

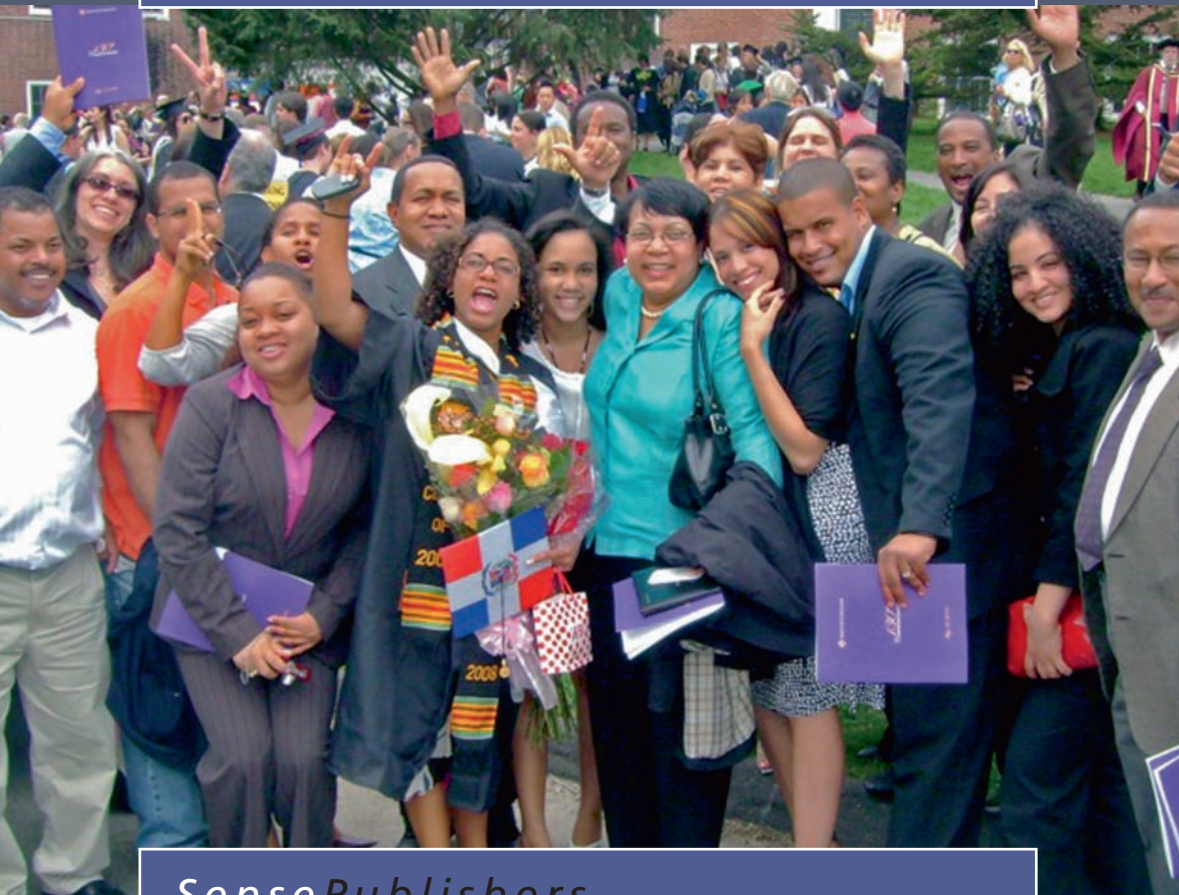
Beyond Stereotypes

Minority Children of Immigrants in Urban Schools

Rosalina Diaz

&

Rupam Saran (Eds.)



