

10-2021

Uncovering the Model Minority Narrative: A Case Study on Asian American Students in High-Achieving Schools

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Recommended Citation

Choi, Joanne, "Uncovering the Model Minority Narrative: A Case Study on Asian American Students in High-Achieving Schools" (2021). *NERA Conference Proceedings 2021*. 12.
<https://opencommons.uconn.edu/nera-2021/12>

Uncovering the Model Minority Narrative:
A Case Study on Asian American Students in High-Achieving Schools

INTRODUCTION:

As a secondary student of Asian descent, I attended a nationally ranked, high-performing secondary high school that was awarded a Blue Ribbon School Award of Excellence by the United States Department of Education, which is the highest accolade a school in the United States can earn. My secondary school had a large representation of minority students, the majority of which was Asian, who were predominantly enrolled in advanced coursework, excelled academically, and were among the highest ranked students in each graduating class.

From the perspective of a secondary student, I noticed that despite the external appearance of unperturbed achievement, my academically high-achieving classmates of Asian descent often concealed struggles that went unnoticed or even unacknowledged by our educators and administrators. I understood that many of my Asian American classmates had difficulty inquiring for help, and they perceived that their struggles were invisibilized and apparently unnoticed by their teachers. Some of my highest-performing classmates indicated that meeting such excessive academic expectations yielded a severe toll on their psychological and physiological health in the form of mental illness, debilitating stress, heightened anxiety, and decreased self-esteem.

Upon beginning my coursework at Teachers College, I was placed as a ninth grade student teacher at two of the highest-achieving, most competitive secondary schools in the tri-state area, Stuyvesant High School and Bergen County Academies. As an educator responsible for teaching predominantly Asian American students, I was moved to reflect on my own former experience as an Asian American student in a high-achieving secondary school. As a

secondary student, I did not consider that my positionality as a student of color could correlate with or detrimentally affect my academic performance. I had unknowingly separated my identity as a high-achieving student in a competitive school from my identity as an individual of Korean American descent. However, as an educator, I sought to better understand the perspectives and potential challenges facing my Asian American students to thoughtfully implement culturally responsive pedagogical approaches into my classroom.

My pupils at Stuyvesant High School and Bergen County Academies produce exemplary academic outcomes, as evidenced by performance on standardized tests and acceptance to the nation's most prestigious universities. Both schools are consistently ranked among the most competitive, high-achieving secondary schools in New York City and New Jersey, respectively, and have a majority representation of minority students in their student bodies, as Asian American students represent 73% of Stuyvesant's student body and 54% of Bergen County Academies'.

Hence, I understood that my position as an educator was unique: as an Asian American teacher with a similar educational background as many of my students, I assumed personal initiative in understanding and addressing the potential educational challenges facing my Asian American students from a stance of empathy, concern, and past experience to promote a more inclusive, culturally responsive classroom.

WONDERING:

As the tenets of tolerance and social justice are deeply embedded into my pedagogical approach, I sought foremost to ascertain how I could make my learning environment more non-discriminatory and inclusive for all students, especially high performers of Asian American

descent. Throughout my coursework in English Education at Teachers College, I have had the opportunity to comprehensively discuss issues such as racial discrimination and injustice as it pertains to classroom teaching as well as to consider deeply and internalize theories about Critical Race Theory, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, student-centered instruction, and intersectionality (particularly between teaching and ethnicity/race). Consequently, as a teacher-researcher, I have been compelled to specifically consider the effect that school culture, ethnicity/race, and ethnographic background may have on my students' academic performance and educational experiences. In response to what I have learned at Teachers College regarding adapting culturally responsive pedagogical approaches to effectively and equitably teach students of color, I sought through my research to understand how to address educational challenges facing Asian American students by adapting the theoretical approaches of multiple educational theorists.

My line of inquiry and wonderings have culminated into the following research questions:

- What are areas of deficit or educational challenges of Asian American students in high-achieving secondary schools which may affect their academic performance?
- What role does ethnographic background, familial upbringing, and home life have in developing educational challenges facing Asian American students in high-achieving secondary schools?
- Does the “Model Minority Myth” perpetuate racism and discrimination towards Asian American students and/or the loss of cultural identity and individuality in the classroom?

- How can teachers create non-discriminatory, inclusive educational spaces to accommodate Asian American students by developing culturally responsive pedagogical approaches and classroom practices?

ASSUMPTIONS:

Throughout the evolution of my inquiry project, I have considered possible assumptions existing within my questions, data collection methodologies and data evaluation. After careful self-reflection, I identified several possible assumptions existing within the survey and interview questions I administered to students during this study, which are indicated below:

- Students are fairly knowledgeable about the implications of the high-achieving stereotype for Asian Americans (“Model Minority Myth”) and are able to comprehensively discuss the concept and its relevance to their educational experiences in a thoughtful, reflective manner.
- Students possess the ability to reflect metacognitively about their educational experiences to respond to survey questions in an accurate and unbiased manner, and students are not entirely skewed in their self-perceptions, which may compromise the objectivity and validity of their responses.
- Students exhibit self-awareness and willingness to acknowledge and identify the areas of deficit and educational challenges they might be experiencing in the classroom.
- Students are able to contextualize, define and describe the conditions of an “ideal” learning environment, whether real or imagined.

