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University of Connecticut

# Asians and the Study Habits of Non-Asians in the United States

Sabrina Tang  
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### **Abstract**

In the United States, Asian American students spend an hour more per day studying than non-Asians (Hofferth et al. 2020). Chen and Stevenson (1995) attribute this to parents and peers who hold higher standards for Asian students. Compared to other races, Asian Americans tend to place a high value on education as a marker of achievement. This thesis explores whether Asian culture impacts non-Asian work ethic by examining whether non-Asians study more in geographic areas with larger Asian populations. I find statistically significant, but small increases in the study time of non-Asians where there is a greater population of Asians.

## **Introduction**

On average, Asian American students achieve higher grades and scores than their non-Asian peers (Chen and Stevenson 1995, Hsin and Xie 2014). They also study more than any other race in the United States (Chen and Stevenson 1995). It is possible that Asians study more because of their greater work ethic and cultural attitudes towards academic achievement. An open question is whether Asian culture spills over to non-Asians in contexts with large Asian populations.

As seen by their studying habits, Asians are more academically focused than other races. Compared to whites, they have higher grade point averages all throughout high school (Hsin and Xie 2014). They also obtain higher scores in elementary school on reading and math (Hsin and Xie 2014). Given that teachers rate Asian students higher than white students in terms of attentiveness and work ethic (Hsin and Xie 2014), cognitive ability alone might only partially explain these achievements. Chen and Stevenson (1995) suggest that culture and upbringing influence the high work ethic and therefore achievements of Asian students.

This thesis explores whether Asian culture can spill over to classmates. If only one Asian student is in a school, it is unlikely that his or her culture will influence non-Asians, but it is possible for culture to change if the Asian population is large. There have been large increases in the Asian population in the United States, especially in certain states. This thesis uses variation over time and across different geographic areas to explore whether non-Asians spend more time studying when they are exposed to more Asians.

In particular, I examine whether non-Asians in areas with more Asians study more than non-Asians in areas with very few Asians. To explore this issue, I start with sample of 190,989 individuals from the 2003-2019 American Time Use Survey (ATUS) which was started by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2003 and is now conducted by the Census Bureau. Survey respondents are asked to record their activities throughout a 24-hour time period. Since this study focuses on how students spend their time studying outside of school hours, this paper has limited the sample to 19,597 enrolled students. The analysis uses ordinary least squares (OLS) regression and explores the impact of the size of the Asian population in state on study time holding constant student's school level, household income, and parent's educational attainment. This analysis is then expanded upon by comparing the impact of the share of Asians in the city instead of a person's state. Finally, the study examines whether the impact of exposure to Asians differs by race, and by school level.

This paper finds increases in the study time of non-Asians in response to larger Asian populations even when controlling for demographic characteristics. The hypothesis that non-Asians study more when there are more Asians around appears to hold true – non-Asians study one minute extra for every one percentage point increase in the Asian population. This result suggests that non-Asians are affected, but only slightly, by the study habits of their Asian peers.

This paper is outlined as follows: Theoretical background and literature review, discussion of the data and methodology, summary of the results and key findings, a discussion of the limitations, and implications for further research.

### **Theoretical Background and Literature Review**

While there is a literature examining the role of race in explaining academic achievement, very little is known about the role of race in determining study habits – one of the drivers of achievement. Prior work using time use data has provided broad descriptions of the time use of youths (Kofman and Bianchi 2015), explored gender gaps in study time (Gershenson and Holt 2015), and examined study time of college students (Nonis and Judson 2010). However, how people of a specific race effect the study time of their peers has not been evaluated yet. This paper focuses on the later and adds to the continuing discussion of differences in study time across races.

This thesis also contributes to the literature examining racial differences in academic achievement. Chen and Stevenson (1995) suggest that the main contributing factors are rooted in deep cultural attitudes toward achievement. Parents of Asian students place a high value on working hard in general and perhaps especially when it comes to education, and this is likely to translate into more time spent on studying. Another factor is the student's own attitude toward achievement – if they believe that studying leads to better outcomes then they will study more regardless of how much they are pushed by their parents. Through a series of interviews, Hsin and Xie (2014) suggest that Asian American students believe success is achieved through effort. Deviating from high expectations can make Asian students feel like failures, which motivates them to work harder at school (Hsin and Xie 2014).

