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Reading Reality More Carefully Than Books: A Structural Approach to Race and Class Differences in Adolescent Educational Performance

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During the past few years a great deal of media and scholarly attention has been directed at the educational achievements of Asian and Asian-American students. Cross-national comparisons report Asians excel far beyond their American counterparts. The academic feats of Asian-American students are said to surpass those of other minorities and Whites in the United States (Barringer, Takeuchi, and Xenos 1990; Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore 1991, 1992; Hirschman and Wong 1986; Stevenson and Stigler 1992). Stereotypical images of minority children abound in the popular and scholarly literature. Asian-Americans are considered "model minorities" (Kitano and Sue 1973). In contrast, minority children from African-American, Native-American, and Latino backgrounds are stereotyped as school failures. These stereotypes rarely differentiate among the various ethnic groups within Latino, African-American or Asian-American minority groups (Slaughter-Dafoe, Nakagawa, Takanishi, and Johnson 1990) nor are the important social-class differences within

groups (Mickelson 1990; College Board 1993) systematically considered.

Putting aside for the moment the question of the accuracy of these depictions, it is indisputable that many Asian-American students excel in school, while African-American, Latino, and American-Indian youth are disproportionately found in the ranks of dropouts and lower achievers. One of the more intriguing questions to arise from these patterns is why so many Asian-American students who attend the same public schools as African-American, Latino, and White students succeed, while many of the other minority students do not. Explanations for diverse educational outcomes by race and ethnicity are wide-ranging. Until quite recently (Gibson and Ogbu 1991; Steinberg, Dornbusch, and Brown 1992) explanations advanced for the successes of Asian-American students were often quite different from those used to account for the success of Whites or the failures of African-Americans, thereby making systematic comparisons among various racial and ethnic groups difficult.

In this chapter we offer an approach that begins to account for the various achievement patterns observed among American adolescents of diverse class, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. We start with the notion that perceptions of the opportunity structure influence adolescents' achievement attitudes and behaviors. All adolescents share beliefs about the ideal role of education in achieving the American Dream. At the same time, all adolescents perceive more or less realistically the nature of the opportunities and barriers that await people like them once they leave school. This is to say, adolescents from racial and ethnic minority groups are aware that they will face barriers to success. These perceptions, then, are refracted through the prism of different worldviews. Parents, older siblings, and neighbors impart an ethnic group's received collective wisdom and lived experiences within the opportunity structure to children over the years of their childhood. This historically contingent worldview channels and shapes adolescents' educational attitudes and school performance.

We will try to explain how children from different minority groups who experience various forms of blocked opportunity can develop cultural frameworks with quite

different educational strategies. For Asian-American students educational achievement continues to be a relatively functional strategy for upward mobility and success. For African-Americans, this is less true. Our approach, moreover, permits an exploration of class variation within each racial and ethnic group as well. As a result, we move toward a parsimonious theory which explains class, racial, and ethnic variations in school outcomes.

The Myth of the Amazing Asian-American

The topic of educational achievement among persons of Asian descent continues to captivate the interest of parents, policymakers, and academics. Comparative studies of American and overseas Asian educational practices and student achievement have been the basis for recommendations for reforming U.S. schools (e.g., Stevenson and Stigler 1992). Moreover, a host of studies have reported the extraordinary achievements of Asian-American students, particularly those of recent Asian immigrants to this country (Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore 1992; Gibson 1988; Hirschman and Wong 1986; Steinberg, Dornbusch, and Brown 1992; Walker-Moffat 1992). Because Asian-Americans have high levels of educational achievement and low rates of crime, mental health-seeking, and reliance on social services, they have earned the label of "model minority."

While noting the overall patterns of high achievement, it is important to note the heterogeneity among Asian-Americans in this country. Asian-American populations vary with respect to country of origin, social class, religion, language, generational status in the United States, cultural background, immigration status, and group history in this country. For example, while Japanese and Chinese immigrants began to arrive in this country in the 1800s (Takaki 1987, 1989), Korean laborers came to Hawaii at the turn of the century (Takaki 1993), and immigrants from Southeast Asia and the Pacific islands have accounted for a large part of the growth in the Asian-American population within the past decade (O'Hare and Felt 1991).

