

Diversity and Development of Asian Americans: Research Gaps in Minority Child Development

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Pathways of development, including consideration of risk and protective factors that accompany these trajectories, constitute a major research paradigm guiding contemporary developmental psychology. Surprisingly, little attention has been given to developmental issues for the fastest growing minority population in North America using the pathways model. Consequently, little is known about the diversity of Asian Americans, the differences among them that are contributed by the more than two dozen countries from which they come, or how their cultures of origin function in the new contexts of U.S. life. In effect, little is known about the continuities or the discontinuities in the development of Asian Americans.

What is known about this minority group is known by the stereotypes of achievement, educational excellence, entrepreneurship, and other positive attributes used to illustrate that the American dream is still achievable by racial minorities in America.

The effect of the paucity of research combined with stereotypes that fail to account for within-group diversity is to understand little of why certain members succeed; how others fall victim to unrealistic expectations; and most important for behavioral science, to fail to understand how values, beliefs, and culture guide socialization of millions of people within U.S. society.

The series of articles that follows continues the practice of the *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* of devoting journal space to issues and topics underrepresented in the research literature. The focus in the following five articles addresses positive influences on development of Asian Americans, raises issues of diversity within the group, and points

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to the need for research data that address within-group differences. The articles discuss socialization influences, consequences for healthy child development, and what it means to be a member of a diverse minority that is different, in many respects, from other North American minority groups.

Ki-Taek Chun (1992), in a recent U.S. Civil Rights Commission Report on Asian Americans, stated that "The model minority stereotype is a seductive and attractive proposition" that has damaging consequences because it causes people to ignore the problems facing Asian Americans. To regard census data showing that all had higher than median household incomes as telling their success story is to ignore that the 1.6 million Chinese, 800,000 Koreans, and 800,000 Asian Indians also had higher poverty rates than the national average (1980 data most recent for this group). It is expected that the 1990 census data will show even higher poverty rates for Southeast Asians and for Asians as a whole.

The effect of the myth is to direct attention away from the problems facing Asian Americans, including poverty within this group, their drug addiction problems, homelessness, their gang memberships, their loss of jobs, the factors that cause the youth to drop out of schools, the culture conflicts that are often unrecognized, the problem of runaway youth, and the fact that many have severe psychiatric disorders. Myths and stereotypes divert attention away from investigating who is affected by conditions such as poverty, how the individuals are affected, and which coping mechanisms help in their survival. In effect, little is known about the vulnerabilities or the resiliencies of Asian Americans because of the myth that has been widely accepted about this minority group.

The following articles were selected to emphasize diversity among Asian Americans. The diversity reported briefly in the discussions are within specific groups to show generational differences and differences thought of as adaptations to the circumstances of their new immigrant contexts. In this regard, it is important to note that the context of development operates similarly when environmental circumstances are comparable across contexts. For example, Koreans show low educational achievement in a host society like Japan where they are involuntary immigrants and where discrimination and limits for upward mobility are conveyed to youth through low parental expectations (Choi, Bempechat, & Ginsburg, 1993); they show high educational achievement in the United States where they are voluntary immigrants (Ogbu, 1994) and expectations are the reverse. Diversity can also be seen across the articles, illustrating that different expectations, aspirations, family factors, and different cultural beliefs operate as guides for the groups who comprise this minority. In this diversity, however, the articles convey a core of similarity in values across the groups.

The articles invited for this special issue were inspired by a larger project on continuities and discontinuities in minority child development. A conference was held in 1991 (Greenfield & Cocking, 1994) to convene international scholars to discuss how culture operates in and out of context and to assess how cultural diversity may illustrate adaptive mechanisms. The conference specifically explored the roots of minority child development, focusing on ancestral cultures, as well as the discontinuities generated by immigration or involuntary incorporation into a nation. Scholars from Africa, Asia, Mexico, the United States, and Europe presented studies concerned with cultural values, socialization, and development in their respective societies. Within the United States African American, Asian American, Mexican American, Native American, and Euro American scholars presented studies on these same themes in all of the aforementioned groups.

Later that year, a symposium was held as part of the International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development in which many of these issues were explored (Greenfield & Cocking, 1993). That symposium focused on Africa and African Americans, and Mexico and Mexican Americans.

An Asian culture symposium that grew out of the original conference was part of the 1992 convention of the American Educational Research Association Special Interest Group. That symposium was the source for the articles in this special section of the *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*.

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