well as the three indices of achievement motivation were entered as dependent variables. The overall main effect of ethnicity was significant ($\lambda = .87$, $F(2,134) = 1.92$, $p = .042$). Univariate effects on Overall GPA and Major GPA were also significant. Univariate effects for Persistence and for Task Involvement approached conventional levels of statistical significance. White students have higher GPA's, both overall and in their majors, than do the Southeast-Asian-American or Hispanic students, $F(2, 134) = 6.12$, $p = .003$ and $F(2, 134) = 5.58$, $p = .005$, respectively. There was a tendency for the Southeast-Asian-American students to be less confident, less persistent and less task-involved than the students in either other group. In summary, first, the typical GPA differences reported elsewhere in the literature appear to be replicated in this sample. And second, although the Southeast-Asian-American and Hispanic students seemed to both be struggling with respect to their grades, at least in contrast to their White peers, they appeared to differ in the other three measures of academic success. More specifically, the Southeast-Asian-American students appeared to suffer from a degree of "learned helplessness", as reflected in their relatively low levels of Persistence and Task Involvement. The Hispanic students, in contrast, appeared to have much more of a "mastery orientation", as reflected in their

relatively high scores for Confidence, Task Involvement, and most especially Persistence. These findings confirm that academic success is not a unitary construct, and that its elements are not similarly aligned for all learners. One implication of these findings is that efforts to assist the Southeast-Asian-American and Hispanic in improving their grades will need to work within the constraints of different achievement motivational dynamics.

2. *(How) do the Southeast-Asian-American, Hispanic and White students in this sample differ from one another with respect to family background characteristics?* As summarized above, the literature on achievement and achievement motivation suggests that students' perceptions of their academic milieu as well as their family background and relationships are predictive of their academic success. Therefore, a MANOVA was performed, with ethnicity as independent variable and with indices of family socio-economic level and educational attainment as well as parenting style and values as dependent variables. The overall main effect of ethnicity was significant ($\lambda = .65$, $F(2,142) = 2.86$, $p = .001$). Univariate tests also revealed significant ethnic group differences for seven of the family indices. Students from the three groups differed in socio-economic level, $F(2,142) = 6.30$, $p = .002$. White students, reported the highest levels of fathers' and mothers' education, and Hispanic students reporting the lowest, $F(2,142) = 9.99$, $p < .001$ and $F(2,142) = 5.75$, $p = .004$, respectively. The difference in the proportion of students in each group who reported being the first person in their family to attend college approached

statistical significance, $F(2,142) = 1.79$, $p = .170$, with Hispanic students most likely to be the first collegian in their families (24%), and Southeast-Asian-American and White students less likely to be the first in their family to attend college (13% and 11%, respectively).

With respect to parenting styles, Hispanic and White students rated their parents higher on two of the three indices of authoritative parenting than Asian-American students: the degree of Autonomy Granting, $F(2,142) = 3.61$, $p = .030$, and Support, $F(2,142) = 3.58$, $p = .031$. There was no difference in the groups' reports of their parents' Demandingness, $F(2,142) = .04$, $p = .96$. Thus, the parents of the Hispanic and White students were more Authoritative than the parents of the Southeast-Asian-American students.

There were differences among the three groups in two of the Family Values examined. There were no group differences in the importance of moral or academic education, $F(2,142)$'s both < 1.00 . But Hispanic families appeared to stress the importance of religion and religious education the most, $F(2,142) = 3.96$, $p = .021$, and Southeast-Asian-American parents appeared to stress the importance of bringing honor to one's family the most, $F(2,142) = 7.64$, $p = .001$. This is consistent with the literature on socialization for these two large groups (c.f., Goldenberg and Gallimore, 1995).

3. *(How) do the Southeast-Asian-American, Hispanic and White students in this sample differ from one another with respect to adjustment to campus life?*

A third MANOVA was performed, with ethnicity as independent variable and stu-

dent rapport with peers and teachers as dependent variables. The overall effect of ethnicity did not quite reach statistical significance ($\Delta = .94$, $F(2, 147) = 2.21$, $p = .068$). However, the Southeast-Asian-American students reported feeling somewhat less positive rapport with their teachers and their peers than the Hispanic or White students, $F(2, 147) = 2.89$, $p = .059$, and $F(2, 147) = 3.53$, $p = .032$, respectively).

4. *How might the differences in perceptions of the college milieu and family background relate to differences in academic success?* To address this question, three series of correlational analyses were performed. The first analyses consisted of bi-variate correlations between (a) the five indices of success and (b) study participants' perceptions of their comfort level with their teachers and their peers as well as their ratings of their family background. Rating one's relationship with one's instructors as positive was significantly and positively related to all five indices of success (r 's ranged from .33 to .52, p 's all $< .001$). Reporting a positive relationship with one's peers was significantly and positively related to Confidence ($r = .39$, $p < .001$) and to Persistence ($r = .25$, $p < .01$). The results also reveal systematic relationships between the indices of college success and adjustment and respondents' family background. More specifically, the more autonomy students reported their parents granted them, the better they were doing, as indexed by all five measures of adjustment and success (r 's ranged from .18 to .41). The greater the ratings of perceived parental emotional support, the greater the reported Confidence ($r = .45$,

$p < .001$), Persistence ($r = .32$, $p < .001$) and Task Involvement ($r = .16$, $p < .05$). And the higher the demands students reported feeling, the more confident ($r = .26$, $p < .001$) and persistent ($r = .22$, $p < .01$) they reported being. Respondents whose parents tended to stress the importance of moral and academic education also tended to report themselves high in Confidence ($r = .29$, $p < .001$ and $r = .27$, $p < .001$) and Persistence ($r = .29$, $p < .001$ and $r = .22$, $p < .01$). Emphasis on religious education was associated with high scores in Persistence ($r = .20$, $p < .05$). Respondents' perception of an emphasis on the importance of bringing honor to one's family was negatively related to GPA ($r = -.23$, $p < .01$ and $r = -.28$, $p < .001$) and to Task Involvement ($r = -.23$, $p < .01$). The correlation between the importance of bringing honor to one's family and Persistence was in the negative direction ($r = .12$, $p = .133$).