The diversity in the backgrounds of Asian-Americans is reflected in the variability in their income, employment status, and the educational level of adults (Barringer, Takeuchi, and Xenos 1990). For example, Southeast Asian households tend to have less than one-third of Filipino and Asian-Indian annual incomes (United States General Accounting Office 1990; United States Department of Commerce 1992a). Recent immigrant adults from Southeast Asia have been relatively uneducated; some are even illiterate in their own language (United States General Accounting Office 1990). As Barringer, Takeuchi, and Xenos point out, research indicates that although some Asian-Americans are better educated and better paid than many other American minorities, there still may be a gap between their relatively high educational levels and their resultant occupations and incomes. The literature suggests that compared to Whites, most Asian-Americans seem to be overeducated for the occupations they hold (p. 29). Asian-Americans receive 21 percent less income than Whites for each additional year of schooling (O'Hare and Felt 1991). The relatively weaker return from education is particularly true for Asian-American women. Barringer, Takeuchi, and Xenos (1990) caution that any assessment of "Asian success" requires consideration of national origin, recency of arrival for immigrants, nativity, gender, actual occupations, and sector of employment.

The model minority stereotype of Asian-Americans is, of course, a myth. Studies of Asian-American students' mental health have shown that Asian-Americans, particularly those who are foreign-born immigrants, tend to have higher rates of depression and other psychological adjustment difficulties than White students (Abe and Zane 1990; Gong-Guy 1987; Kuo 1984). Asian-American youth gangs have recently gained the attention of parents, the law enforcement system, and criminologists (Chen 1993; Walker-Moffat 1992).

The model minority myth also results from a popular misconception that all Asian-Americans are well educated. Educational attainment varies widely among Asian-Americans of different ethnic groups and generations in the United States (United States Department of Commerce 1992a; Schmidt 1992). Although the overall educational level of Asian-Americans is

high, recent census data reveal that 20 percent of Asian-Americans over the age of twenty-five have less than a high school diploma (O'Hare and Felt 1991; United States Department of Commerce 1992a).

Myths even pervade teachers' perceptions of their Asian-American students, whom they describe as exemplary, delightful pupils, or model students (Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore 1991, 1992; Gibson 1988; Lee 1991). Nevertheless, not all Asian-American students do well in school, many struggle to achieve, and certain ethnic groups and recent immigrants have high rates of school failure and dropping out. Walker-Moffat (1992) points to the case of Hmong teenage girls, who often drop out of school in order to have children because of the crucial importance of bearing children to Hmong women's status. Furthermore, Walker-Moffat (1992) notes that one reason Hmong students get high grades is that they are placed in ESL and low-level, non-college-bound classes. Sue and Zane (1985) found that immigrant Asian-American college students study longer hours and take fewer classes in order to compensate for their lack of expertise with English. Moreover, they found that among foreign-born Asian-American students who get high grades, many also appear to suffer from the stress of immigration and other emotional distresses.

In addition, Asian-American students also face many of the same obstacles to school success that other minority students encounter. These may include racial and ethnic hostility from other students and teachers, overcrowded classrooms, and limited proficiency in English.

Despite these difficulties, recent comparisons of students from four ethnic groups showed that Asian-Americans excel academically not only in comparison to African-Americans and Latinos but also in comparison to Whites (Steinberg, Dornbusch, and Brown 1992). Similarly, Asian-American students are more likely to persist in school than students from other racial and ethnic groups (Gibson 1988, p. 360; United States Department of Commerce 1992a, 1992b). Recent College Board results indicate Asian-American students are more likely than students from any other ethnic group to score well on college entrance exams (1993).

Because the patterns of African-American and White adolescent education have been thoroughly explicated elsewhere, they need not be reviewed here. We now turn to various explanations that have been advanced for Asian-American high educational performance relative to both White and other minority students.