In addition to any Asian-specific explanations for longer study times, another potential explanation is that the majority of Asian Americans are immigrants or descendants of immigrants (Pew

Research Center 2012). Regardless of ethnicity, immigrants tend to be more optimistic about future success and are motivated to succeed (Hsin and Xie 2014). Asians' immigrant background may only intensify beliefs that working hard can help one move upward and obtain social prestige.

While it is well established that Asian Americans study more than non-Asians, whether they influence study habits of non-Asians in their classrooms and communities is an open question. This paper attempts to answer the question: "How do the studying habits of non-Asians change when there are more Asians in their state or city?"

From a theoretical perspective, there are many potential channels through which Asians may affect study habits of non-Asians within their communities. One way Asians may change the study habits of non-Asians is through their impact of study norms. Asian students are pushed by their parents and Asian peers to study more. This may change what is considered a normal amount of study time for everyone in the classroom. Not wanting to spend significantly less time studying than the average in the class, non-Asian students may study more. This academic form of peer pressure could motivate students to study more to gain social approval. Not only do disciplined students have better scores themselves, but students who attend schools with more studious and well-disciplined peers learn more (Bishop 2006). Especially at younger levels of education, keeping up academically is viewed positively by other students.

Another possibility is that educational environments with more studious students lead to more study time of all students. The classroom climate or learning environment can be thought of as how disciplined and undisruptive the classroom is during the school day. It also includes factors such as whether paying attention or spending more time on homework is the norm in the class. Asians are more highly disciplined and focused in the classroom (Hsin and Xie 2014). In classrooms with more Asians, then all students may end up paying more attention during class and then spend more time on homework so that they do not fall behind in class. Bishop (2006) finds that there is a positive relationship between student achievement and the classroom climate.

A third possibility is that Asian Americans create a more studious and academically rigorous environment by demanding more challenging courses. If non-Asian students take these more challenging courses, they may end up studying more. For instance, high schools may require a certain number of interested students in order to offer AP classes. Having more high achieving Asian students in a school would make it more likely that these difficult classes are offered. If non-

Asian students take these classes and these classes require more studying, then this is another mechanism through which more Asian students may indirectly increase study time of non-Asians.

While these are all reasons why larger Asian populations can have a *causal* impact on the study time of non-Asians, there are also reasons why larger Asian populations may be *correlated* with more study time that are not causal. For example, Asians may be more likely to live in areas where schools have more resources. Schools with more resources can hire teachers selectively, use better curriculum, and purchase books or technology that will positively affect students' learning. Students may feel more motivated to learn with new school materials which translates into more time spent studying. Another possibility is that Asian families are more likely to live in areas with higher household incomes. If students in higher income households always study more (regardless of the racial composition of their classmates), then a correlation between the size of the Asian population and study time of non-Asians could arise even if Asians have no causal impacts on study time of non-Asians. Non-Asians living in poorer households may need to work more to help support their families leaving little time for study.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, parents with higher household incomes can afford extra study materials and tutoring for their children. To conclude, it may be that Asians choose to live in areas where all parents value hard work. If that is the case, then it would not be Asian culture that spills over into the study habits of non-Asians, but instead, that non-Asian work-hard culture attracts Asians to the area.

## Data

This paper analyzes time use data from the 2003-2019 ATUS. The ATUS randomly selects one individual aged 15 or older per household from the Current Population Survey (CPS) which is a representative sample of the entire US population. Respondents were asked to record their activity within a 24-hour time period—the time each activity started, the time it ended, the nature of the activity, and where and with whom it took place. The survey links each respondent back to the household data from the CPS. The entire sample consists of 190,989 observations, but I restrict the sample to the 18,642 respondents who self-reported being enrolled in high school or college at the time of completing the survey and who do not self-identify as Asian. This sample includes

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<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, people in richer areas may also be able to afford more expensive but time-intensive extracurricular activities leaving little time to study. Leisure may also be more enjoyable within richer families.

