

Asian Americans as a model minority: self-perceptions and perceptions by other racial groups.

by Paul Wong, Chienping Faith Lai, Richard Nagasawa and Tieming Lin

A study was conducted on Asian Americans's self-perceptions and the perceptions of various racial groups on whether Asian Americans are a model minority. Perceptions examined involve expectations of future career success, preparedness for college and motivation. Results show that Asian Americans believe they are more prepared, motivated and are more likely to succeed than whites. Whites, Native Americans, Hispanics and African Americans also believe that Asian Americans are superior to whites in all three categories.

© COPYRIGHT 1998 Pacific Sociological Association

INTRODUCTION

For two decades, Asian Americans have been portrayed by the popular press and the media as a successful minority. Asian Americans are believed to enjoy extraordinary achievements in education, occupational upward mobility, rising income, and are problem-free in mental health and crime. Acclamation of Asian Americans as a model minority has become the dominant theme in media portrayal of Asian Americans since the middle 1960s. Most studies reported that both the media and the general public have perceived Asian Americans as a model minority on the basis of their educational attainment.

Some scholars have expressed, however, suspicion and concern for this image. In particular, they have explored the historical fluctuation of white Americans' perception of Asian Americans and attempted to construct historical and sociocultural explanations for the model minority image (Sue and Zane 1985; Osajima 1988; Suzuki 1989; Sue and Okazaki 1990; Reglin and Adams 1990; Ahn and Son 1991). In general, previous research about Asian Americans as a model minority have focused on the following issues: 1) testing the validity of the model minority image by examining the reality of Asian Americans' educational and occupational attainments; 2) accounting for the academic performance of Asian Americans with sociocultural factors; and 3) examining the social and psychological impact of those perceptions on Asian Americans.

Nevertheless, few studies have directly examined the link between the academic performance of Asian American students and the perception of them as a model minority. Specifically, no empirical research has been done regarding whether Asian Americans perceive themselves as a model minority and how they are perceived by other racial groups. This paper thus attempts to examine the minority image of Asian Americans, and how other racial groups perceive them. It intends to explore whether such a perception of Asian Americans is held by whites, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans themselves. The social and psychological impact of this perception on Asian American students will also be discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Image of Asian Americans as a Model Minority

The portrait of Asian Americans as a model minority appeared for the first time in the popular press in the early 1960s (Osajima 1988). Asian American scholars, e.g., Sue and Kitano (1973), Osajima (1988), Suzuki (1989), Hurh and Kim (1989), examined the social construction of this popular image and attempted to explain its emergence in association with sociocultural and historical changes. They postulated that this image was created as a product of the changing racial climate or as a result of the changing "moods or conditions of society rather than upon any real characteristics of the stereotyped group" (Sue and Kitano 1973). According to Sue and Kitano (1973), the model minority image only reflected a changing stereotyped image of Asian Americans. The unwarranted and stereotypical portrait of Asian Americans as an exemplary minority reflected the dominant-minority group social relationship, which has been viewed as both teleological and situational (Hurh and Kim 1989). It has served an instrumental function to "discredit the protests and demands for social justice of other minority groups" in the mid-1960s (Suzuki 1989). The model minority image has misled people to think of the alleged success story of Asian Americans as evidence of the triumph of meritocracy in American society (Osajima 1988). Suzuki (1989) indicated that college educators have ignored the real performances of Asian American

Asian Americans as a model minority: self-perceptions and perceptions by other racial groups.

students and continued to perceive these students by their hypothesized image from the mass media.

In studying the validity of the "successful" image of Asian Americans, Hurh and Kim (1989) focused on describing the discrepancies between the seemingly high achievements of Asian Americans and their enormous investment in the American labor market. Their investigation revealed that the "successful" minority image was invalid since the cost (investment) was not taken into consideration in the measurement of success. They indicated that Asian Americans on the average have a higher annual family income than whites. However, when adjusted to other factors, such as working hours, number of workers in the household, ethnic status, and education, the individual earnings ratio for Asian Americans, especially those who were foreign-born, were found to be lower than those of whites under the equivalent conditions of investment (Hurh and Kim 1989).

Academic Achievement of Asian American Students

The popular stereotypical perception of Asian Americans as a model minority has led many researchers to address the reality of the academic achievements of Asian American students. Many studies have used standard tests and school records, such as SAT, GPA, and other measures to compare the academic performance of Asian American students with non-Asian American students (Sue and Zane 1985; Hirschman and Wong 1986; Xu et al. 1993). Several studies have indicated that the outstanding academic performance of Asian American students might be attributed to their cultural and family values (Sue and Okazaki 1990; Fejgin 1995; Pang 1991; Reglin and Adams 1990).

Sue and Okazaki (1990) questioned the validity of the two hypotheses that were often used to account for Asian American academic success - hereditary differences in intelligence and Asian cultural values. Based on their in-depth examination of the cultural values of diverse ethnic groups, such as the Jewish middle-class values emphasizing thrift, sobriety, and ambition and the Chinese as well as Japanese values emphasizing hard work, family cohesion, patience, and group solidarity, they theorized that education was increasingly functional as a means for social mobility when other avenues were blocked, particularly with groups that were culturally oriented toward education. They rejected the hereditary intelligence hypothesis and critiqued the inadequacy of the cultural value hypothesis, since not all cultural elements can be considered as predictors of educational performance. Instead, they conceptualized the study by using the notion of relative functionalism as an alternative explanation of the achievements of Asian Americans.