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TRANSGRESSIONS: CULTURAL STUDIES AND EDUCATION

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TRANSGRESSIONS: CULTURAL STUDIES AND EDUCATION

Cultural studies provides an analytical toolbox for both making sense of educational practice and extending the insights of educational professionals into their labors. In this context *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* provides a collection of books in the domain that specify this assertion. Crafted for an audience of teachers, teacher educators, scholars and students of cultural studies and others interested in cultural studies and pedagogy, the series documents both the possibilities of and the controversies surrounding the intersection of cultural studies and education. The editors and the authors of this series do not assume that the interaction of cultural studies and education devalues other types of knowledge and analytical forms. Rather the intersection of these knowledge disciplines offers a rejuvenating, optimistic, and positive perspective on education and educational institutions. Some might describe its contribution as democratic, emancipatory, and transformative. The editors and authors maintain that cultural studies helps free educators from sterile, monolithic analyses that have for too long undermined efforts to think of educational practices by providing other words, new languages, and fresh metaphors. Operating in an interdisciplinary cosmos, *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* is dedicated to exploring the ways cultural studies enhances the study and practice of education. With this in mind the series focuses in a non-exclusive way on popular culture as well as other dimensions of cultural studies including social theory, social justice and positionality, cultural dimensions of technological innovation, new media and media literacy, new forms of oppression emerging in an electronic hyperreality, and postcolonial global concerns. With these concerns in mind cultural studies scholars often argue that the realm of popular culture is the most powerful educational force in contemporary culture. Indeed, in the twenty-first century this pedagogical dynamic is sweeping through the entire world. Educators, they believe, must understand these emerging realities in order to gain an important voice in the pedagogical conversation.

Without an understanding of cultural pedagogy's (education that takes place outside of formal schooling) role in the shaping of individual identity—youth identity in particular—the role educators play in the lives of their students will continue to fade. Why do so many of our students feel that life is incomprehensible and devoid of meaning? What does it mean, teachers wonder, when young people are unable to describe their moods, their affective affiliation to the society around them. Meanings provided young people by mainstream institutions often do little to help them deal with their affective complexity, their difficulty negotiating the rift between meaning and affect. School knowledge and educational expectations seem as anachronistic as a ditto machine, not that learning ways of rational thought and making sense of the world are unimportant. But school knowledge and educational expectations often have little to offer students about making sense of the way they feel, the way their affective lives are shaped. In no way do we argue that analysis of the production of youth in an electronic mediated world demands some “touchy-feely” educational superficiality. What is needed in this context is a rigorous analysis of the interrelationship between pedagogy, popular culture, meaning making, and youth subjectivity. In an era marked by youth depression, violence, and suicide such insights become extremely important, even life saving. Pessimism about the future is the common sense of many contemporary youth with its concomitant feeling that no one can make a difference.

If affective production can be shaped to reflect these perspectives, then it can be reshaped to lay the groundwork for optimism, passionate commitment, and transformative educational and political activity. In these ways cultural studies adds a dimension to the work of education unfilled by any other sub-discipline. This is what *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* seeks to produce—literature on these issues that makes a difference. It seeks to publish studies that help those who work with young people, those individuals involved in the disciplines that study children and youth, and young people themselves improve their lives in these bizarre times.

Beyond Stereotypes

Minority Children of Immigrants in Urban Schools

Edited by

Rupam Saran

Rosalina Diaz



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Dedication

In Loving Memory of our Mentor & Friend
Joe Lyons Kincheloe
1950 - 2008

Your spirit continues to empower us to understand and unveil oppression and social injustice in our classrooms and in our world. Your presence in our lives has transformed us forever. Thank you, Joe.

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Our thanks to all the dedicated scholars & researchers who generously shared their work & wisdom with us through this text, especially Philip Anderson and Philip Kasinitz of the CUNY Graduate Center who additionally provided support and guidance. We also acknowledge our spouses and families for their on-going support, and patience. But mostly we acknowledge the many young people of diverse ethnicities and cultural backgrounds whose lives are reflected in these pages and whose presence through the years has enriched our classrooms and our lives.

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PREFACE

MOVING BEYOND STEREOTYPES

What the new Second Generation means for our schools...and our nation

More than 35 million immigrants have come to the United States since 1965. One out of every five children in the US has immigrant parents, and in many of the nation's largest cities the numbers are much higher. Indeed, in both New York and Los Angeles, immigrants and their US born children together now make up the majority of the population.

Of course, many readers are familiar with these numbers. But it is worth stopping for a moment and thinking about what they mean. Too often, when the "immigration issue" is discussed in the media or among policy makers, the focus is on the process of immigration itself. Legislators wrangle endlessly over how many immigrants should come to the US, how we should control our borders and what we should do about the millions of undocumented immigrants who are already here. Yet in some ways this discussion of immigration policy misses the point. For all the attention paid to immigration, the US has never really had a systematic policy to cope with the *incorporation* of newcomers and their children. The question of where these new Americans will fit in American society, and how they will change the nation in the process, could hardly be more important. Yet the hard work of responding to the challenges of our ever more diverse society usually falls to overwhelmed and underfunded local institutions whose ad hoc responses to the nation's changing demography are often based on outmoded models, misinformation, and stereotypes. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the public schools.