Explanations for Asian-American Achievement

Heredity

Genetic approaches to explaining the ethnic differences in academic achievement continue to be advanced by scholars like R. Lynn (1987) and J. P. Rushton (1988). Lynn (1987) compared IQ test scores of various racial groups to advance a genetic-evolutionary theory that Asians are superior to Europeans in intelligence, who are, in turn, superior to Africans. Rushton (1988) argued that selective evolutionary processes have resulted in differential reproductive strategies for human racial groups, which in turn are manifested in racial differences in brain size and intelligence. These works have been criticized for falling short in scientific methodology and for assuming that academic achievement can be largely explained by genetic factors in intelligence (Cain and Vanderwolf 1990; Sue and Okazaki 1990, 1991).

Even if genetic-evolutionary arguments for racial and ethnic differences in achievement are refuted, few scholars deny that heredity plays some part in individual differences in intelligence, which in turn may be reflected in academic achievement. However, evidence is not sufficient to conclude that the observed achievement differences among various ethnic groups in the United States are due to racial variations in intelligence. Moreover, the documented variations in performance within a particular ethnic group in different social contexts (Gibson 1988; Lee 1991) suggest social-structural factors have as powerful an influence as either culture or intelligence.

Cultural Values

The tension between the tendency to lump together all Asian-Americans and the tendency to recognize historical, linguistic, social-class, and cultural variability among them is reflected in cultural arguments advanced to explain their academic achievements. Undergirding the claim of commonalities in culture is the influence of Chinese culture and Confucianism on Japanese, Vietnamese, and Korean cultures (Lee 1991). For example, Nathan Caplan and his colleagues describe education and achievement, a cohesive family, and hard work as the "core" values that constitute the bedrock of refugees' culturally derived beliefs (Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore 1991). Uichol Kim and Maria B. J. Chun (1993) cite the commonalities across East Asian cultures which share a Confucian and Buddhist core. In a related vein, Harold Stevenson and James Stigler (1992) argue that Japanese and Chinese parents share certain assumptions that differ from those of other American parents about child development, the respective roles of schools and families in children's education, the influence of effort versus ability in school achievement, and the malleability of children.

The flip side of the cultural values coin is the claim that the values associated with the culture of poverty, which many poor African-Americans, Latinos, and American Indians allegedly share, undermine their children's achievement (Lewis 1966; Valentine 1971). While this older explanation of minority groups' underachievement has been soundly debunked, it has reappeared in a modern form as the current rhetoric about "at-risk" youth, whose parents ostensibly fail to provide them with the wherewithal to succeed in school. Both the claim of superior Asian cultural values which inoculate children against school failure and that of inferior values of children at-risk require greater empirical scrutiny.

Cultural values as explanations for Asian achievement are not new. Caudill and DeVos (1956) argued that the successful adaptation of Japanese immigrants to the United States was due to the compatibility between traditional Japanese and middle-class American values. Similarly, Sung (1967) argued that the Chinese values of hard work and scholarship enabled their children to succeed in American schools. John Ogbu (1983) notes

that such explanations make no distinction between the behavior and values of peasants and those of higher classes within Chinese society, nor do they explain why children of immigrant peasants succeeded in their new countries while their peers in China did not. Stanley Sue and Sumie Okazaki (1990) also point out that cultural values do not operate in a vacuum. Similarly, Ogbu (1987) cautions that any microcultural analysis which fails to include the wider societal structure cannot show how educational performance is linked with the wider economy and polity. Moreover, different members of the same cultural groups have vastly different educational outcomes across diverse societal conditions; for example, Koreans in Japan are not noted for their academic achievement while those in the United States frequently excel in school (Gibson and Ogbu 1991; Lee 1991). Finally, it is not clear that the educational or family values of ethnic minorities who are less likely to succeed in school (e.g., African-Americans or Latinos) are, in fact, essentially different from those of ethnic minorities who do (e.g., Chinese-Americans).