Pang (1991) examined how parental and cultural values could affect the development of test and achievement anxiety. The findings indicated that Asian American middle school students reported significantly more test anxiety than white American students. Specifically, Asian American males experienced higher pressure to do well in school from parents than other groups. It indicated that Asian American children were more sensitive to please their parents than whites. Pang concluded that Asian American students may "mask feelings of depression, frustration, and desperation" in order to attend to parental expectations (Pang 1991).

Reglin and Adams (1990) used the concepts of helplessness and home influence as their analytical framework to examine the academic achievement of Asian-American high school students. The helplessness theory argues that "learned helplessness is a psychological state in which repeated failure to control the outcome of one situation induces a carryover of passivity and a depressed level of performance to a new situation." The home influence theory states that children of parents with high expectations do better than children of parents with low expectations (Mordkowitz and Ginsburg 1986). That is, Asian American students were hypothesized to be influenced more by their parents' desire to do well in school than other students. The findings confirmed this hypothesis by Reglin and Adams (1990).

A recent study suggested that three factors contribute to the academic excellence of Jewish and Asian American students: human capital family and/or cultural value, and predisposition (Fejgin 1995). In addition to the cultural value approach, Fejgin also took the socioeconomic approach to explain the high academic performance of both Jewish and Asian American students, which linked the parental education and income level with children's school achievement. It showed that parents' financial and human capitals and the cultural heritage of family and cultural values were translated into actions which helped both Jewish and Asian American students develop their own human capital, and contributed to their academic success (Fejgin 1995).

In comparing 1993 College Board SAT profile with 1992 and 1976 data, Hawkins (1993) found that SAT scores were

Asian Americans as a model minority: self-perceptions and perceptions by other racial groups.

related to the level of parents' education across all ethnic groups. He concluded that test scores such as SAT did not reflect true college success. His report showed that Asian Americans, whites, and other ethnic students had more opportunities than Hispanic and African American students to enroll in high schools which offered challenging curriculum and had rigorous academic standards. When socio-economic family background variables, such as family income and parents' education, were controlled, there was no significant difference between Asian American students and students of other ethnic backgrounds in their test scores (Hawkins 1993).

Social and Psychological Costs of Academic Achievement

Some studies revealed that the model minority image had a negative impact on Asian Americans' psychological well-being (Shih 1989; Hartman and Askounis 1989; Ahn and Son 1991; Sue and Okazaki 1990). Sue and Zane (1985) showed that recent immigrant Chinese students were significantly less happy than both American born Chinese and early immigrant Chinese. They concluded that for recent immigrant students, academic excellence had the following academic and psychological costs: studying longer hours, taking fewer courses, enduring feeling of loneliness and isolation, restricting one's career, and foregoing a social life in order to perform as well as other Chinese students. Leong's study (1991) indicated that Asian American students' career development and occupational values were significantly different from white American students. The findings showed that Asian American freshmen had developed less career maturity, were more dependent in decision-making styles, but they attached more values to occupational achievement than white American students.

Other Racial Groups' Perception of Asian Americans

Amidst the extensive attention given to the image of Asian Americans as a model minority, there has been surprisingly little systematic empirical evidence on the perceptions of other racial groups towards Asian Americans and their social interaction with Asian Americans. Thornton and Taylor (1988) measured the perceived closeness of Asian Americans by African-Americans, which by far was the only research that directly measured how Asian Americans were perceived by other ethnic groups. They considered the role of familiarity as a determinant of out-group perceptions and assumed that blacks perceptions of Asian Americans were dependent upon external boundaries of intergroup identification. Overall the results showed that black Americans in general did not feel close to Asian Americans.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

In general, stereotypes are impressions that members of one group have about members of another group. Stereotypes contain distortions and errors. They tend to perpetuate myths, but they also may contain an element of truth. In one sense, stereotypes are a kind of "shorthand" used to describe a group. It also encourages a homogeneous identity. The "model minority" stereotype given to Asian Americans is persuasive, for they have managed to achieve well-paying positions and higher socio-economic statuses through education and hard work despite bigotry and racism.

Model Minority Hypothesis: If the minority group exhibits middle class characteristics, and if the minority group attains some measure of success on its own without special programs or welfare, then the majority group will depict the minority group as a "model minority and view the group favorably."

The middle class characteristics in question include a strong work ethic, high achievement motivation, patience, discipline, respect for authority, and conformity. It is the case that Asian Americans tend to exhibit values and traits similar to the middle class and that, as a group, they tend to have high medium income, high educational attainment, low crime and welfare rates.