I identified additional possible assumptions transcribed within the data collection methodologies and approaches which I incorporated throughout this study, which are depicted below:

- The data produced by students during the study was not affected by the wording or phrasing of the survey and interview questions.
- Adapting culturally responsive pedagogical approaches and considering the role of Critical Race Theory in education is an (but not necessarily only) appropriate approach to address areas of deficit experienced by Asian American students.
- Students conveyed honest and accurate reflections about their experiences as Asian American students, particularly regarding potentially sensitive topics such as previous educational experiences in the classroom, ethnographic and socioeconomic background, familial/parental upbringing, and previous experiences with racial discrimination.
- To an extent, teachers possess responsibility for addressing educational challenges facing their students through differentiated pedagogical theories and methodologies. They are responsible for considering multiple factors of their students' experiences such as, but not limited to, psychological wellness, physiological health, cultural adaptation to various learning environments, and conditions of family life.

Finally, I identified possible assumptions embedded within my interpretation of the data findings produced during this study, which are provided below

- I acknowledge that my interpretation of data may be informed or affected by my experience as an Asian American student who formerly attended a high-achieving secondary school and by my perceptions of the challenges facing Asian American secondary students. However, I acknowledge that my experience could be different from

that of my current students and the possible invalidity/subjectivity of any previously made generalizations.

- I am aware of my positionality as an individual of Asian descent who may have internalized assumptions perpetuated by the implementation of the “Model Minority Myth” throughout my own educational experiences as a former secondary student. The objectivity of my own beliefs about myself as an Asian American educator and former secondary student, as well as about my Asian American students, may be affected or biased by implications and messages perpetuated by the media and in greater society.
- My interpretation of the data relies on my assumption that to an extent, it is important to examine the correlation, if not causality, between the educational challenges facing my Asian American students and the role of ethnicity/race in the perpetuation of the “Model Minority Myth”. However, in order to validate this assumption, I also acknowledge the importance of considering additional factors leading to multiple sources of causation, such as students’ medical or family background, predisposition to mental illness, socioeconomic status and income level, and geographic/cultural area of origin in producing these aforementioned educational challenges. My acknowledgement of the possibility of multiple sources of causation may yield a more comprehensive understanding and help eliminate the possibility of misleading correlations.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Within the field of education, Critical Race Theory aims to counter dominant racial ideologies and racist modes of thought. Critical Race Theory is often also used to target deficit-based and stereotypical thinking about racial issues. Specifically, the theory strives to

validate the various, diverse experiences of students of color in an overarching sense to promote a greater sense of legitimacy and social acceptance. Scholars who study Critical Race Theory attempt to specifically uncover the narratives of people of color through various modes such as verbal/oral history and counter storytelling in order to further validate the voices of minority groups marginalized from majority conversation.

According to Tracy Lachica Buenavista, Uma M. Jayakumar, and Kimberly Misa-Escalante in “Contextualizing Asian American Education Through Critical Race Theory: An Example of U.S. Pilipino College Student Experiences”, Asians frequently suffer from a lack of support from their educational institutions and are often excluded from specified outreach efforts. As “liminal whites”, a concept which internalization of may result in the loss of cultural identity, Asians are not deemed minorities in the sense of requiring additional institutional support. However, as minority students, they are still subjected to barriers facing students of color and are not granted full acceptance as people of color, yet do not obtain the privilege of Caucasians. Thus, Asians are often considered “in between” in the sense of being neither fully a minority group needing additional resources nor privileged members of the dominant culture. In a research case study featured in the article, one Asian student in an educational setting expressed feeling, paraphrased, “like an invisible minority on campus who is not eligible for university assistance because Asians do not count as majorities”. Other students who participated in the study, as cited in the article, shared that their institutions lack awareness of students’ lived experiences in terms of relationships, sources of stress, and home lives. Hence, the “Model Minority Myth” is particularly damaging, as it silos Asian students into the singular narrative of success in educational institutions, which implies little to no need for additional attention, support or resources.

In “Parental Influence on Asian Americans’ Educational and Vocational Outcomes”, Donna Poon indicates that Asians who immigrate to the United States seek financial stability and subsequently “project their personal aspirations onto their children by ensuring their children’s academic success to the best of their ability” (Yang, 2007). Hence, the children of these immigrants experience pressures to maintain high expectations of their parents to achieve academic and financial success. Poon also indicates that the role of the family bears exceptional significance in Asian culture, as “filial piety and interdependence are demonstrated through family cohesion in most Asian American households” (Chao and Tseng, 2002). Consequently, Asian American children of immigrant parents pursue academic and professional pathways corresponding with financial success which may not be aligned with their own interests in order to appease their parents’ or family’s expectations of success. Hence, Asian American students’ motivation for doing well in school is largely to obtain “a steady job as compensation for their parents’ sacrifices and financial difficulties as first-generation immigrants” (Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002).

The incorporation of Asian Americans into mainstream culture as well as broader conversations about race have generally been in the context of their above average performance and intelligence. In “Smartness as Cultural Wealth: An AsianCrit Counterstory”, Lan Kolano indicates that Asians have a dual identity in the United States: simultaneously as a “model minority” and a “perpetual foreigner” (Kolano 1150). The various Asian ethnic/racial groups are often enmeshed and described as a homogeneous identity of high achievement characterized singularly as “Asian”, despite the existence of multiple Asian ethnic/racial groups who may be underachieving or struggling socially and academically. Consequently, Kolano indicates, the unique, heterogeneous narratives of Asians become deindividualized and consequently less