Thanks goodness then, for Professors Saran and Diaz, and the marvelous volume they have put together. In these pages readers will find an up to the minute account of the kinds of problems now facing students, teachers and educational policy makers. Saran, Diaz and the other contributors to this volume move beyond simplistic, "who is doing well and who is not" account of contemporary immigrant students and make a strong case for new conceptual frameworks. On the one hand, they show how today's post civil rights climate shapes the context of reception for today's immigrant students. At the same time they show how outmoded the "black/white" and even the "black/white/Latino" models of race relations have become. They take on both the "model minority" stereotypes of immigrant achievement and negative stereotypes of inevitable "downward assimilation" for some immigrant groups as two sides of the same coin. Both, they argue, obscure the increasingly complex realities educators now face.

This contribution could hardly be more timely. Today many—too many in my view—despair of the children of immigrants finding their place in American society. On the political left there are those who fear that since most immigrants

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and their children are not considered “white,” racial discrimination will prevent their upward mobility, swelling the ranks of an impoverished minority population. Others, mainly on the political right, worry that multiculturalism of post-1960’s America, combined with today’s large numbers of immigrants will lead to a balkanized society of dual loyalties and declining civic unity. And across the spectrum many are concerned that the decline in manufacturing and other blue collar jobs means that today’s newcomers and their children will have less opportunities for economic advancement than immigrants did in the past.

These concerns echo those heard within the immigrant communities. Most immigrants came to the United States to make a better life for their families. They hope that through their sacrifices, their children will grow up with the opportunities, educations and security that come from being Americans. At the same time many immigrants worry about what will become of their children in this strange and often confusing new land. Will they succumb to the dangers and temptations of the American streets? Will they work as hard as their immigrant parents or will they Americanize so thoroughly that they lose their parent’s immigrant drive? It’s the old paradox of assimilation. Immigrants hope their children will grow up as Americans, but they worry about what kind of Americans they will become. They want them to assimilate but perhaps not completely, and certainly not too fast.

It is also important to note that today’s immigrants and their children face an American society that is different in many ways from the one that confronted their predecessors in the early to mid 20th century. For one thing, there has been a dramatic cultural shift away from what Milton Gordon described as the “Anglo-conformity” model of incorporation to a more multicultural vision now dominant in most educational settings. This greatly reduced the pressure towards cultural conformity on the part of newcomers, and, ironically, probably made incorporation easier. Of course many of the young people we read about in this volume are keenly aware of their “outsider” status and many struggle with questions of identity. At the same time, however, they take for granted a world in which many forms of diversity are not only tolerated, they are celebrated, particularly by institutions of higher education. In 1940’s showing up on the Harvard or Williams campus wearing a Sari, insisting on Halal food, removing one’s shoes when entering a dwelling or even speaking with an accent, would have no doubt subjected a young person to considerable social isolation and ridicule. Today, not only are such things unremarkable, they would, if anything, encourage an invitation to an officially sanctioned campus club made of people who share these ways, paid for by student activities fees.

In addition to the greater acceptance of cultural difference on the part of the broader society, the situation in many educational institutions has been changed by the presence of earlier immigrants as well as members of native minority groups in positions of authority in educational institutions. These educators may not always be as supportive of the members of newer groups as we might like. However their presence may have effects in itself. For example, it seems unlikely that speaking English with an accent will be a handicap in an academic department in which the

chair and the most senior faculty all speak English with an accent—not an unusual circumstance in many of the nation’s leading University science departments. Moreover the incorporation of earlier waves of immigrants, and perhaps more important, the struggles for racial equality and greater opportunities for minorities inspired by the civil rights movement, has left an institutional infrastructure for promoting opportunity both within the educational establishment and within minority communities. Today’s children of immigrants may not be aware of the origins of such institutions, but that does prevent them from taking advantage of them.