The stereotype of the model minority capitalizes the values of the middle class or "silent majority" for minority groups in society to assume. The assimilation model (Gordon 1964) suggests that minority group members who exist between two cultures are likely to be absorbed into the culture that is dominant or more desirable. Hence, minority group members who strongly identify with the majority group are doing so at the expense of denying their own ethnic identity. Sue and Sue (1973:115) state that "existing between the margin of two cultures, [the person] suffers from an identity crisis." For Asian Americans, the model minority stereotype transforms them into a "silent minority" that conforms to the norms and values of the majority group; and hence, under its control. The "success" of Asian Americans is often used indirectly to denigrate

Asian Americans as a model minority: self-perceptions and perceptions by other racial groups.

other people of color (Newsweek 1978; U.S. News & World Report 1966; Chan 1991). The implied question, of course, is: If this minority group can make it without welfare or special programs, why cannot other groups? Hence, if a group is unable to "make it," then the fault lies with the group. It is based on the egalitarian idea that anyone who makes the effort can achieve success (Chan 1991).

The model minority is also used by the white majority to neutralize social unrest by dissident minority groups in society. The "success" of the minority is offered as proof that the American dream of equal opportunity is valid for those who conform and who are willing to work hard. It follows, then, that the "model minority" label serves (1) to control minority groups in society, (2) to validate and reinforce the values of the white majority, and (3) to inform other minority groups that they too could achieve success if they conform to the values and norms of the middle class.

Diversity

The "model minority" status of Asian Americans is problematic for some of the Asian groups, for in spite of the assumption of homogeneity, among the Asian groups diversity exists - between and within groups. Numerous ethnic groups are subsumed under the Asian American label (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Cambodian, etc.). The model minority implies that Asians share fully in the American way of life in spite of their minority status in society. Even though the model minority stereotype may describe Asian Americans of higher socioeconomic status, it does not describe Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders who, for the most part, are poorly educated, underemployed, and trapped in low-paying menial jobs (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993, Table 5, pp. 141-175). As a result of the "success" of the model minority, these groups are often ignored or overlooked as regards public assistance programs.

Hence, the model minority creates a "silent minority" of middle class Asian Americans, and submerged within it is the "colonial model" which creates an "invisible" minority of lower class Southeast Asian/Pacific Islanders. In either case, Asian Americans are unable to escape the label of model minority.

Model Minority Myth. The model minority label suggests that Asian Americans conform to the norms of society, do well in school and careers, are hard working and self-sufficient. It follows that Asian Americans are a model for all groups, especially other minority groups. A closer look, however, uncovers serious problems. For if the model minority label accurately describes Asian American success, then they should compare favorably to whites on indicators of success. The "myth" of the model minority surfaces in academia and in industry. For example, Asian Americans are typically excluded from the executive ranks in the private and public sectors. In part, this is due to a discriminatory view that they are either content (i.e., "they never complain") or they are not suited for executive positions despite their education and abilities. Even though Asian Americans have invested highly in terms of human capital, their income returns are not in line with whites (Hirschman and Wong 1986; Hurh and Kim 1989). College admission policies also tend to discriminate against Asian Americans by imposing de facto quotas to limit the admission of Asian American students (Chang 1985; Ho and Chin 1983; Hsia 1988; Sue 1985). Therefore, contrary to the model minority belief, the facts suggest that it is more myth than reality (Sue 1985; Maritelli and Nagasawa 1987; Hsia 1988; The Economic 1989; Chan 1991).

Hypothesis: We may now state specific hypotheses, derived from the "model minority hypothesis," that relate to the purpose of this study:

1. If Asian Americans are viewed as the "model minority," then they will be perceived as highly motivated to do well at all levels of education.
2. If Asian Americans are viewed as the "model minority," they will be perceived as most likely to succeed in their chosen careers.
3. If Asian Americans are viewed as the "model minority," then they will be perceived as most likely to do well in college.
4. If the "model minority" label accurately describes Asian American success, then they will do better than other groups in college.

The hypotheses above will be used to guide the analysis of the data. The first three hypotheses are derived from the

Asian Americans as a model minority: self-perceptions and perceptions by other racial groups.

model minority hypothesis. The hypotheses relate to perceptions of Asian American students as a model minority. The fourth hypothesis is derived from the "model minority myth" hypothesis. It addresses actual behavior (academic performance) as measured by grade point averages.

METHOD

The sample consisted of 1,257 students who enrolled at the four Washington State University (WSU) campuses. In order to give adequate representation to five different racial and ethnic groups - Asian, African American, Native American, Hispanic, and white, a stratified random sample was drawn from the student database.

Telephone interviews were conducted by using the Microcomputer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (MATI) system. This system displays the survey questions on a computer monitor. The interviewer reads the survey script to the respondent, whose answers are entered directly into the microcomputer for data storage. The function of MATI system is to increase the accuracy of data collection by automatically branching to the sets of questions that fit the circumstances of a given respondent and prohibiting entry of illegitimate ranges of answers for each question.

The questionnaire for this study contained a total of seventy questions: two of which were open-ended and the rest of which were closed-ended. Most close-ended questions were four- to six-point Likert response scales. In addition to being compared on some background variables, these five race-ethnic groups were compared based on the major dependent variables listed as follows:

* Academic performance: Using white or Caucasian students as a reference group, these variables asked respondents to rate the academic performance of other racial and ethnic students compared to that of white students. In addition, SAT scores (verbal and quantitative), and students' cumulative grade-point average (GPA) were compared as well.