visible, resulting in what is referred to as “the single model minority narrative” or the particularly misleading implication of “sameness” of Asian identity. However, the “model minority” identity promotes the false illusion of homogeneity and eliminates diversity within the minority group. Homogenizing the unique backgrounds and experiences of all Asians into one identity strips individuals of their respective identities and cultures to further perpetuate the dominance of Caucasians in the United States. Furthermore, Asians often compromise their intrinsic cultural, ethnographic, and linguistic backgrounds in the pursuit of obtaining power and privilege, as they struggle to juggle multiple identities and cultural/societal expectations. Consequently, as minorities, Asian students experience identity dissonance which can be damaging to their home lives, communities and families. A consequence of internalizing racism is experiencing feelings of shame and inferiority, a lack of acceptance for one’s ethnographic, cultural, and linguistic origin, and difficulty with self-perception and identity formation in early developmental stages. Internalization of racism and harmful stereotypes of the mainstream culture is especially dangerous if minority students question their self-worth in the context of a dominant society promoting white superiority. Kolano indicates that when minorities are excluded from the majority culture, they resort to acquiring certain elements utilized by the dominant group such as language and culture. Acquisition of such components can propel an otherwise marginalized ethnic/racial group into a position of privilege and power. Hence, the existence of such mannerisms and necessary behavioral decorum results in a “culture of power”, and non-dominant groups may increase the probability of access to this culture through adaptation and awareness of this behavioral decorum. Such access provides a rationale for the extent to which minority groups are academically and socially distinguishable. Kolano asserts that Asian Americans gain access to the culture of power through education, as “smartness” as a social

attribute is implied to be inherently Caucasian. Students who are disadvantaged in the sense of lacking social capital or awareness are required to learn to navigate the school context in order to gain success. To obtain success, Asians tend to mirror the academic, organizational, and social behaviors of their Caucasian counterparts, exemplifying “smartness” through high academic performance.

The authors of the sources depicted in my literature review propose several approaches to better comprehend and address discrimination in learning spaces, such as legitimizing students’ unique forms of experiential awareness and enabling “counter-storytelling” by the vocalization of narratives which are often excluded from the majority. Implications for educators include a greater recognition of the need to address harmful biases and power dynamics which may prevent them from truly “seeing”, or recognizing and accepting, students.

Sources’ Connection to Personal Experiences

According to “Parental Influence on Asian Americans’ Educational and Vocational Outcomes”, current studies confirm that the academic pursuits and occupations of individuals of Asian descent are largely represented in fields related to science and mathematics but less represented in the humanities and social sciences. Based on my interactions with and responses from surveys/interviews with current Asian American students in high-achieving schools, I have noticed that Asian American students express that they have been pressured to pursue careers and postsecondary academic disciplines in fields related to science and mathematics by parents or family members. In my own experience as an educator, I have also spoken with a sizable number of Asian American students who indicate that their parents and families tend to discourage the pursuit of careers in or academic pursuits of fields such as the humanities and

social sciences. Hence, Poon's article verifies that many of my students' responses and assumptions are not suppositions, but confirmed by research.

In "Smartness as Cultural Wealth: An AsianCrit Counterstory", Kolano acknowledges that the "culture of power" in the United States is characterized by mannerisms and necessary behavioral decorum; he indicates that non-dominant groups may increase the probability of access to this culture through adaptation of these mannerisms and behavioral decorum to become academically and socially distinguishable. Over sixty percent of my students surveyed for this study indicated that they have "code switched" at school, suggesting that they may have attempted to increase their probability of access to the "culture of power". Hence, based on my observations of students in class combined with their survey/interview responses, I have noticed that their efforts to become "academically and socially distinguishable", as Kolano describes, through Western mannerisms and behavioral decorum may contradict those of their own cultural "codes", resulting in the loss or compromising of cultural identity.

Connections Between Multiple Sources

In "Smartness as Cultural Wealth: An AsianCrit Counterstory", Kolano states that Asian Americans consider high academic achievement and intelligence to be sources of social capital in the "culture of power", resulting in elevated status in society. The emphasis on the value of education is rationalized by Poon's assertion in "Parental Influence on Asian Americans' Educational and Vocational Outcomes" that immigrant parents of Asian students believe that education is a strong indicator of future success and that the lack of education correlates with failure. According to Poon, Asian American children of immigrant parents feel inclined to be high-achieving due to cultural ideals of collectivism, filial piety and a sense of responsibility to

fulfill parental expectations. However, Asian American students are often excluded from institutional support from higher education in the form of outreach and support services, as evidenced by “Contextualizing Asian American Education Through Critical Race Theory: An Example of U.S. Pilipino College Student Experiences”. Particularly if Asian American students are immigrants to the United States, do not speak English as their first language, reside in low-income homes, or are children of parents who did not receive a secondary or postsecondary education, they may be in need of additional institutional support in order to achieve high academic performance. However, the article indicates that Asian American students are less likely to be provided with less institutional support, outreach services and resources than other minority groups, possibly due their positionality as “honorary whites” and “model minorities” as well as the assumptions of the “Model Minority Myth”.

Questions Inspired by Authors’ Premises

The authors of “Contextualizing Asian American Education Through Critical Race Theory: An Example of U.S. Pilipino College Student Experiences” indicate that Asian American students are often excluded from receiving additional institutional support and outreach services in comparison to other minority groups due to their positionality as “liminal whites”. I wonder which approaches would be most effective to implement to alter the perceptions of educational administrators of Asian American students to promote fair practices regarding distribution of institutional support and outreach to all students, particularly to Asian American students who may be struggling to meet academic expectations. I also wonder how Asian American students who do not adhere to the expectations of the homogenous, “single model minority narrative”, as referred to by Kolano, can practice increased self-advocacy and

vocalization in seeking additional support and assistance from institutions which may not adequately address their educational challenges.