I do not mean to sound like a “Pollyanna” or imply that today’s children of immigrants “have it easy.” As anyone reading this volume will see, they certainly do not. Readers will also come to appreciate the complexity of the task that lies before the nation’s educators. Yet I suspect that looking into the lives of today’s second generation, readers will also come away with a bit of guarded optimism about their prospects. Many, as it turns out, are doing surprisingly well—defying stereotypes and surpassing comparable natives in their educational outcomes and their earnings while moving quickly into the nation’s increasingly multiethnic mainstream. Indeed, growing up in multi-ethnic neighborhoods and often attending dizzyingly multi-cultural schools, these young Americans seem generally comfortable with a staggering amount of racial, ethnic and linguistic diversity. Their world is not one of balkanized groups huddled within their own enclaves, but rather of hybrids and fluid exchanges across group boundaries.

Ironically, in this hyper diverse world assimilation seems to happen faster and with less angst than in the past. The children of European immigrants who arrived at the beginning of the 20th century often felt forced to choose between their parents’ ways and those of American society. Many were embarrassed when their parents could not speak English and even changed their names to better “fit in” at work or school. By contrast, today’s second generation is far more at ease with both their American and ethnic identities. Far from being “torn between two worlds” the children of immigrants increasingly make use of a “second generation advantage:” the ability to combine the best of their parents’ culture with the best that America has to offer, enriching American society and culture with their flexible and creative outlooks. Of course American history is full of second generation success stories—Irving Berlin, Aaron Copland and Eugene O’Neil in the arts, to name just a few. But in keeping with the times they usually downplayed their immigrant roots and accentuated their American futures—often through painful distancing from their parents and their ethnic heritages. By contrast, the current second generation enjoys the advantages of combining that ethnic past and American future.

Further, much of today’s “second generation” does not fit easily into American racial boxes and categories. Of course race will continue to be central fact in American life for the foreseeable future, and racism will continue to tragically circumscribe many people’s life chances. But racial boundaries are blurring as the categories become more complicated. And young people—both the second generation and those who grow up with them, seem more comfortable with that fact than are their elders.

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There is another reason I am guardedly optimistic about the prospects of today's second generation, having to do with the unique social position they inhabit. The children of immigrants have often been described as being "torn" between two worlds. Social scientists and immigrant parents often worry that a group navigating between two cultural systems and particularly between two languages, may never be completely competent in either. That growing up "between two worlds" has the potential for extraordinary tensions and dangers is obvious and undeniable. Yet too often we have ignored the fact that being in this position offers advantages as well. The second generation is in a position to make a creative and selective combination of foreign and American culture that can, at its best, be highly conducive to success, whether in terms of socioeconomic mobility or exceptional accomplishments or creativity. This creativity is evident in cultural expression and in the everyday decisions and behaviors of young people who grow up with a dual frame of reference - their parent's norms and the American norms around them. These young people can be, perhaps *must* be, creative in their reactions to their environment. They cannot rely on the received wisdom of their parents, as that wisdom is best suited to a very different society. Nor can they unreflectively take up the ways of an American mainstream they are only beginning to know. In a multitude of large and small decisions they must choose between the ways of their parents, of the broader American society, the ways of their native minority peers or, perhaps, to create something new and different altogether. They do not always choose wisely or well. Yet they cannot help but be aware that they have a choice. And seeing choices where others see only prescriptions is a considerable advantage. While puritans of various stripes are generally more comfortable with the coherence of traditional cultural systems, American culture, at its best, generally honors hybridity and rewards innovation.

Not long after I was asked to write the preface to this volume, the United States defied stereotypes by electing a racially mixed African American with a foreign parent and an exotic name to the highest office in the land. It is possible, I suppose, to make too much of this amazing historical moment. As the research in these pages clearly shows, it would be very wrong to conclude that the barriers facing the children of immigrants and other minority youth have suddenly tumbled down. Yet, Diaz, Saran and their collaborators also clearly show that in the age of Obama many young people are now moving beyond stereotypes, challenging preconceptions and changing our society in the process. The question is now whether our educators can do the same.

Philip Kasinitz
The City University of New York Graduate Center

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Why Study Beyond Stereotyped Youths?