Our approach to the central question of class, racial, and ethnic differences in school outcomes draws heavily from three recent conceptualizations of minority achievement. Although these models are grounded in different disciplines, they have in common the view that what adolescents do in school is influenced by their perceptions of the social world in which they live. The first has been proposed by cultural anthropologists, the second by psychologists, and the third by a sociologist. We turn to a description of each of these.

Cultural Model

John U. Ogbu (1991) begins with the proposition that all groups in society, minorities as well as the majority, have a cultural model or folk theory that serves as a framework for interpreting the world. His conception of a cultural model links an ethnic group's educational orientation to specific historical conditions of the group's incorporation into a majority society and the group members' lived experiences once in it. Importantly, each group's cultural model is connected to some degree with the

historical record of relative academic success or failure of its members in the host society. Ogbu argues that what distinguishes educationally successful minority groups from less successful ones is the cultural model guiding their adolescents' school behavior. More successful minorities tend to be immigrant groups who compare returns from education and opportunities for advancement in the United States to those in their country of origin, or they look within the group and compare the social positions of group members with and without educational credentials. This within-group comparison supports a view of education as a credible strategy for advancement. In contrast, less successful students tend to be involuntary minorities who compare their returns from education to those of the majority group—a between-group comparison—find themselves wanting, and develop cultural models where, quite reasonably, education does not serve as a strategy for advancement.

Psychological Explanations

Psychologists Stanley Sue and Sumie Okazaki (1990) offer an approach to explain how differences in structures of opportunity contribute to high achievement among Asian-Americans and lower levels of educational success among other minorities. Their relative functionalism explanation posits that Asian-American students work harder and achieve academically because they regard educational achievement as the best means to success in this country for people like themselves. For Asian-Americans, compared to other ethnic minority and majority groups, other means to success are perceived as relatively less functional. Unlike African-Americans and Latinos, Asian-Americans in this country have very few models in political leadership roles, professional sports, or entertainment. Even in business, there may be a glass ceiling effect, whereby Asian-Americans are disproportionately underrepresented in management and other high-status positions within organizations. Therefore, education (and the professional opportunities it opens up) may be the most viable means of achieving success.

One problem with this explanation is that it presumes that a rational-choice model underlies Asian achievement but an irrational one shapes the behavior of other ethnic minorities like African-Americans and Latinos. In reality, education is also the most viable route to success for all ethnic and minority people. Medical school is still a relatively more functional route to success for African-Americans than is the National Basketball Association or Capitol Records. Far fewer African-Americans and Latinos will become upwardly mobile through sports and entertainment than through the professions and business. The question that remains unanswered by the relative functionalism hypothesis is why Asian-Americans continue to pursue education despite discrimination and limited opportunity while African-Americans and Latinos do not. Why are members of certain minority groups more likely to pursue education than others? Relative functionalism explanations tend to be circular: Those who pursue education believe it will work; those who don't believe it do not pursue education. Why some minorities believe education will work and others have lost faith in it as a strategy for success remains unclear.

Abstract and Concrete Attitudes

Roslyn Mickelson's (1990) investigation of the relationship between perceptions of various barriers and opportunities in the occupational structure and high school achievement of adolescents from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds begins to answer these questions. She compared the attitudes toward education and school performance of about 1,200 African-American and White adolescents and proposes that all adolescents' attitudes toward education are multidimensional. The first dimension is composed of abstract attitudes that reflect the American Dream's account of the role of education and opportunities. An example of one of the beliefs which comprise the abstract attitude scale is: "Education is the key to success in the future." The second dimension is composed of concrete attitudes rooted in the material realities in which educational credentials may or may not be fairly rewarded. Unlike abstract attitudes, concrete attitudes actually channel and shape

achievement behavior. An example of one of the beliefs which form the concrete attitudes scale is the statement, "Based on their experiences, my parents say people like us are not always paid or promoted according to our education."

Mickelson (1990) demonstrated that all students simultaneously hold abstract and concrete attitudes toward education, and that concrete, not abstract, attitudes vary by students' race and class. Importantly, she showed that concrete attitudes, but not abstract attitudes, contribute significantly to the explained variance in achievement among all students. Substantively, the study illustrated how perceptions of race and class stratification in the opportunity structure, which are, along with gender, large components of the social context of achievement, influence school outcomes.