* Motivation to do well: These variables tested different racial and ethnic students' motivation to do well in college compared to that of white students. The rating scale consisted of: (1) much better, (2) a little better, (3) the same, (4) a little worse, and (5) much worse.

* Probability of success: These variables measured respondents' viewpoints about the probability that minority students will be successful in their careers after college compared to that the non-minority Caucasian students.

* Racial climate: This variable was derived from results of a factor analysis of the ratings for 9 statements, such as "There is a great deal of racism that is present but not heard." A five-point Likert response scale was used ranging from "(1) strongly disagree" to "(5) strongly agree." A high score on the racial climate index indicated liberal racial attitudes; a low score indicated conservative attitudes.

* Cultural diversity - this variable was constructed by averaging several questions together to form an index to measure the attitudes of respondents toward the learning of the history, culture, and social issues of different racial or ethnic groups.

* Willingness to learn cultural diversity - the respondents were asked about their willingness or the likelihood to learn in the classroom about each ethnic or minority groups, such as "Would you say you would like to learn nothing, a little, some, or a great deal about African Americans or blacks?"

* Racial discrimination - this variable measured respondents' experience of being discriminated by other student's faculty, university top administrators, or university staff because of their race or ethnicity.

* Interracial closeness - this variable was defined by respondents' personal interaction with a different race or ethnic background. For example, respondents were asked: "Do you have close friends who are Asian or Pacific Islander?" and "Have you ever dated a person who was of a different race than you?"

* Academically prepared: We asked the respondent, "how academically prepared were you compared to most students, when you first began attending the college, do you think you were...(1) more academically prepared than most, (2) about

Asian Americans as a model minority: self-perceptions and perceptions by other racial groups.

as prepared as most, or (3) not as prepared as most."

* Confidence to finish degree: This variable was measured by the question of how sure you are that you will stay on at college to finish your degree. The response scale ranges from "(1) very unsure" to "(4) very sure."

* Employed status: This variable was divided as "(1) employed full-time", "(2) employed part-time", and "(3) unemployed."

RESULTS

From the total of 1,257 students, 704 interviews were completed and 8 interviews were partially completed. Of the 704 completed interviews, 119 were Asian Americans, 125 African Americans, 126 Native Americans, 143 Hispanic origins, and 133 white Americans. Fifty-eight (58) respondents did not identify their race or ethnic origin.

Perceived Academic Performance

Table 1 presents data on the perceived academic performances of minority students on campus relative to that of non-minority students by the five racial and ethnic groups in the study. Using whites as the group of reference, we asked students to rate the academic performance of African American, Native American, Asian American, and Hispanic American students. For statistical purposes, an analysis of variance was employed to test the significance of between-group differences. The results show that all five racial and ethnic groups tend to perceive African Americans similarly in terms of their academic performances ($F = 1.11$, $p = 0.35$). The findings are similar for Native Americans and Hispanics (rows two to four). In fact, the five racial and ethnic groups did not differ significantly with respect to how they perceived the academic performances of minority students compared to that of non-minority students. However, students from the five racial and ethnic groups perceived the academic performance of Asian Americans as better than African Americans, Native Americans, or Hispanic Americans (third row). Even Asian Americans perceived themselves to be superior to other minority and non-minority groups in terms of academic performance. The findings in Table 1 are thus compatible with the model minority hypothesis.

Perceived Motivation to do Well in College

The data in Table 2 are also consistent with the model minority hypothesis. The findings suggest that students, regardless of race or ethnic origin, did not differ [TABULAR DATA FOR TABLE 1 OMITTED] [TABULAR DATA FOR TABLE 2 OMITTED] [TABULAR DATA FOR TABLE 3 OMITTED] significantly in their perceptions of Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, and African Americans' motivation to do well in college compared to that of white Americans (first, second, and fourth rows). However, the findings also indicate that the students from the various racial and ethnic groups tend to perceive Asian Americans as significantly more motivated to do well in college than the other groups (p [less than] .001). This holds for Asian Americans as well. In addition, the data also tend to support the model minority hypothesis.

Perceived Probability of Success in Careers

Table 3 presents the data on the perceived likelihood of success in careers by race and ethnicity. The findings show that, except for Asian Americans, the racial and ethnic groups did not differ significantly in their perception of the likelihood of minority students' success in careers. The Asian Americans were perceived as the most likely to succeed in careers (p [less than] .001). Certainly, the model minority label given to Asian Americans is persuasive. Even Asian American students have adopted the model minority label.

Summary of Paired Comparisons

Table 4 gives a summary of the paired comparisons (Asian Americans with other minority groups in the study) relative to academic performance, motivation to do well, and likelihood of success in careers. For this purpose, the difference [TABULAR DATA FOR TABLE 4 OMITTED] [TABULAR DATA FOR TABLE 5 OMITTED] [TABULAR DATA FOR TABLE 6 OMITTED] between the means of the pairs and t-values are given by racial and ethnic groups in the table. It can be seen that the five racial and ethnic groups did not differ in their perceptions of Asian Americans. The results show that the groups consistently rated Asian Americans better than other minority groups on the three model minority items. In this

Asian Americans as a model minority: self-perceptions and perceptions by other racial groups.

sense, the Asian American students are viewed as the model minority on campus. The Asian American students also view themselves as "better" than others. Hence, it can be said that they too have "bought" the idea of the model minority.