In more constructivist and critical forms of inquiry researchers who do not understand themselves tend to misconstrue the pronouncements and feelings of others. The complexity and multiple readings characteristics of such multilogical research are remote to more positivistic scholars, as they seek comfort in the prescribed methods, objectivity, and depersonalisation of traditional social scientific research. In a sense the objectivist tradition provides a shelter in which the self can hide from the deeply personal issues that permeate all socio-educational phenomena.

(Kincheloe, 2005, p. 156)

As critical phenomenological ethnographers of immigrant origin and editors of this book, we present life stories, histories, and experiences of immigrant minority youths in the context of urban schools and American society in which all ethnic groups are generalized and stereotyped. We agree with Kincheloe that in order to tell stories of others and understand their actions of subordination or emancipation, critical researchers must understand themselves and their position in the web of realities. And at the same time, we need to critically examine the story of our lives, understand who we are, and what cultural, historical, and social structures have shaped our lives. Our perceptions of social issues, our ideas, and the way we interpret the actions of others are mediated by how we look at ourselves and how we define our identities. The relationship between researchers and researched is shaped by socio-political standing, worldviews, and self-understanding of the researcher.

This book examines the life stories of minority immigrant youths who contradict their stereotyped images and seek to unravel the social, cultural, and educational issues that mediate school experiences and shape their identities in mainstream society. We assert that their actions in schools are controlled by an unconscious desire to gain power either by achieving academic success or by becoming American at the cost of academics. They perceive their position in school and in the larger society within the framework of their stereotyped image in the dominant society and often want to move beyond their stereotype images.

In this chapter, we try to personalize our research by exploring our selves, illuminating our experiences as immigrants, discussing forces that shape our identities and consciousness, and analysing the construction of our selfhood. We believe that

our insights into our own immigrant experiences and understandings of our “selves” and the historical cultural context that shaped our selfhood provides us with powerful tools to analyse the lives of those minority immigrant youths who consciously or unconsciously construct their identity differently from their ethnic stereotyped image in mainstream society. These youths understand themselves in relation to their ascribed identities as high achievers or failures. By telling our stories, providing accounts of our past in the form of auto/biography, we allow readers to gain insights into our lived experiences and construct richer meaning from the stories we tell. Although in our auto/biography we do not provide our ideologies, our stories reveal the cultural and social norms and values that have shaped us. Our research provides analysis of traditionally stereotyped marginalized students of diverse ethnic and socio-economic background such as Asians, Latinos/as, and African Americans.

We are scholars of immigrant origin and we identify ourselves with a new generation of immigration scholars who focus on populations about whom not much is known. In other words we focus on immigrant populations such as South Asians, Latino/a, South East Asians that are neglected in research.

EXPLORING LIVED EXPERIENCES: PHENOMENOLOGY AND *CURRERE*

In our quest to find an answer to the question, “Why do these youths behave in a way that is outside their generalized image?” our goal is to understand their behaviour patterns and experiences phenomenologically. Phenomenological research does not solve problems; our research is not capable of solving the problems of positive stereotyping, but it is interested in exploring the significance of the model minority phenomenon and gaining insights into the schooling experiences of immigrant and minority students. According to Manen (1990) a phenomenological researcher investigates any given phenomenon “as it is lived” not as it is theorized. This study investigates the model minority phenomenon as it is lived by minority immigrant students.

We are in debt to phenomenology because it has enabled us to gain a deeper understanding of the lives of the second-generation minority youths in urban schools. At the same time it has provided us tools to understand their social and cultural capital, their life histories, and thought processes that are manifested through their academic performance and social interactions. In this book we describe the complex structures of school that students experience and negotiate everyday. With the help of phenomenology we attempt to understand the manifestation of stereotyping in school and minority students’ lives. Van Manen describes the true essence of phenomenology, “In other words, phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning structures, of lived experiences” (p. 10). Phenomenological research instructs researchers to practice “attentive thoughtfulness.” As educators and practitioners of pedagogy we have incorporated thoughtfulness by serving interests of minority youths.