Dunchun Zheng (1991) later analyzed the data from the Asian-American sample in Mickelson's (1990) study and compared them with those of the African-American students. He demonstrated that, like African-Americans and Whites, Asian-American students hold dual attitudes toward education. Asian-Americans' abstract attitudes were uniformly very positive and reflected the dominant ideology's account of education and opportunity, but did not correlate with their high school achievement. Similarly, their concrete attitudes correlated with high school achievement.

Mickelson, Okazaki, and Zheng (1993) reanalyzed her original data, this time including Asian-American, African-American, and White adolescents in the sample. The newly included Asian-American sample of approximately one hundred students is comprised predominantly of Japanese, Chinese, and Korean youth. Using the model of achievement Mickelson proposed in her earlier work (Mickelson 1990), they first submitted student attitude and achievement measures to three-way analyses of variance to test for mean differences by race, class, and gender. The second step of their analysis used a multiple regression analysis to determine the relative contribution of various social forces (abstract and concrete attitudes, parental education and occupation, gender, peer influence) to the prediction of achievement.

TABLE 4.1. Means of Attitudes and Achievement by Race, Ethnic, Class, and Gender Cohort.

Class	MALES			FEMALES		
	Black	Asian	White	Black	Asian	White
MIDDLE						
GPA	2.19	2.98	2.71	2.36	2.94	2.81****
Ascore	5.48	5.19	5.02	5.22	5.33	5.07*
Cscore	4.39	4.39	4.90	4.43	4.54	5.00****
(N)	56	37	224	84	34	241
WORKING						
GPA	2.10	2.72	2.42	2.29	2.94	2.74
Ascore	5.23	5.37	4.93	5.29	5.22	5.18
Cscore	4.20	4.23	4.55	4.19	4.10	4.81
(N)	138	18	109	140	15	93

* $p < .05$ **** $p < .0001$.

Note: Ascore and Cscore ranged from 1 to 7 where 1 indicated high and 7 indicated low endorsement of the relationship of education and opportunity.

The results of the analyses of variance of students' attitudes by their race-by-gender-by-class groups indicated all students hold very positive abstract attitudes toward education. Whites, African-Americans, and Asian-Americans share extremely positive beliefs about the role of education in achieving the American Dream. Moreover, both African-Americans' and Asian-Americans' abstract attitudes toward education were significantly more optimistic than those of Whites in similar class and gender cohorts (see Mickelson, Okazaki, and Zheng 1993 for details).

All held concrete attitudes toward achievement that reflected racial, ethnic, and class differences in opportunity. Middle-class Asian-Americans' concrete attitudes were almost

identical to those of African-Americans; that is, the attitudes of both ethnic groups were significantly more pessimistic about schooling and opportunity than those of middle-class White students. Similarly, working-class Asian-Americans' concrete attitudes were virtually identical to those of working-class African-Americans, and both were significantly more pessimistic than those of working-class Whites about the value of education with respect to the opportunity structure.

The ANOVAS reveal significant racial, ethnic, and class differences in grade-point averages as well. In all comparisons Asians' grades exceeded those of Whites and African-Americans in comparable classes. With the exception of working-class Asian women, whose average grades were identical to those of their middle-class counterparts, the grades of all middle-class students exceeded those of students of the same race and gender in the working class.

The results of multiple regression analysis indicate that, as hypothesized, abstract attitudes do not contribute to the explained variance in achievement for individuals from any ethnic group. Concrete attitudes contribute significantly to the explained variance in all students' achievement, suggesting that the effects of family background and the opportunity structure are expressed through students' concrete attitudes. Those with more positive perceptions of the role of education in their future received higher grades. Not surprisingly, students whose friends plan to attend college achieved higher grades. Comparisons among the three racial and ethnic groups indicate that gender is an important factor in achievement among Blacks and Whites, but not among Asian-American students (see Mickelson, Okazaki, and Zheng 1993 for details).