Socioeconomic status and level of parental education were significantly and positively correlated with Major GPA, although none of these family characteristics was correlated with the other indices of adjustment and success. A series of one-way ANOVA's revealed that having a close family relative who and already attended college was associated with an advantage in Major GPA, $F(2, 147) = 5.9052$, $p = .016$, but made no difference in overall GPA or in Confidence, Persistence or Task Involvement scale scores, $F(2, 147)$'s all < 1.00 , p 's all $> .05$. It would appear that the advantages of financial affluence, parental education and prior experience with college do not seem to help students develop greater confidence, nor do they appear to

help students be more persistent and task involved as they approach their academic challenges.

Inasmuch as ratings of family background and teacher and peer rapport were also significantly correlated with each other, two sets of partial correlations were performed. The first examined the relationship between the indices of students' adjustment and success and their ratings of their rapport with their teachers and peers while controlling for the family ratings (Autonomy Granting, Supportiveness, Demandingness, Moral Education, Academic Education, Religious Education and Bringing Honor to One's Family). The second set of partial correlations examined the relationship between the five indices of student success and adjustment and their ratings of their family background while controlling for teacher- and peer rapport.

Once again, Teacher Rapport was positively and significantly related to all five indices of college success and adjustment (r 's range from .34 to .44, p 's all $<.001$). Positive rapport with peers remained significantly positively correlated with Confidence ($r = .32$, $p < .001$). Students' adjustment and success emerged once again significantly related to several dimensions of parenting style and family values. More specifically, the relationship between parental Autonomy Granting and students' Confidence was positive and significant ($r = .24$, $p < .01$). The relationships between Autonomy Granting and the other four indices of success and adjustment were also in the positive direction and approached statistical significance. Ratings of parental Supportiveness were predictive of Confidence ($r = .34$, $p < .001$) and

Persistence ($r = .17$, $p < .05$). Ratings of the perceived importance of Moral Education were also predictive of Confidence ($r = .20$, $p < .05$) and Persistence ($r = .21$, $p < .05$). Ratings of the perceived importance of Religious Education were predictive of levels of Persistence ($r = .27$, $p < .001$). And the perceived importance of Bringing Honor to one's Family was negatively correlated with grades ($r = -.20$, $p < .05$ for Overall GPA and $r = -.23$, $p < .01$ for Major GPA). It was also negatively correlated with Task Involvement, although the magnitude of this correlation did not quite reach conventional levels of statistical significance ($r = -.16$, $p = .073$).

Discussion

Taken together, the findings reported here clearly confirm the persistence of differences among Southeast-Asian-American, Hispanic and White college students in college adjustment and success. They further suggest that these differences are linked both to elements of the students' family backgrounds and to characteristics of their college milieu. The data presented here are correlational, and based on students' self-reports, and so caution should be exercised in interpreting them. These caveats notwithstanding, however, several specific points warrant reiteration.

First, it is important to consider several aspects of college success. Grade Point Average is but one measure of how well students are doing. In several of the analyses reported in this study, the other indices of adjustment (Confidence, Persistence and Task Involvement) seemed to be more significantly and meaningfully related to the family background and environmental fac-

tors under consideration. This is certainly consistent with the finding widely reported in the literature on achievement motivation that GPA is not a reliable predictor of academic adjustment.

Second, these results underscore the importance of the role of instructors and peers. High ratings of positive rapport with teachers were associated with all five indices of college success and adjustment, and high ratings of positive rapport with peers were associated with high levels of confidence. These data are certainly consistent with college student retention and attrition reported elsewhere (Tinto, 1993; Padilla et al, 1997).

Third, these findings are consistent with the literature on the correlates of Baumrind's (1967, 1972) Parenting Styles and with the work of Gallimore and Goldenberg (1995) and Cooper and her colleagues (e.g., Cooper et al, 1994) on the importance of the social, educational and cultural capital parents invest in their children. They are significant in that they reveal that the relationship between students' perception of their parents' practices and values and the degree to which they apply themselves to academic tasks extends into adulthood and college.

And fourth, the analyses reported here suggest some important, if complex, differences in the achievement motivational profiles of the three groups of students. More specifically, despite relatively poor grades, the Hispanic students appear to have managed to adopt and sustain a strong mastery orientation in college. They are remarkably persistent and confident despite their relatively low grades. The high levels of emotional support and autonomy

they report coupled with the emphasis placed on moral and religious education may well have helped them to achieve this motivational profile. In contrast, the Southeast-Asian-American students appear to be suffering from learned helplessness, as evidenced in their relatively low scores on Persistence and Task Involvement. The strong pressures they feel to bring honor to their families, coupled with the relatively low levels of emotional support they report getting from their families and the relatively poor grades they are earning may be fueling this process. A focus on GPA alone would not have uncovered this significant difference in the how well the Southeast-Asian-American and Hispanic students were doing. And so, as college and university administrators address issues of student recruitment and retention, they would be well advised to continue to focus on parameters of campus climate, but they should also explore ways to take into consideration the dynamics and expectations set in motion by the on-going relationships their students have with their families.

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Author Notes

Portions of this research were funded by a grant from KPMG Peat Marwick through

the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business and the Association of American Colleges.

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