8,060 part time or full high school students and 10,582 part-time or full-time college students. There are 15,115 white students, 2,824 black students, and 3,350 Hispanic students in the sample.

The CPS shows that the Asian population in the United States has steadily increased since 2003, with slight fluctuations from year to year. The average number of Asians by state was 4.3 percent in 2019. Figure 1 gives a complete overview of the Asian population for the years of the ATUS survey. The percent of Asians by state also varies significantly between states. Table 1 shows that in 2019, states including California, Hawaii, and New Jersey had the greatest number of Asians compared to states such as Mississippi, West Virginia, and Wyoming which have much less Asians (ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates).

The outcome of interest in this study is the time, measured in minutes per day, spent on research or homework. This includes but is not limited to reading, writing papers, attending study groups, and preparing for standardized exams. Importantly, this is time spent on schoolwork outside of the school day. Table 2 summarizes students' daily homework time by race. The average high school student spends 46.84 minutes a day on homework while the average college student spends 74.75 minutes a day on homework.

The independent variables of interest in this study are the Asian population per state and per city. Specifically, I use the share of the state population in a given year that is Asian in some specifications, and in other specifications I use the share of the metropolitan area population that is Asian.

This analysis also controls for exogenous factors that may be correlated with share Asian. In particular, I will control for the educational level of the student, household income, and parent's educational attainment. Table 3 compares the average study time, household income, and educational attainment of non-Asian students from states below and above the average Asian population. Non-Asian students from states with more Asians study an average of 6.07 minutes more than non-Asian students from states with few Asians. States where the Asian population is above average also tend to have higher household incomes. The average educational attainment is relatively consistent across the sample, where most non-Asian parents have some college education or an associate degree.



## Methodology

The hypothesis that non-Asians study more when there are more Asians around them is explored by comparing the change in study time when having more Asians in a state to having less Asians. A similar procedure follows at the city level.

A linear time-use regression is estimated by ordinary least squares:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta_1(\text{percentasian})_{sti} + \beta_2(\text{schoollevel})_i + \beta_3 \ln(\text{income})_i + \beta_4(\text{educationdad}) + \beta_5(\text{educationmom})_i + \beta_8(\text{race})_i + \mu_i$$

where  $i$  represents the student,  $Y$  is the study time, *percentasian* is the percentage of Asians in the state or city  $s$  in year  $t$ , *schoollevel* indicates if the respondent is in high school or college, *income* is household income, *educationdad* and *educationmom* indicate the respondents' parents' educational attainment, *race* indicates the race of the student, and  $\mu$  is the error term.

I control for whether the student is in college because college students spend more time studying than high school students (see Table 2), and it might be that Asians tend to live in cities or states with more colleges and therefore more college students. Without controlling for the school level of students, it would be possible to attribute to the impacts of Asians what it actually driven by college attendance.

Another important variable to control for is family income. Students with higher household incomes have access to better resources and schools which influences the amount of effort the student devotes to learning and studying. If Asians tend to live in areas where families have higher incomes, again it is possible to attribute to Asian classmates what is actually driven by own family incomes.

Even holding constant family income, parents who completed higher levels of education tend to influence high academic standards on their children. A parent's educational attainment is likely a good measure of his or her cultural attitudes towards hard work at least in academic settings. If Asians tend to live in areas with high average educational attainments, then we might erroneously attribute to Asians what is actually being driven by higher educational attainments of non-Asian parents.