Mickelson, Okazaki, and Zheng's (1993) finding that all students have both concrete and abstract attitudes indicates that while all youth are well socialized into the dominant ideology's account of education and opportunity, simultaneously all students are keenly aware of their place in the opportunity structure. Students from different classes and ethnic groups read reality more carefully than their textbooks, and what they learn shapes their school performance.

The abstract attitudes of both Asian-American and African-American students are higher than those of Whites in comparable gender and class cohorts. This comparability of abstract attitudes suggests Asian-American and African-American youth embrace, at least in theory, the optimistic account of the role of schooling in achieving the American Dream. As members of oppressed racial and ethnic minorities, it is not surprising that Asian-Americans and African-Americans hold concrete attitudes toward education that reflect the realities of racism in employment opportunities, pay, glass ceilings, and short career ladders. But while Asian-Americans' concrete attitudes are almost identical to those of African-Americans in their assessment of the racial, ethnic, and class barriers to realizing the American Dream, the grades of Asian-Americans are equal to or better than those of Whites of similar class and gender cohorts who ostensibly do not face comparable barriers. This pattern of school achievement among Asian-Americans in the face of likely discrimination is precisely what we wish to understand and explain. Why do Asian-Americans recognize job ceilings, limited career ladders, (and) the many extra hurdles they must face, yet continue to achieve in school? Why does knowledge of the limitations of the opportunity structure depress the achievement of many African-Americans? For possible explanations, we revisit Ogbu's (1991) conceptualization of cultural models, and Sue and Okazaki's (1990) relative functionalism.

Linking Cultural Frameworks and the Structure of Opportunity

In this section we will formulate a parsimonious explanation of the differences in school outcomes we and others have observed among Asian-Americans in comparison with African-Americans. The question is extremely important because both minorities are oppressed in American society. The nature of each group's oppression is historically contingent and varies with region, social class, and length of time in this society. Mickelson, Okazaki, and Zheng's data show Asian-American and African-

American youth are keenly aware of the racism and lesser opportunities they are likely to face once they leave school. Both groups are markedly different (as reflected in their concrete attitudes) in this regard from White students of the same social class. But the behavior of Asian-Americans and African-Americans in school is quite disparate, as evidenced by their grade point averages. On the whole, Asian-American youth much more often than African-American youth vigorously pursue education as the solution to this problem and work very hard in school, while African-American youth are much less likely to do the same.

We start with the concept of cultural model, which Ogbu (1991) describes as a group's understanding of how their society works and their respective place in that working order. Cultural models are influenced by two historical forces: (1) the group's initial terms of incorporation and (2) subsequent discriminatory treatment. Because of immigrant minorities' voluntary incorporation into the host society, they possess a dual frame of reference that allows them to develop or maintain an optimistic view of their future possibilities. They compare their current situation, not with that of the dominant group, but with that of kinfolk in their country of origin or that of other members of their group in the host society. In both contrasts, members of their group with more education fare relatively better than those with less. This leads them to the conclusion that, despite real barriers to opportunity, pursuing an education makes sense—at least more sense than not pursuing one.

Involuntary minorities, like African-Americans, Chicanos, and American-Indians, in contrast, have as a frame of reference only the dominant group of their society. The reasons for this lie in their long history of subordination and their collective memory of discriminatory treatment. They are more cynical about the promise of opportunity through education because they accurately perceive that, relative to the dominant group, they do not receive comparable (e.g., fair and equitable) returns for their hard work in school. This assessment, rooted in their material reality, leads to disillusionment, cynicism about schooling, and the reasonable conclusion that investing time,

effort, and hopes for the future in education may not be the most rational choice (Mickelson 1993; Ogbu 1991).