Actual Performance

The question is raised: If Asian Americans are viewed as the model minority, does it carry over to actual performance? i.e., will they out-perform other groups as the hypothesis implies? Table 5, 6, and 7 present data related to actual GPA and SAT scores by race and ethnicity (Table 5); selected majors by race and ethnicity (Table 6); and GPA and major by race and ethnicity (Table 7). The model minority hypothesis implies that Asian American students will do "better" than other groups in college. Let us now turn to the actual performances of the students in terms of test scores.

If the model minority hypothesis is correct, then we should observe Asian American students' GPA and SAT scores to be significantly higher than students from the other minority groups. On the other hand, it has been argued that the model is more myth than reality. Thus, if the scores do not differ, the data will then question the model minority hypothesis and offer direct empirical evidence for the "model minority myth" hypothesis.

It can be seen in Table 5 that the GPA and SAT scores of Asian Americans do not differ significantly from the scores of other race and ethnic groups. Even though their scores were the highest relative to the others in the SAT quantitative category, the differences were not statistically significant, except in the African American comparison. The emerging pattern was that African Americans' scores were lower than other racial and ethnic groups on overall GPA, semester GPA, and SAT verbal scores. The results clearly favor the "myth hypothesis" and cast serious doubt on the model minority hypothesis as it relates to the actual performance of Asian American students.

In the choice of major fields, Asian Americans are known to select majors in science and engineering. The Liberal Arts curricula require verbal skills which are more difficult for Asians due to their more recent immigrant history (Chan 1991). Indeed, Table 6 shows that more Asian Americans major in sciences and engineering than the other groups (41%), but not significantly higher than white Americans (40%), Native Americans (36%), and Hispanics(36%). Even so, the findings suggest that Asian American students tend to favor sciences and engineering as major fields of study.

Table 7 provides a more refined analysis of the data. It offers data that compare major by mean GPA for the five race and ethnic groups. Except for the data that include African Americans, the groups did not differ significantly in the comparison by major and mean GPA. For science and engineering majors, white Americans differ significantly from African Americans ($p < .05$).

[TABULAR DATA FOR TABLE 7 OMITTED]

[TABULAR DATA FOR TABLE 8 OMITTED]

[TABULAR DATA FOR TABLE 9 OMITTED]

Academic Preparation

Table 8 compares the students' perception of academic preparation by race and ethnicity. The findings suggest that Asian American students are no more academically prepared than other minority and non-minority students. Hence, the belief that the model minority tends to be more academically prepared than other students is not embraced.

Table 9 presents standardized regression coefficients of five independent variables on the three perception variables that bear on Asian Americans. The first row of Table 9 indicates that only GPA and the racial climate have significant effects on the perception of Asian Americans ($p < .05$). It is interesting to note that the more liberal students feel about the racial climate, the less likely they will perceive Asian Americans as the model minority ($p < .05$). Moreover, the students who said they would like to learn more about other ethnic or minority groups in the classroom, were more inclined to interact with Asian Americans ($p < .05$). The view toward racial climate on campus also affects the perception of Asian Americans and African Americans. In other words, the more diverse and open students view the racial climate, the less the difference they perceive the two groups to be in terms of academic performance ($p < .01$).

Asian Americans as a model minority: self-perceptions and perceptions by other racial groups.

Table 10 exhibits the results of the regression analysis of the effects of academically preparation, confidence to complete degree, employed status, and race/ethnicity on the dependent variable, GPA. Holding race/ethnicity constant, the three other independent variables had a significant impact on GPA ($F = 29.24$, p [less than] .001). Hence, students who were academically prepared, confident about completing their degree, and who did not work, were more likely to have higher GPAs than students who were not academically prepared, had less confidence in finishing their degree, and who had jobs.

Finally, the results in Table 11 show the impact of academic preparation, confidence to complete degree, and employed status on GPA by race/ethnicity. It is clear that perceived academic preparation, regardless of race/ethnicity, significantly affected GPAs. Curiously, the confidence to finish the degree significantly predicted GPA only for Asian Americans (p [less than] .01). The variable, employed status, had no effect on the GPAs.

[TABULAR DATA FOR TABLE 10 OMITTED]

[TABULAR DATA FOR TABLE 11 OMITTED]

In this study, Asian Americans perceived themselves as more prepared, motivated, and more likely to have higher career success than whites. In addition, the perceptions that Asian Americans were superior to whites in those three areas were shared by whites, African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans, which confirmed the first three hypotheses on the above. This lends empirical support to anecdotal and journalistic accounts about Asian Americans as a model minority.

From a cognitive point of view, a stereotype is usually characterized as a set of traits that describes a social group (Ashmore and Del Boca 1981). Although stereotypes are usually overgeneralized and widely accepted, they tend to be inconsistent with reality. The findings of this study also question the model minority stereotype that portrays Asian American students as high achievers in terms of grades in college and SAT scores. In actual fact at the university where the survey was conducted, they perform no better than other groups on the indicators of academic performance used in this study. It is thus unfair to expect Asian American students as a group to perform as implied under the model minority label. The fact that Asian American students also perceive themselves as the model minority only makes it more problematic because it may have serious consequences for those students who "bought into" the model minority belief and who as a result strive to "keep up" the "good student" image. Failure to maintain "good grades" may thus affect his or her self-esteem as well as how others are likely to perceive him or her as a person.