## Results

Table 4 presents the OLS estimates of the model. Columns 1-4 show results examining the impact of the share Asian in the state while columns 5-8 show results examining the impact of the share Asian in the metropolitan area. As can be seen in column 1, non-Asians spend more time studying if they live in states with more Asians. As discussed previously, this may be because there happen to be more colleges in states with Asians and college students study more than high school students. To address this issue, in column 2, I add controls for whether the student is in high school as well as whether they are in school full or part time (part time high school is the omitted category). As expected, full time college students spend more time studying than any other category but adding these variables to the model do not significantly change the estimate of interest. In fact, if anything, it increases in magnitude. Household income is controlled in column 3 since it is possible that higher incomes are associated with better studying resources for a student. Column 3 shows that household income positively influences study time but does not significantly change the estimate of the impact of the variable of interest. Finally, in column 4, I added controls for parents with a high school diploma, some college education, or an associate degree or higher, and where parents with a high school education or less is the omitted category. As seen in column 4, students whose parents have earned college degrees study more than the other categories. Adding these variables to the model increases the time non-Asians spend studying when there are more Asians in their state.

U.S. states can be very large. Just because a state has a large Asian population does not mean that non-Asian students in that state are exposed to many Asians. For this reason, in columns 5-8, I look at the share Asian in a student's city of residence instead of state of residence. Similar to results when considering the state share Asian, non-Asians spend more time studying if they live in cities with more Asians. Adding whether a student is in high school or college increases the magnitude of the estimate of interest by a small amount. Controlling for household income slightly decreases the estimate but explains that those with higher incomes tend to study for slightly more time than those with lower incomes. In column 7, controlling for educational attainments increases the time non-Asians spend studying. Just as the state results reported, students of parents with college degrees study more than all other categories in a city as well. Column 8 estimates that non-Asians spend 1.21 minutes more studying for every increase in the percent of Asians in their city.

Table 5 reports estimates of the study time by race when controlling for school level, household income, and educational attainments. The first two columns examine the study time of white students when there are more Asians in their state (column 1) or in their city (column 2). The next two columns show the study time of black students while the last two columns examine the study time of Hispanic students. Overall, these results are similar to table 4, where every increase in the percent of Asians in a state or a city increases the study time of a particular race group by about one minute. However, the city share Asian for blacks and Hispanic is not statistically significant in this analysis. Interestingly, the estimate of interest is statistically significant and larger for white and black students than Hispanic students. As seen by column 3, black students will study 1.81 minutes more while white students will study 1.59 minutes more. The smallest estimates are found when limiting the sample to Hispanic students, who will only study 1.06 minutes more. The population of Asians in a state increases black study time by almost two minutes, compared to the non-Asian average of 1.40, although this result is only marginally statistically significant. Table 5 shows that the percent of Asians in a state has a larger effect on white and black students than Hispanic students. Overall, table 5 suggests that there are subtle differences in student's study time by race when considering how many Asians there are in the state or city.

Table 6 reports differences in the study time of college students and high school students when controlling for household income and educational attainments. Columns 1 and 2 examine the study time of non-Asian college students while columns 3 and 4 examine the study time of non-Asian high school students. Again, the results are statistically significant (excluding column 2) where Asian representation increases study time by about a minute. Specifically, college students will study 1.25 minutes more and high school students will study 1.31 minutes more. Although not always significant when considering the city share Asian, table 6 suggests that (non-Asian) high school students are more affected by increases in the Asian population than college students. Especially when considering the number of Asians in a city, high school students will study 1.5 minutes more. Perhaps this is because high school students work more closely with their peers daily than college students. While the difference in the impact is not very large, there are subtle differences between impacts on college students and high school students.

## **Limitations**

One limitation of this study is that the size of the Asian population is measured at the state or city level while most of the mechanisms linking Asians to study habits of non-Asians operate at the classroom level. Ideally this study would measure the population of Asians within classrooms. Since these results were using state-level and metropolitan-level data, the estimates are quite small; it is difficult to detect impacts because many of the non-Asians in states (or cities) with large Asian populations may not actually be exposed to so many Asians. This might imply that the true effect of Asians on non-Asian study time is actually much larger than what is estimated in this paper.