Another aspect of immigrant minorities' responses to discrimination is their explanations for why they face ethnic barriers. They attribute the barriers to their newness, their language difficulties, and cultural traits that set them apart from the majority, as well as to racism and ethnic prejudice. Acquisition of educational credentials appears to be a rational response to unequal returns to education because voluntary minorities can continue to believe in the overall societal rules for advancement while they place the onus on themselves to acquire the cultural traits (such as standard English and educational credentials) perceived as necessary to compete in what they still believe to be an essentially meritocratic system. Involuntary minorities, like African-Americans, in contrast, perceive labor market discrimination as a relatively permanent barrier. They are more skeptical regarding the relative function of schooling, and of meritocratic assumptions of the links between education and status attainment alleged to underlie the opportunity structure (Mickelson 1993; Ogbu 1991).

Divergent cultural models provide an explanation of why education may be treated as relatively more functional to Asian-Americans than to African-Americans. Asian-American students in the sample studied by Mickelson, Okazaki, and Zheng (1993) share with African-American students concrete attitudes which reflect their awareness of the job ceiling, the glass ceiling, and other barriers to opportunity that members of oppressed minorities face in American society. However, significant differences in the groups' achievement suggest that each group interprets these barriers through a different cultural model. In the case of Asian-American youth, comparisons with uneducated Asian-Americans or with Asians in their country of origin likely reveal educational achievement to be a relatively more functional response to their future given the lack of alternatives. The cultural model of African-American youth refracts perceptions of their future through a lens littered with a history of broken promises and poor returns to education even for those who have education comparable to that of majority Whites. A rational response by African-Americans to perceptions

of their place in the social order does not necessarily lead them to believe that education is relatively functional for them. Their assessment, rooted in their material reality, may lead to disillusionment, cynicism about schooling, and the reasonable conclusion that investing time, effort, and hopes for the future in the pursuit of education may not necessarily bring the promised rewards.

A final element in a group's cultural model is its social identity. Immigrants come to their host society with an identity forged prior to their immigration. They teach their children that they are different from the dominant group and that what sets them apart is valuable and worthwhile. Ogbu (1991) argues, therefore, that learning the host society's language and norms does not diminish the positive identity immigrants possess; it is additive rather than subtractive of their identity. In Margaret Gibson's (1988) words, voluntary minorities can accommodate themselves to the dominant culture without assimilating or losing their identity. The identities of involuntary minorities develop in opposition to the dominant group's culture under terms of subordination. For many involuntary minority youth an oppositional identity constitutes a way of believing and acting which affirms one as a bona fide member of a group which is different, indeed, in opposition to the cultural identity of the dominant group or the "oppressors." If studying hard in school is a dominant cultural norm, subordinate members may reject it. The work of Signithia Fordham and John U. Ogbu (1986) suggests how the oppositional identity of some adolescent African-Americans leads them to ridicule high achievers as "acting White."

The concept of an oppositional identity is hauntingly reminiscent of Paul Willis's (1977) description of working-class White "lads," whose identity centered around their resistance to schooling. In contrast to "earholes," who passively acquiesced to the school and its demands, the lads undermine and resist education. In his account of how English working-class White males end up with working-class jobs, Willis described how the lads' resistance to education is both fundamental to their social identity and rooted in the material realities of their male working-class culture, which, for example, considered books and

reading to be "feminine" and, thus, to be avoided. But this behavior sealed their fate. Once they resisted schooling they consigned themselves to never rising above the factory floor if they were lucky enough to find a job in the deindustrialized English economy. Their resistance, just like the oppositional identity of African-Americans who refuse to study in order to avoid "acting White," forecloses any possibility that they will attain jobs other than low-wage, low-skill dead-end service jobs in the restructured, "information age" economy (Ray and Mickelson 1993).