Hence, educators must be cognizant of the "myth" of the model minority and discard the model minority stereotype to describe Asian American students. For example, Asian American students have been unfairly portrayed as being too narrowly focused on academic achievement. Doubtless, the popular stereotype perception of Asian Americans as a model minority has some support in empirical evidence. It would be interesting to see if different racial and ethnic groups are aware of the diversity of Asian Americans in terms of socioeconomic status, citizenship, and other variables. This study did not include items which deal with the perceptions of differences within the Asian American "pan-ethnic" group.

Even so, our data suggest caution in that label of "model minority" does not mean that the behavior implied by the stereotype follows. For once a stereotype about Asian Americans has been adopted, a wide variety of evidence can be generated in support of that stereotype. Some inevitable cognitive biases may result because of limited knowledge about the target group. Many Asian American communities have been concerned that the widely publicized success of some students overshadows the struggle of other Asian Americans. While some Asian Americans are well-established in American society, many others are having a very difficult time - especially recent immigrants. The model minority stereotype has fostered an attitude among the general public and policy makers that affirmative action need not include APIs. The most serious casualties of this model minority stereotype are the Southeast Asian groups and the Pacific Islanders. More generally, new immigrants from all the groups are facing increasing difficulties in their socioeconomic adaptation in American society in the context of the rise of anti-immigrant sentiments in a number of states such as the passage of Proposition 187 in California in 1994.1

In this study, we have focused on one stereotype and confirmed that Asian Americans were indeed regarded as academically superior by all racial groups including themselves, in spite of the evidence showing that there was no significant difference between the racial groups in this sample. Further research is needed to examine the stereotype

Asian Americans as a model minority: self-perceptions and perceptions by other racial groups.

about Asian American deficiency in their motivation, preparation and skills for administrative and executive positions in academia and other sectors of the American economy.

APPENDIX A

Variable Definition	Coding Scheme
Racial climate	Nine-item factor scale, (see Appendix B for items).
Academic performance	Five-point scale: 1 = "much worse," to 5 = "much better," by using whites as the reference group.
GPA	cumulative grade point average
SAT scores (verbal &	Average SAT of entering freshmen

quantitative)

Motivation to do well	Five-point scale: 1 = "much worse," to 5 = "much better," by using whites as the reference group.
Probability of success	Five-point scale: 1 = "much worse," to 5 = "much better," by using whites as the reference group.
Cultural diversity	Four-point scale: 1 = "nothing," to 4 = "a great deal."
Willingness to learn cultural diversity	Four-point scale: 1 = "nothing," to 4 = "a great deal."
Racial discrimination	Five-point scale: 1 = "never," to 5 = "very often."
Interracial closeness	Dichotomous: 1 = "no"; 2 = "yes."
Academically prepared	Three-point scale: 1 = "more prepared than most," to 3 = "not as prepared as most."
Confidence to finish	Four-point scale: 1 = "very unsure," to 4 = degree "very sure."
Employed status	Three-point scale: 1 = "employed full-time," 2 = "employed part-time," 3 = "unemployed."
Major	Five-point scale: 1 = "Agriculture & others," 2 = "Business & Economics," 3 = "Education," 4 = "Engineer & Sciences," 5 = "Liberal Arts."

APPENDIX B

Items Constituting Factor Scales

Racial Climate Factor

(Statements about racial diversity at WSU)(*)

WSU does a good job in recruiting minority students.

WSU does a good job of retaining minority students.

WSU faculty and staff are racially sensitive in working with minority students.

Complaints about racial discrimination are taken seriously by the administration.

- Reprinted with permission. Additional copying is prohibited. -

Asian Americans as a model minority: self-perceptions and perceptions by other racial groups.

Residence Life & Housing is sensitive to the needs of minority students.

There is a great deal of racism that is present but not heard.

WSU has achieved a positive climate for diversity.

In order to "fit in" you often feel a need to change some of your personal characteristics such as dress or language.

The relations between minority students and the local community are positive.

Note: * Correlation coefficient, [Alpha] = .81. Five-point scale: 1 = "Strongly agree" to 4 = "Strongly disagree" (reversed for analyses).