METHODS:

**See Appendix for visual representations*

My research project featured a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methodologies, including an anonymous online survey and individualized, in-depth interviews.

I administered the questionnaire to thirty-four mixed gender students from two high-achieving, nationally ranked public secondary schools with a majority representation of Asian American students, Stuyvesant High School in New York City and Bergen County Academies in Hackensack, New Jersey. I decided to administer the survey to students from these particular secondary schools because I was formerly a Phase I ninth grade student teacher at Stuyvesant High School during the fall semester of 2018 and am currently placed as a Phase II ninth grade student teacher at Bergen County Academies. My rationale was to survey students exclusively from secondary schools with which I had fairly strong relationships and had previously taught or currently teach at. The survey was provided on a Google Form, and the link for the survey was distributed among the classes of four secondary teachers; three are currently employed at Stuyvesant High School (one sophomore Chemistry teacher and two freshmen English Language Arts teachers) and one at Bergen County Academies (a freshmen and sophomore English Language Arts teacher). Prior to starting the survey, students were informed that responding to the questions would require approximately 5-8 minutes. They were also informed that their participation in the survey was entirely voluntarily and that their identities would remain anonymous. Furthermore, students were provided with a brief introduction to the

research project conveying that the goal of the study was to better understand the experiences of Asian American students in high-achieving secondary schools. When distributed, the survey was titled “Educational Research Study” rather than the title of the research study as to avoid potentially influencing responses by providing detailed information regarding the approach of the study, which could potentially skew students’ perspectives. As a prerequisite to completing the survey, I indicated a space for all participants to confirm their ethnic/racial origin as students of Asian American descent. I eliminated one response from the initial sampling of students which indicated that he/she was not a student of Asian descent, but of Hispanic/Latin American descent. The survey responses were collected over the progression of twenty-six days or approximately one month.

The questionnaire consisted of a combination of qualitative and quantitative survey questions. The breakdown of both types of questions with descriptions is provided below:

11 Qualitative Questions	7 Quantitative Questions
3 Short Response Questions	5 Yes/No Questions
8 Long Response Questions	2 Multiple Choice Questions

The survey consisted of the following mixed response questions provided below:

Yes or No Questions (5 Questions)

- Do you identify as a student of Asian American or Pacific Islander (AAPI) descent? If you responded "no", please refrain from filling out this survey.
- Do you feel like educators talk about diversity issues enough in the classroom?
- Do you feel comfortable discussing issues of race and culture in the classroom?
- Have you ever heard of the "Model Minority Myth"?

- Have you ever felt like you had to “code switch”, or behave/speak differently at school compared to how you might behave/speak at home or around other individuals of exclusively Asian descent?

Multiple Choice Questions (2 Questions)

- On average, what grade do you mostly receive on coursework?
 - A
 - B
 - C
 - D
- Academically, approximately where are you ranked among your peers?
 - Top 10%
 - 11-25%
 - 26-50%
 - 51-100%

Short Response Questions (3 Questions)

- What school do you attend?
- What country do you most identify with?
- Are you enrolled in Honors, Advanced Placement, or International Baccalaureate courses?

Long Response Questions (8 Questions)

- As a student of Asian descent, do you feel that you are expected to be academically high-achieving or meet the standards of the “Model Minority Myth”? Elaborate.

- If you responded with "yes" to “have you ever heard of the “Model Minority Myth”?”, what do you know about the "Model Minority Myth"?
- As a student of Asian descent in a high-achieving school, have you ever felt like you struggled to meet the expectations of the "Model Minority Myth"? Elaborate.
- What educational challenges/struggles do Asian American or Pacific Islander students face, particularly in high-achieving schools?
- What are classroom practices you might suggest for teachers to create a more culturally inclusive/accommodating space for AAPI students?
- How can teachers better respond to the challenges facing AAPI students, particularly in high-achieving schools?
- What do you think are some common perceptions, misconceptions, or biases teachers might have towards AAPI students?

I also provided the opportunity for students to offer additional feedback or comments following the completion of the survey by providing the following question:

Additional Feedback Question (1)

- Feel free to write anything which you feel is important to share or is relevant to this study. You may write about personal experiences, perspectives, words of advice, suggestions for educators, etc. All feedback is welcome.

Several students indicated a sense of gratitude and appreciation regarding the opportunity to candidly discuss a fairly sensitive, yet “important” issue of relevance to their lives, implying that students resonated with the topic.

I provided students with the following additional participation-based questions:

Additional Participation-Based Questions (2)

- Would you be interested in participating in a discussion-based, focus group interview with other students? If so, please provide your name and email address. (All participants' names and responses will be anonymous.)
- Would you be interested in participating in an individual in-depth interview for this study? If so, please provide your name and email address. (All participants' names and responses will be anonymous.)

Four students within the thirty-four surveyed also indicated willingness to participate in a discussion-based, focus group interview with other students, and four students indicated willingness to participate in an individualized, in-depth interview.

In addition to administering an anonymous questionnaire, I administered an individualized, in-depth interview with two female Asian American students in Grade 10 from Bergen County Academies with differentiated qualitative questions tailored to each student's ethnic/racial and academic background, indicated below:

Individualized Interview Questions

- What is the "Model Minority Myth"?
- How does this myth affect you/your classmates?
- Do you think ethnic, racial or cultural background, particularly one's home background, has an effect on educational or academic success?
- What do you believe are the consequences when students internalize stereotypes that teachers might have of Asian American students as "naturally high achievers"? Does this affect your motivation to perform well academically?