These results also do not necessarily imply causal relationships despite the controls for household income and parental education. In particular, this analysis cannot capture the unobserved preferences for study time. As discussed previously, another reason why estimating the causal effect of Asians on study habits of non-Asians is difficult is that Asians choose where to live, they are not randomly allocated to different cities and states. While this study controls for parental incomes and educational attainments, even holding constant these factors, Asians could choose to live in cities and states where students tend to study more.

The purpose of this thesis is to uncover possible relationships and hypotheses for studying habits and is not intended for causal interpretations. This paper aims to contribute to the growing research on study habits through exploring possible explanations for the gap in study time between Asians and non-Asians.

## **Summary and Future Implications**

I hypothesized that non-Asians would tend to study more when there are more Asians peers because of academic competition or academically rigorous curriculum.

This study of studying habits used observations from the 2003-2019 ATUS to compare the impact of Asian representation on the study time of non-Asians. Overall, there is a positive correlation between the share of Asians and the study time of non-Asians. This result is statistically significant but small. When comparing the study time by race, increases in the Asian population has the largest effect on black students, followed by white students, and then Hispanic students. The impact of

the percent of Asians is also larger for non-Asian high school students than college students. Although these results cannot be interpreted as causal, they are designed to contribute to literature on the studying habits of adolescents.

If there is a significant relationship between race and studying, future studies could benefit from examining how race effects leisure or work ethic. Perhaps cultural background and upbringing is significant in determining how people perceive hard work and achievement. This would be important for future research to identify the effects of academic competition on students.

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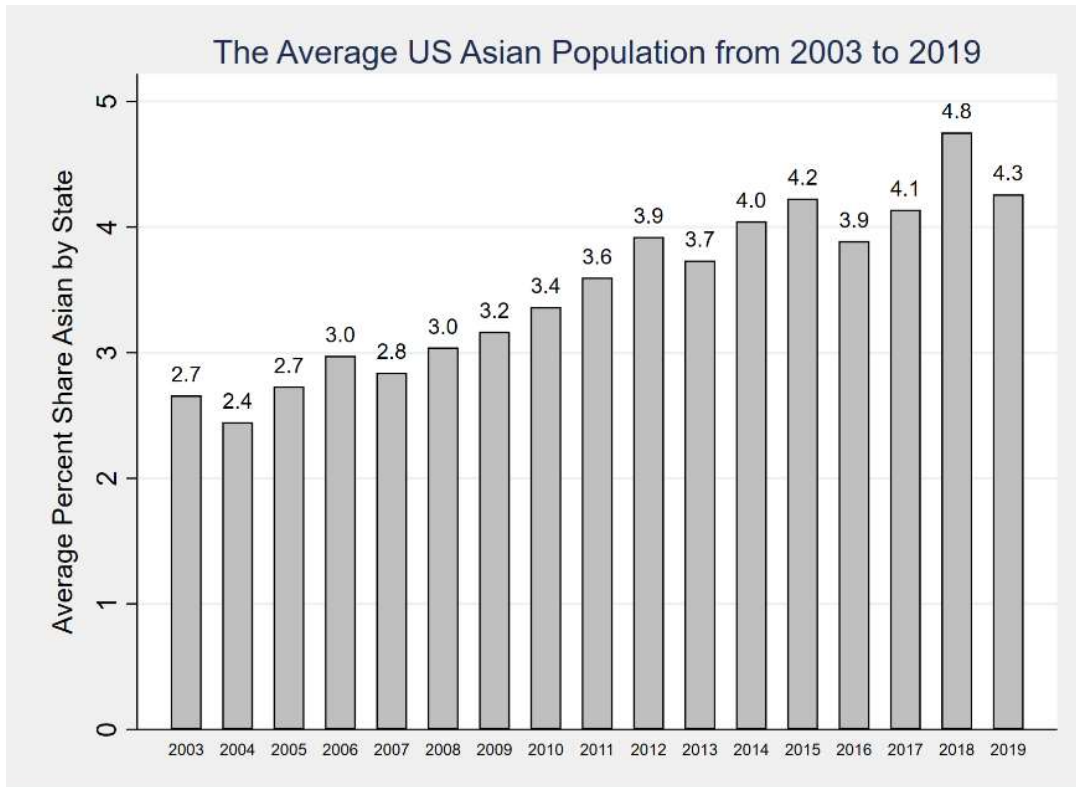


Figure 1. Source: 2003-2019 ATUS (Hofferth et al. 2020).