The following story about a working-class African-American male illustrates how his understanding of the function of education was shaped by the barriers to success faced by his sister. Al Boswell was interviewed by the first author several years after he graduated from a Los Angeles area high school. He was selected to be interviewed because he had participated in Mickelson's (1990) survey of student attitudes several years earlier. Although highly intelligent, articulate, and hard working, he had, nonetheless, dropped out of college after three semesters and taken a job as a clerk in a truck rental agency. When asked, Al could not give a reason for dropping out of college. Twenty minutes later in the interview, he described how at the time he dropped out of college his older sister, who had graduated from college with a social work degree, had not been able to find work for two years. Discouraged, she applied abroad and eventually found a job in the Virgin Islands at much less pay than she would have received in Los Angeles and at a considerable distance from her family. At first Al did not connect his decision to drop out of school with his sister's difficulties in the labor market. Later in the interview he reflected upon the two events and speculated that, indeed, the two may well have been connected. That is to say, until the interview he had not been conscious of the effects of his sister's struggles on the cultural model through which he understood the meaning of education for people like him. When asked again how he understood his decision to leave college, Al responded with a shrug of resignation, "Why bother?"

If our conceptualization of the relationship between achievement and the dynamics of class, race, and opportunity is

correct, we can expect voluntary minority students to begin to redefine the relative function of education with each succeeding generation in the United States. The longer an immigrant group has been in the United States, the longer will be its history of racial barriers and diminished returns for education, and the weaker will be its collective memory of education and opportunity in their country of origin. Over time, the cultural model of voluntary minorities may begin to resemble those of involuntary ones, and this may result in declining academic achievement for voluntary minorities.

While the evidence is far from complete, there appear to be some data on Japanese-Americans which lend support to this hypothesis. Barbara Schneider and her colleagues note that Japanese-Americans represent a unique group among East Asians (Schneider, Hieshima, and Lee 1994). Because of reduced immigration in the last five decades, Japanese-Americans are primarily an American-born English-speaking ethnic group; 72 percent of them are either third (Sansei) or fourth (Yonsei) generation (Takaki 1989). In their comparisons of middle-school Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and White student performance and parental attitudes toward education, Schneider, Hieshima, and Lee find evidence of acculturation among the Japanese. Japanese and White American parents shared similar attitudes toward education and Japanese student grades were lower than those of Korean or Chinese students but comparable to those of White youths. The researchers speculate that continued discrimination experienced by Japanese-American families in the labor force and by their children in school may undermine their commitment to education. Repeated incidents of racism may erode their confidence in the instrumental value, or relative functionalism, of education (Schneider, Hieshima, and Lee 1994).

Similarly, Alan Shoho (1992) reports that because of growing economic pressures among Hawaiians of Japanese descent, third-generation Japanese have reduced involvement in their children's education (compared to first- and second-generation parents). He notes that the ramifications of decreased parental involvement in the education of Yonsei (fourth-

generation) youth has resulted in greater levels of social misbehavior and educational underachievement among them.

Conclusions

Most Asian-American youth, while keenly aware of limitations and discrimination they face, continue to believe that perseverance in school will bring more rewards than resisting education, albeit fewer than for Whites but certainly more than they could hope for without educational credentials. Aewon Park, a Korean-American high school senior in an advanced placement Chemistry class, explained her academic achievements. "My mom tells me that, yes, I'll have to be three times as good as Whites to become a doctor." This statement suggests that she knows she will face racism and discrimination, but she believes that eventually her hard work will compensate for them, and she can become a physician. Unlike African-American Al Boswell, she still has reasons to bother to acquire an education.

We have not answered the question of why immigrant cultural models develop differently from those of involuntary minorities. Is the reason purely historical? Is it because immigrant minorities have been here long enough for several generations of youth to be battered by blocked opportunity? How do immigrant minorities come to perceive education as a relatively more functional strategy than other approaches? To put it differently, why do numerous involuntary minorities depend on noneducational avenues like sports, entertainment, and politics more often than schooling as a relatively more functional strategy for success when education is a far more likely route to mobility? Any definitive explanation for racial and ethnic differences in school outcomes must begin to answer these questions.

A final set of questions that arises from the notion that cultural models are historically contingent concerns the future children of the young Korean woman, Aewon Park, who plans to be a physician despite the racial barriers she knows she will encounter. In thirty years, will her daughter think and act in a

similar fashion? Or will her generation become cynical realists actively resisting schooling like so many Latino, American-Indian, and African-American adolescents today, who, after many generations, have come to doubt the value of education for achieving the American Dream?

NOTES

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