- Do you believe you've ever been/felt excluded, marginalized, or treated differently in a classroom setting or educational space because you are an Asian American student? How so?
- Have you ever felt that your cultural values as an Asian American student have clashed with Caucasian values, particularly surrounding what it means to be successful or around the emphasis on/significance of education?
- Other than "being smart", what assumptions do you feel educators have made about you because of your race in academic spaces? How have these affected you or your academic performance?
- What can teachers do to better understand the needs or challenges facing Asian American students, particularly in high-achieving schools?
- How can teachers make their classrooms more inclusive or respond to Asian American-specific needs?
- How can teachers better respond to the challenges facing Asian American students, particularly in high-achieving schools?
- Have you ever felt like the teacher expected you to be academically high-achieving, perhaps more than your non-Asian American counterparts, or treated you differently because of your race?
- As someone who grew up in a household in which you were the only Asian American individual, do you feel that the emphasis on education/academics and expectations surrounding education or educational outcomes, such as post-graduation plans like career choice or where you will attend college, was different compared to those of your Asian American peers who grew up in Asian American households?

- How do you think your experience as an Asian American student has differed compared to your experience before BCA, where you were (as you said) “that one Asian girl who is really smart”, compared to BCA, where there is a large representation of Asian American students? Were you treated more as an individual following your arrival to BCA? Elaborate upon your experience in school and particularly how teachers might have viewed you.

I also provided the opportunity for students to provide additional feedback or comments following the completion of the interview, indicated in the question below.

Additional Feedback Question (1)

- Feel free to write anything which you feel is important to share or is relevant to this study. You may write about personal experiences, perspectives, words of advice, suggestions for educators, etc. All feedback is welcome.

The majority of students surveyed self-identified as Bergen County Academies students of South Korean or Chinese/Taiwanese descent. In terms of academic performance, approximately two-thirds of the surveyed students ranked themselves academically in the top half of their graduating class, and the majority of participants indicated enrollment in Honors, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate courses in their secondary schools.

The demographic and educational backgrounds of the thirty-four students surveyed are indicated below.

Country of Origin (Total Countries: 6)	Number of Respondents (Total: 30 Students)	Percentage of Total Students Surveyed
China/Taiwan	14/30	46.67%
South Korea	10/30	33.33%

India	2/30	6.67%
Philippines	1/30	3.33%
American	3/30	1.00%

Secondary Institutions (Total Schools: 2)	Number of Respondents (Total: 30 Students)	Percentage of Total Students Surveyed
Bergen County Academies	22/30	73.33%
Stuyvesant High School	8/30	26.67%

Class Ranking (Total Divisions: 4)	Number of Respondents (Total: 30 students)	Percentage of Total Students Surveyed
1-10%	10/30	33.33%
11-25%	10/30	33.33%
26-50%	8/30	26.67%
51-100%	2/30	6.67%

Number of Students Enrolled in Honors/Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate Courses (Total: 30 students)	Percentage of Total Students Surveyed
17/30	56.67%
13/30	43.33%

Among the most interesting of the results was that the majority of students surveyed indicated that they were unfamiliar with or unaware of the term “Model Minority Myth” stereotype. Hence, I found it interesting that students demonstrated at least rudimentary awareness of the premise of the stereotype without knowledge of the popular term coined by the media, as it is commonly referred to in mainstream culture. Additional unsettling results were

that the majority of students surveyed did not believe that educators talk about diversity issues enough, and an overwhelming majority of students surveyed also indicated that they previously felt like they had to “code switch”, or behave/speak differently at school compared to how they might behave/speak at home or around other individuals of exclusively Asian descent.

INSIGHTS:

A significant number of responses to the survey and individualized interview responses indicate that students considered parental/familial influence, upbringing, and home background to be particularly relevant when examining the educational experiences of Asian American students in secondary schools.

Students also indicated that the prevalence and perpetuation of the “Model Minority Myth” stereotype towards Asian American students is unevenly distributed in accordance with location and type of secondary school. For example, a sizable number of students indicated that they experienced increased discrimination as evidenced by racist comments by fellow students and teachers while in middle school as opposed to in high school. Asian American students also indicated that the perpetuation of racial discrimination was more prevalent in culturally homogenous schools with a predominantly Caucasian student body in which Asian American students were significantly underrepresented. Furthermore, the majority of students surveyed indicated that they experienced decreased discrimination and a greater sense of affinity, belonging, and recognition as individuals in secondary schools with greater Asian American representation.

The majority of students who were surveyed for the study indicated that the implications of high-achieving assumption for Asian American students resulted in harmful consequences

affecting their mental, psychological, social, and academic outcomes. Students indicated that they internalized pressures to adhere to the high-achieving stereotype, resulting in harmful physiological outcomes such as anxiety, stress, loss of identity, decreased self-esteem and self-confidence, and internal conflict.

Students indicated that they experienced increased difficulty in meeting the academic expectations of the “Model Minority Myth” stereotype if they belonged to low-income or socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Without the ability to afford access to additional educational resources, such as test preparation centers and tutoring services, students reported experiencing increased struggles to maintain high academic expectations, often by family members. Furthermore, students indicated that high academic expectations based on race/ethnicity were also internalized and widely perpetuated within the Asian American community through increased competition and comparison between members of the community.