**Table 1**  
**Percent of Asians by State in 2019<sup>2</sup>**

State	Percent of Asians		
AL	1.3	MS	1.0
AK	6.0	MO	2.1
AZ	3.3	MT	0.8
AR	1.5	NE	2.5
CA	14.8	NV	8.5
CO	3.3	NH	2.6
CT	4.7	NJ	9.6
DE	3.8	NM	1.7
DC	4.1	NY	8.6
FL	2.8	NC	3.0
GA	4.1	ND	1.4
HI	38.7	OH	2.3
ID	1.5	OK	2.3
IL	5.7	OR	4.6
IN	2.5	PA	3.5
IA	2.4	RI	3.5
KS	3.0	SC	1.7
KY	1.6	SD	1.3
LA	1.8	TN	1.8
ME	1.1	TX	5.0
MD	6.4	UT	2.4
MA	6.9	VT	1.4
MI	3.3	VA	6.6
MN	5.1	WA	9.0
		WV	0.8
		WI	2.9
		WY	0.8

<sup>2</sup> 2019 ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates

**Table 2**  
**Average Study Time (in minutes per day) Summary Statistics**

	Asian Students	White Students	Black Students	Hispanic Students	All Students
Average study time	123.17 (5.36)	60.76 (.96)	55.04 (2.09)	54.54 (1.88)	62.78 (.86)
College students	122.67 (7.12)	72.69 (1.50)	68.49 (2.99)	69.91 (3.23)	74.75 (1.31)
High school students	124.42 (7.86)	45.76 (1.03)	30.76 (2.08)	38.59 (1.79)	46.84 (.95)
<i>N</i>	955	15, 115	2,924	3,379	19,597

**Table 3**  
**Summary Statistics of Non-Asian Students**

	Below the average Asian population*	Above the average Asian population*
Average study time	57.57 (1.04)	63.64 (1.50)
Share of all students that are full- college students	65.13	34.87
Average household income	\$59,472.35 (388.06)	\$66,312.60 (570.72)
Average mother's educational attainment	Associate degree	Some college, no degree
Average father's educational attainment	Associate degree	Some college, no degree
<i>N</i>	12,142	6,500

\*where the average state Asian population is 3.42%

**Table 4**  
**Study Time Use Regressions**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
State share Asian	1.14*** (.29)	1.27*** (.28)	1.24*** (.30)	1.40*** (.30)	-	-	-	-
City share Asian	-	-	-	-	1.03*** (.29)	1.17*** (.29)	1.12*** (.30)	1.21*** (.30)
High school full time	-	20.71*** (3.46)	21.20*** (3.60)	23.83*** (3.70)		20.52*** (3.47)	20*** (3.61)	23.55*** (3.7)
part time	-	-	-	-		-	-	-
College full time		64.46*** (3.82)	65.39*** (3.95)	59.74*** (4.00)		64.26*** (3.82)	65.20*** (3.95)	59.65*** (4.01)
part time		22.87*** (3.71)	23.49*** (3.87)	15.23*** (3.99)		22.69*** (3.72)	23.31*** (3.87)	15.21*** (3.99)
Household Income			.99 (1.07)	.69 (1.12)		-	.97 (1.07)	.71 (1.13)
R's father HS or less				-				-
HS diploma				-0.18 (3.98)				-0.71 (3.98)
Some college				-0.85 (4.04)				-1.40 (4.04)
Associate degree or higher				5.56 (3.56)				4.88 (3.56)
R's mother HS or less				-				-
HS diploma				-3.47 (3.54)				-4.07 (3.54)
Some college				5.52				5.09