NOTE

1. In terms of educational achievement, it is worth noting that when the data on Ph.D. production among APIs were disaggregated by citizenship, the rate per 100,000 for APIs was 8.6 as compared to 10.4 for whites in 1989 (Wong 1996). More recent data revealed that the disparity between API citizens and whites in Ph.D. production persists. However, when Ph.D. production among APIs was aggregated irrespective of citizenship status, the rate per 100,000 was 70.8 in 1989, as compared to 11.6 for whites (Wong 1996). This latter figure would give the appearance that APIs were indeed a model minority in academic achievement at the level of doctoral completion. It has been noted by Hsia that, among Asian Americans, between 1936 and 1978, in the science and engineering fields, the foreign-born outnumbered the native-born 11 to 1 in Ph.D. production (Hsia 1988:160-161). Together, Asian Americans constituted 6.6% of all science and engineering doctorates earned during the 43-year interval, but the native-born were only 0.6% of the total. From 1936 to 1949, native-born Asian Americans earned about 0.2% of the science and engineering Ph.D.s (Hsia 1988:161). Asians were about 0.4% of the population in the 1940 and 1950 censuses. Between 1950 and 1959, native-born Asian Americans earned 0.5% of the science and engineering doctorates, about the same as the proportions of Asians in the total United States population in 1960. The 1970 census indicated that about 0.7% of Americans were Asian. Asian Americans who earned their science and engineering doctorates during the 1960-1969 interval were 0.7% of the total. Only 0.5% of the 1970-1979 Asian American science and engineering doctorates were native-born, while Asians had risen to about 1.6% of the U.S. population in the 1980 census (Hsia 1988:161).

It is important to examine if the general public in the United States and policy makers distinguish APIs as to whether they are native-born, immigrants, or foreign students. In this respect, the facts would seem to support the stereotype of Asian Americans as a model minority if the native-born were not separated from the foreign-born in educational statistics. Indeed, at the institutional level, at many research universities, APIs irrespective of nativity would seem to be "over-represented" in a number of fields and especially in the graduate programs. The foreign students who are studying in the United States as a result of "brain-drain" or "brain-flow" may be perceived as part of the API population. If the model minority stereotype seems to be supported by distorted perceptions of facts, then the mixing of all APIs irrespective of nativity and citizenship into one group certainly would contribute to this confusion. In fact, in terms of Ph.D. production per 100,000 population in 1990, for the native-born, only the Chinese (552) and Japanese (582) among the API groups have rates of doctoral production higher than the figure (425) for the U.S. population as a whole (Wong 1996).

In sum, the model minority stereotype remains problematic for Asian Americans. The extant studies strongly suggest that Asian Americans continue to face inequities in income and employment. In academia, the stereotype of Asian Americans as a model minority has not led to a reduction in their disparate under-representation in the administrative and executive ranks of their universities. In 1981, the ratio of API in faculty ranks versus those in administrative/executive ranks was 17.1 to 1, as compared to 4.4 to 1 for whites, 2.3 to 1 for Blacks, 3.8 to 1 for Hispanics, and 3.0 to 1 for American Indians among males (Wong 1996). Among females, the ratio was 6.8 to 1 for APIs as compared to 3.7 to 1 for all females. The 1991 figures confirmed that the disparate under-representation of APIs in administrative/executive positions remained virtually the same as in 1981. In this respect, one stereotype about Asian American academic motivation, achievement, and career success appears to be in contradiction with another stereotype which sees Asian Americans as quiet, unassertive and not suited to perform managerial or executive functions in academia and, perhaps, in other occupations and industries as well. A National Science Foundation survey conducted in 1982, with a national sample of 88,000, found

Asian Americans as a model minority: self-perceptions and perceptions by other racial groups.

that Asian Americans were significantly less likely to hold administrative positions as supervisors, middle managers, and executives (Wong and Nagasawa 1994:4). Perceiving a glass ceiling on their mobility to achieve administrative status, many Asian Americans avoid the uncertainty of seeking an administrative career and concentrate on gaining more job security by technical accomplishments. based on the stereotype that Asian Americans tend to be deficient in the attributes and skills for administrative positions, employers may exclude them as potential candidates for those positions.

REFERENCES

- Aim Toupin, Elizabeth S. W. and Linda Son. 1991. "Preliminary Findings on Asian Americans: 'The Model Minority' in a Small Private East Coast College." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 22:403-417.
- "America's Asians: The Glass Ceiling" *The Economist* (June 3, 1989), pp.23-26.
- "Asian Americans: A 'Model Minority'," *Newsweek* (December 6, 1978).
- Asmore, R.D. and F.K. Del Boca. 1988. "Conceptual Approaches to Stereotypes and Stereotyping," pp. 1-35 in *Cognitive Processes in Stereotyping and Intergroup Behavior*, edited by D.L. Hamilton. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Chan, Sucheng. 1991. *Asian Californians*. San Francisco, CA: MTL/Boyd & Frazer.
- Chang, L.S. 1985. "Yale Dean Defends Policy on Asian Americans" *Black Issues in Higher Education*: 6.
- Divoky, Diane, 1990. "The Model Minority Goes to School." *Phi Delta Kappa* 70: 219-222.
- Fejgin, Naomi. 1995. "Factors Contributing to the Academic Excellence of American Jewish and Asian Students." *Sociology of Education* 68:18-30.
- Gordon, Milton. 1964. *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hartman, Joan S. & Anna C. Askounis. 1989. "Asian-American Students: Are They Really a 'Model Minority'?" *The School Counselor* 37:109-112.
- Hawkins, B. Denise. 1993. "Socio-economic Family Background Still a Significant Influence on SAT Scores." *Black Issues in Higher Education* September, pp. 14-16.
- Hirschman, Charles & Morrison G. Wong. 1986. "The Extraordinary Educational Attainment of Asian-Americans: A Search for Historical Evidence and Explanations." *Social Forces* 65:1-27.
- Ho, D. and M. Chin. 1983. "Admission Impossible" *Bridge* 51:7-8.
- Hsia, Jayjia. 1988. *Asian Americans in Higher Education and at Work*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Hu, Arthur. 1989. "Asian Americans: Model Minority or Double Minority?" *Amerasia Journal* 15:243-257.
- Hurh, Won Moo and Kwang Chung Kim. 1989. "The 'Success' Image of Asian Americans: It's Validity, and its Practical and Theoretical Implications." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 12:514-561.
- Jiobu, Robert M. 1988. *Ethnicity and Assimilation: Blacks, Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese, Koreans, Mexicans, Vietnamese, and Whites*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Leong, Frederick T. 1991. "Career Development Attributes and Occupational Values of Asian American and White American College Students." *The Career Development Quarterly* 39:221-230.