Surprisingly, several students surveyed who identified ethnically as Asian American and culturally as non-Asian American reported experiencing debilitating inner conflict, identity confusion, and tension regarding the possession a dual cultural identity, which affected their self-perception, confidence in their cultural identity, and ultimately, their academic performance.

Students’ responses to the individualized interview and survey questions (short and long response) were categorized by trend and divided by code, which have been thoroughly defined and contextualized below.

Code Title	Code Description	Student Responses
PC (Psychological/Physical Consequences)	Internalization of high academic expectations due to the “Model Minority Myth” stereotype negatively affects	“I think Asian American students struggle with stress and pressures from family and peers, particularly in

	<p>Asian American students psychologically and physiologically. Students report experiencing increased anxiety, loss or confusion of identity, decreased self-confidence and self-esteem, internal conflict, and stress.</p>	<p>high-achieving schools. They feel obligated to fulfill the expectations set upon them to the point where they may neglect their own needs and well-being.”</p>
<p>UD (Uneven Distribution)</p>	<p>Discrimination due to implementation of the “Model Minority Myth” is unequally distributed among geographic locations in the United States. Discrimination due to race/ethnicity correlates positively with more culturally homogenous schools with less Asian American representation and negatively in more culturally diverse schools with greater Asian American representation.</p>	<p>“Because Asians are not the minority at Bergen County Academies, there is more of an Asian community here that has a wider range of students with different capabilities. At my town school, I was ‘that one Asian girl who’s really smart,’ but now, I am one of many Asian people. Some are smart, some are not, some have good grades, and some don’t care as much.”</p> <p>“[During my] middle school experience, I was one of the only Asians, meaning not only were the other students racist and cultural insensitive, but the teachers were too.”</p>
<p>DI (Dual Identity)</p>	<p>Students who identify ethnically as Asian yet culturally as “American”, or other than as Asian, experience identity confusion and debilitating inner conflict regarding the tension of possessing a dual cultural identity, particularly if external perceptions misalign with self-identified perceptions.</p>	<p>”I have an Italian mother and a German father. It’s always been interesting growing up ‘cultural American’ as someone who is ‘externally Chinese’. I am biologically Chinese...but I do not feel culturally Chinese. I am culturally American. Asian stereotypes always amused me because it’s a cultural thing...because I was not raised with Chinese culture’s</p>

		standards, I don't necessarily follow those stereotypes."
EB (Ethnographic Background)	Students indicate that the influence of ethnographic background, home life, and familial upbringing are especially relevant to consider while examining Asian American students' educational experiences and academic outcomes.	<p>"I think [the] home environment is very important and relevant to his study."</p> <p>"I'm constantly compared to my 'smarter Asian' peers. Aside from my ethnicity, though, the fact that I am part of an immigrant family who does not have much and is not financially stable, brings countless expectations from people around me that weigh me down, telling me to do better in all aspects of my academic and extracurricular activities."</p>
IA (Inter-Asian Competition)	The "Model Minority Myth" is perpetuated internally by members within the Asian American community, as opposed to solely by external or non-Asian members, through inter-Asian American academic competition and the reinforcement of internal pressures to maintain expectations of the stereotype and external perceptions of high-achievement.	"I'm constantly compared to my 'smarter Asian' peers. Aside from my ethnicity, though, the fact that I am part of an immigrant family who does not have much and is not financially stable, brings countless expectations from people around me that weigh me down, telling me to do better in all aspects of my academic and extracurricular activities."
AA (Affirmative Action)	Students indicate that affirmative action in higher and secondary education admissions is problematic as it perpetuates racial discrimination, can be unfairly biased towards Asian Americans, and discredits	"I don't think it's fair for there to be racial quotas when applying to high schools or colleges. If you have someone who is Asian who is not naturally gifted and worked very hard to apply to a college bumped out by

	students' academic efforts.	<p>someone else who didn't work as hard just because they are Asian, I think that is extremely unfair."</p> <p>"It has been shown that college weigh Asian students with 'non-Asian' accolades higher than a typical Asian student with 'typical accolades'. This, I feel, is an extreme double standard that is detrimental to so many students and their experiences as students. How is one supposed to be smart, but not 'Asian smart', and well rounded, but not 'Asian well-rounded'?"</p> <p>"Everyone knows or thinks that colleges are extremely selective of Asian American students because of the huge number of Asian American applicants each year and how all of them are equally high-achieving. But then this will also cause the other Asian American students to become even more high-achieving. Then, the whole "expectation" of an Asian American student rises, and the cycle continues. It's a dead cycle."</p>
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Suggested Pedagogical Approaches for Educators

In their responses, students recommended pedagogical approaches for educators to address educational challenges of Asian American students in the secondary classroom. Again, students' responses to the survey questions (short and long response) as well as in-depth, individualized

interview questions were categorized by trend and divided into codes, which have been thoroughly defined and contextualized below:

Code Title	Code Description	Excerpts from Data
RI (Relevant Issues)	Educators should be especially cognizant of issues facing high-achieving Asian American students, such as difficulty in maintaining balance, self-care, and mental health, which may be more prevalent than in less competitive school environments. Psychological and physiological consequences due to the internalization of harmful stereotypes bears relevance in the classroom and ought to be considered a pedagogical concern.	“I think it’s necessary for teachers to...be willing to take time to understand their struggles. By doing so...Asian American students will feel more comfortable in the classroom.”
NP (Nondiscriminatory Pedagogy)	Students recommend that educators implement the same practices in their pedagogy towards students from all backgrounds as opposed to differentiated methodologies specific for Asian American students to promote equality, fairness, and nondiscrimination in pedagogical implementation.	<p>“Don’t single a person of any race out? I mean, while you should acknowledge the history of people of each ethnicity, you shouldn’t make them seem like an outsider.”</p> <p>“I recommend treating Asian American students like any other students would be a good idea. It might also be to the benefit of the Asian American student to provide slightly less homework. Most Asian American families already sign their children up for additional tutoring and lessons already, so having such a burden on them can get overwhelming.”</p>