				(3.60)				(3.6)
Associate degree or higher				19.37***				18.66***
				(3.52)				(3.52)
Adjusted $R^2$	.001	.033	.033	.04	.0007	.033	.033	.039
Non-Asian	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>N</i>	18,642	18,642	17,519	17,519	18,642	18,642	17,519	17,519

\* $p < .10$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .01$

**Table 5**  
**Study Time Use Regressions by Race**

	White Students	White Students	Black Students	Black Students	Hispanic Students	Hispanic Students
	1	2	3	4	5	6
State share Asian	1.59*** (.36)	-	1.81** (.91)	-	1.06** (.48)	-
City share Asian	-	1.20*** (.34)	-	1.07 (.83)	-	0.62 (.49)
High school full time	25.39*** (4.29)	25.11*** (4.29)	15.3** (7.75)	15.5* (7.92)	23.92*** (4.91)	23.68*** (4.89)
part time	-	-	-	-		
College full time	59.5*** (4.63)	59.40*** (4.63)	58.51*** (8.42)	59.1*** (8.56)	61.81*** (6.17)	61.7*** (6.15)
part time	12.90** (4.57)	12.93** (4.58)	28.52** (8.73)	29.24** (8.88)	19.72** (5.88)	19.87** (5.86)
Household Income	-.19 (1.33)	-.22 (1.34)	-1.68 (2.51)	-1.45 (2.51)	10.10** (2.34)	10.19** (2.34)
R's father HS or less	-	-	-	-	-	-
HS diploma	.13 (4.36)	-.48 (4.36)	14.22 (12.21)	14.03 (12.27)	-.48 (6.75)	-.4 (6.77)
Some college	-1.55 (4.41)	-2.11 (4.42)	20.2 (12.68)	19.90 (12.78)	-11.69 (7.23)	-11.72 (7.23)
Associate degree or higher	7.47 (3.98)*	6.84 (3.99)*	15.79 (10.3)	15.72 (10.36)	-3.74 (5.53)	-3.42 (5.34)
R's mother HS or less	-	-	-	-	-	-
HS diploma	-5.13 (4.12)	-6.24 (4.11)	4.17 (7.14)	3.96 (7.15)	-3.74 (5.34)	-4.05 (5.53)
Some college	4.81 (4.21)	3.83 (4.2)	11 (7.28)	11.07 (7.29)	-2.74 (5.65)	-2.72 (5.67)
Associate degree or higher	18.88*** (4.16)	17.69*** (4.14)	20.55** (6.74)	20.30** (6.77)	13.53** (5.43)	12.98 (5.44)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.04	.039	.04	.04	.045	.044
N	14,232	14,232	2,616	2,616	3,185	3,185

\*p<.10, \*\*p<.05, \*\*\*p<.01

**Table 6**  
**Study Time Use Regressions of College vs. High School Students**

	College Students	College Students	High School Students	High School Students
	1	2	3	4
State share Asian	1.25** (.47)	-	1.31*** (.3)	-
City share Asian	-	.71 (.45)	-	1.53*** (.37)
Household Income	-9.23*** (1.63)	-9.08*** (1.63)	12.74*** (1.18)	12.69*** (1.17)
R's father HS or less	-	-	-	-
HS diploma	1.29 (11.74)	-.076 (11.72)	-1.22 (3.55)	-1.31 (3.56)
Some college	-3.72 (11.40)	-4.81 (11.39)	-1.21 (3.74)	-1.34 (3.75)
Associate degree or higher	-2.86 (10.63)	-4.08 (10.61)	6.4** (3.1)	5.94* (3.12)
R's mother				
High school or less HS diploma	-4.99 (10.23)	-5.82 (10.22)	-5.19* (3.08)	-5.45* (3.1)
Some college	9.76 (10.15)	9.25 (9.59)	.33 (3.18)	.16 (3.19)
Associate degree or higher	12.07 (9.59)	11.16 (9.59)	11.5*** (3.15)	10.96** (3.15)
Adjusted $R^2$	.005	.004	.033	.034
Non-Asian	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
$N$	10,002	10,002	7,517	7,517

\* $p < .10$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .01$