Asian Americans as a model minority: self-perceptions and perceptions by other racial groups.

- Maritinelli, Phylis and Richard Nagasawa. 1987. "A Further Test of the Model Minority Thesis: Japanese Americans in a Sunbelt State" *Sociological Perspective* 30:266-288.
- Mordkowitz, Elliot R. and Herbert P. Ginsburg. 1986. "Early Academic Socialization of Successful Asian-American College Students." Portions of this paper were presented at the Annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association.
- Osajima, Keith. 1988. "Asian Americans as the Model Minority: An Analysis of the Popular Press Image in the 1960s and 1980s," pp. 165-174 in *Reflections on Shattered Windows*. Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press.
- Pang, Valerie O. 1991. "The Relationship of Test Anxiety and Math Achievement to Parental Values in Asian-American and European-American Middle School Students." *Journal of Research and Development in Education* 24:1-10.
- Peng, Samuel and Deeann Wright. 1994. "Explanation of Academic Achievement of Asian American Students." *Journal of Educational Research* 87:346-352.
- Reglin, Gary L. and Dale R. Adams. 1990. "Why Asian-American High School Students Have Higher Grade Point Averages and SAT Scores Than Other High School Students." *The High School Journal* Feb./March: 143-149.
- Shih, Frank H. 1989. "Asian-American Students: The Myth of a Model Minority." *Chinese American Forum* 4:9-11.
- "Success Story of One Minority Group in the U.S." *U.S. News and World Report* (December 26, 1966).
- Sue, Stanley and Harry H. L. Kitano. 1973. "Stereotypes as a Measure of Success." *Journal of Social Issues* 29:83-98.
- Sue, Stanley and Derald Sue. 1973. "Chinese-American Personality and Mental Health," pp. 111-123 in *Asian Americans: Psychological Perspectives* edited by Stanley Sue and N.N. Wagner. Science and Behavior Books.
- Sue, Stanley. 1985. "Asian American and Educational Pursuits: Are the Doors Beginning to Close?" *Asian American Psychological Association Journal* Spring:16-19.
- Sue, Stanley and N. Zane. 1985. "Academic Achievement and Socioemotional Adjustment among Chinese University Students." *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 32:570-579.
- Sue, Stanley and Sumei Okazaki. 1990. "Asian-American Educational Achievements: A Phenomenon in Search of an Explanation." *American Psychologist* 45:913-920.
- Suzuki, Bob H. 1989. "Asian-American as the Model Minority." *Change* November, pp. 13-19.
- Thornton, Michael C. and Robert J. Taylor. 1988. "Intergroup Attitudes: Black American Perceptions of Asian Americans." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 11:474-488.
- Xu, Gang, J. J. Veloski, M. Hojat, J.S. Gonnella, and B. Bacharach. 1993. "Longitudinal Comparison of the Academic Performances of Asian-American and White Medical Students." *Academic Medicine* 68:82-86.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1993. *1990 Census of Population: Asian and Pacific Islanders in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Wong, Paul and Richard Nagasawa. 1991. "Asian American Scientists and Engineers: Is There a Glass Ceiling for Career Advancement?" *Chinese American Forum* 6:3-6.
- Wong, Paul, 1996. "National Trends on the Status of Asian/Pacific Americans in Higher Education from the 1930's to the 1990's: Some Surprising and Not-So-Surprising Findings." Paper presented at the Ninth Conference of Asian and Pacific Americans in Higher Education, San Francisco, March 8-10.

Asian Americans as a model minority: self-perceptions and perceptions by other racial groups.

Paul Wong is associate provost of Colorado State University. He is concurrently the director of the Center for the Applied Studies of American Ethnicity and a professor of sociology. His research interests include race/ethnicity, policy analysis, research methods, and Asian studies. He received a Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley.

Faith Lai is a post-doctoral fellow in the Department of Psychology, University of Idaho. She earned her Ph.D. from Washington State University. She is doing research on immigration, race and ethnicity.

Richard Nagasawa is director of graduate studies and a professor of sociology at Arizona State University. He earned his Ph.D. from the University of Washington. He has published works include formal theories, criminology, race/ethnicity, small groups, and the sociology of fashions.

Tieming Lim recently completed his M.A. degree in sociology at Washington State University. He is interested in culture and health behavior.