SA (Support and Accommodation)	Educators should offer to provide support/additional assistance and be accommodating yet non-discriminatory in their teaching style to acknowledge challenges facing high-achieving Asian American students. Educators should be aware and accommodating to the preferences, needs, and interests of their distinct learners.	<p>“Encourage people to be more open in regards to asking for help. At least I’ve noticed that some kids that might need help on a subject just don't ask for it, and it’s very rarely caught by teachers. It kinda applies to all kids, but every bit helps. Don’t have any expectations. Please.”</p> <p>“I think the ideal teacher...is one that understands and respects their needs and is open to manipulating certain aspects of their own teaching styles to accommodate them. A teacher that is willing to listen to their struggles and provide help, whether it be material help or extensions or feedback. A teacher that students are not afraid to ask for help because they are too intimidated by the way the teacher seems to respond or behave in class.”</p>
EE (Equal Evaluation)	Educators should avoid imposing higher academic expectations onto high-achieving Asian American students due to racial stereotypes and previous patterns of performance. Rather, evaluation of academic performance should be unweighted, equal and unbiased, and educators are recommended to acknowledge students’ individual efforts apart from	<p>“Because almost everyone thinks all Asian students are so much smarter than students of other races, we are constantly pressured to be the best at math, history, science, English, and many other subjects as well...teachers often expect us to already know material, or they expect us to study on our own, even when they don’t teach us anything in class.”</p> <p>“I think that not creating even</p>

	race-based implications or stereotypes.	higher standards for students would be a good start considering all the pressure they may already receive from friends and family. Don't expect too much from students."
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NEXT STEPS:

In conclusion, Asian American students feel more visible, recognized and validated as students when they are not restricted within the singular "Model Minority Myth" of high performance, which consequently affects their self-identification, their academic performance and their experiences in learning environments. When students are subjected to (and often internalize) academic pressures due to the perpetuation of the high-performing stereotype, they experience harmful consequences which are detrimental to their educational experiences and lives as students.

However, the majority of students surveyed and interviewed for the study indicated that pressures to be academically high-achieving emerged from a combination of sources and were not believed to be *solely* racially motivated. Students' indicated that expectations to meet high academic standards resulted from self-imposed standards of academic outcomes, rigorous environments of competitive high-achieving schools, and high expectations of academic performance by parents, family members, and other members of the Asian American community.

In response to educational challenges experienced by Asian American students, educators are recommended to practice culturally responsive pedagogical approaches through promoting equal, unbiased assessment of all students, regardless of ethnic/racial origin, recognize students' academic performance as contingent on individual effort as opposed to racial implications,

provide additional support and supplementary resources to assist Asian American students who may be struggling academically, and exhibit willingness to adjust their teaching style in order to be more accommodating to the needs of all learners.

In terms of projected changes to this research project, I am interested in the distribution of additional survey and interview questions pertaining to the role of the perpetuation of the high-achieving stereotype in secondary and higher education admissions. I would like to examine the role of the implications of the “Model Minority Myth” on affirmative action and the efforts to diversify the specialized high school system in New York City and postsecondary institutions such as Harvard University. I am also interested in extending the research project to examine the professional, educational, and financial outcomes of high-achieving Asian American students by surveying and interviewing Asian American former secondary students who graduated from high-achieving schools, such as Stuyvesant High School or the Bronx High School of Science.

When examining the emergence of data I collected for this study, I am forced to consider the existence of potential biases or motivations, which may have influenced or skewed the evaluation of my findings. I acknowledge that I may have approached the research project with possible predictions or expectations regarding the study’s findings and may have unintentionally framed my survey and interview questions to validate these expectations as opposed to a more unbiased approach.

As I introduced students to the premise of the high-achieving stereotype for Asian Americans fairly early in the survey, I wonder about the extent to which students may have been predisposed to further substantiate, rather than challenge or question, the implied leanings of the “Model Minority Myth” based on commonly accepted views towards the topic in society.

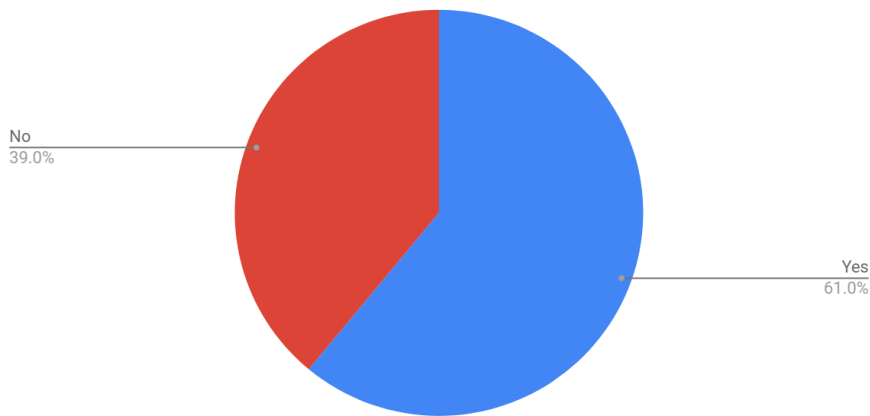
Students may have felt pressured to produce certain responses to align with the expectations of the research objective; in hindsight, I consider that presenting the survey more objectively and with less contextualization may have yielded more surprising, unexpected responses. I wonder how I could have framed the survey and interview questions to produce less predictable outcomes in alliance with my own, or society's/commonly accepted, views towards the "Model Minority Myth" concept. If I were to repeat this study, I will be more mindful of the wording of my interview/survey questions and perhaps omit introducing the concept of "Model Minority Myth" when administering the survey with the intent of generating candid responses about their experiences as Asian American students without a necessary point of reference.

To expand my research project, I would also like to survey Asian American students from additional specialized high schools in New York City. I also intend to administer the survey questions to an increased number of students from additional high-achieving secondary schools outside the proximity of a large metropolitan area, such as in rural areas or possibly high-achieving international schools in countries outside of the United States. To increase my survey sample, I would like to obtain responses from a minimum of sixty high-achieving Asian American secondary students and individually interview an additional two students. Ideally, I would like to individually interview at least one student of non-east Asian background and/or at least one male student, as all of the students individually interviewed for the research study have identified as female. Additionally, I would like to interview administrators and classroom teachers regarding their consideration of, receptiveness to, and, if applicable, experience with implementing culturally responsive pedagogical approaches for Asian American students in high-achieving schools. Furthermore, I am interested in determining the educational challenges or areas of deficit which administrators and classroom teachers have observed of their

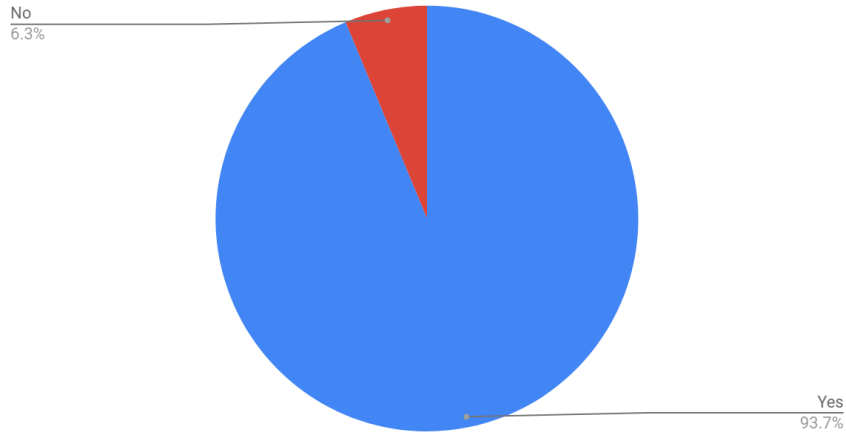
high-achieving Asian American students throughout their own teaching experiences. I also would like to administer a group interview with at least three high-achieving Asian American students from an array of ethnic/racial backgrounds, genders, academic and grade levels, which I would film and/or record by voice as a form of multimodal (visual and auditory) data representation for my study.

APPENDIX: CHARTS AND GRAPHS

Have you ever felt like you had to “code switch”, or behave/speak differently at school compared to how you might behave/speak at home or around other individuals of exclusively Asian descent?

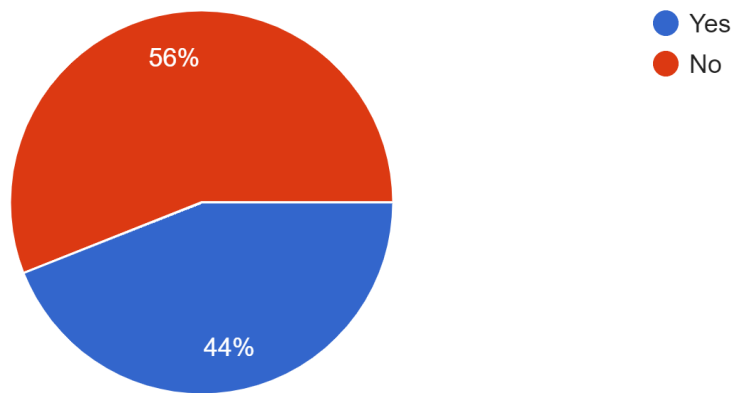


Do you feel comfortable discussing issues of race and culture in the classroom?



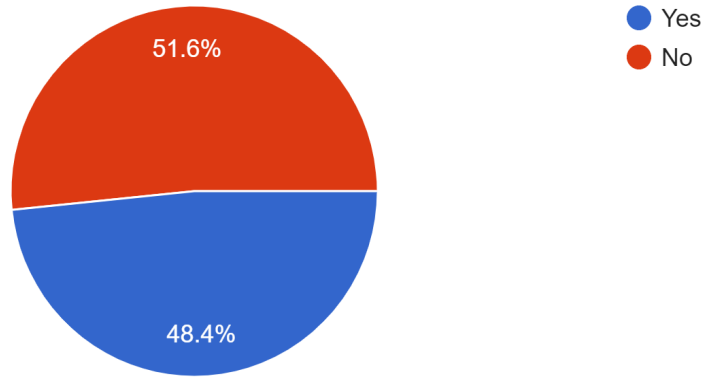
Have you ever heard of the "model minority myth"?

25 responses



Do you feel like educators talk about diversity issues enough in the classroom?

31 responses



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