In the endeavour of our education research we embrace William Pinar’s notion of *currere* (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995). *Currere* is a research method that enables researchers to analyse how individuals experience education in

the educational context of schools. At the same time researchers are engaged with their research and they try to provide a “phenomenological description of both subject and object” and in this process gain understanding of their selves as “knowers.” Pinar argued that researchers are better prepared to analyse experiences and meanings by understanding reciprocity between subjectivity and objectivity. According to Pinar (1995), “*Currere* shares phenomenology’s interest in describing immediate, preconceptual experience, and then makes use of the phenomenological process of ‘distancing’ and ‘bracketing’ required to do so” (p. 414). Pinar argues that researchers lose their rigid identities and understand complexities of educational experiences that appear because of social conditioning unconscious and observance. Through *currere* we, teacher researchers have been able to examine the influences of power on the lives of immigrant youths in school and how power shapes their identities, self-image, educational goals, and perspectives. Our research unravels the way power and hegemonic conditions of school privileges some groups and oppresses others (Kincheloe, 2005). Kincheloe asserts that post-formal critical form of auto/biography enables researchers to understand psychological and social origins of their perceptions and their own identity. At the same time it provides the ability to analyze how educational experiences are influenced by dominant ideologies such as social stratification, stereotyping, and racism.

In our post formal critical research, we share our auto/biographies in order to understand our own construction, our privileged or unprivileged position in our country of origin and in our adopted country. By analysing our stories and reflecting on our experiences we gain a deeper level of understanding of the phenomena we are exploring.

WHAT IS STEREOTYPE?

The term, *stereotype*, and the concept of stereotyping have been associated with negative connotations and expressed as prejudice. In the United States, often, prejudice is justified because false perceptions are treated as truth by groups who blame minority groups even for their positive attributes. Stereotype in both forms, either positive or negative, categorizes people and rationalizes “exaggerated beliefs” and validates biased opinion and narrow outlooks (Allport, 1954). Thus, stereotyping is a process of labelling or categorization, and it is a fixed idea that is based on perception and judgment. Stereotyping negates differentiated opinion, generalizes a category, and portrays a specific image of a category or a group. Allport regards stereotyping as a “justificatory device for categorical acceptance or rejection of a group” (p. 192). Positive or negative stereotyping justifies and rationalizes an individual’s love-prejudice or hate-prejudice. Simultaneously, Allport views stereotyping as a continuous process of “selected perception” and “selective forgetting” that celebrates a group for its success but forgets their contribution if the group fails to achieve success. Asian Indians are categorized and stereotyped as a “model minority” and are accepted by the dominant society in the belief that Asian Indians possess specific traits. In other words, stereotyping of Asian Indians is based on a generalized collective judgment that all Asian Indians are hard working and intelligent.

In the context of stereotyping and prejudice, Allport (1954) refers to two kinds of social status: *ascribed* and *achieved*. Ascribed status is forced or acquired through heredity. For example, African Americans were forced to be slaves, or in India people are ascribed to a certain caste. Achieved status is attained by individuals through their own efforts. In America, class status is achieved through education and economic success. Asian Indians have dual status in American society. They are not whites or a part of a dominant group, thus they are *ascribed* a marginalized status in American society. However, the paradox is that they have *achieved* a higher status of “honorary whites” (Tuan, 1998) through higher education and economic success. Their success is often perceived negatively and they are discriminated by prejudice in disguise. Although overt prejudice is “not in fashion,” often they experience overt prejudice as being a marginalized population. Prejudice is a psychological aspect of stereotyping and it is “an aversive or hostile attitude toward a person who belongs to a group because he belongs to that group, and is therefore presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to the group” (Allport, 1954, p. 7).

The psychoanalytical theory of prejudice explains the nature of ethnic prejudice and hostility as projection of predisposed ideas and “unacceptable inner strivings” about an ethnic and minority group. Members of an ethnic group experience prejudice because of their membership in that group and “ethnic prejudice is an antipathy based on a faulty and inflexible generalization” (Allport, p. 10); For example, Asian Americans experience prejudice not because of their individual traits but rather because of the fact that they are Asians and are labelled as a successful minority.

Stereotyping facilitates discriminatory practices in society. Schneider (2004) asserts, “stereotyping traits are those that generally discriminate the stereotyped group from others” (p. 182). Stereotyping is an evaluative phenomenon and it is directly related to intolerance. Prejudice and stereotyping blame the stereotyped group for their achievements or their shortcomings, or in many cases they are used as a scapegoat. Schneider argues that prejudice can be expressed in many forms, and “Prejudice can encompass any number of feelings or emotions. It makes perfect sense to speak of prejudice, but prototypically prejudice is on intimate terms with hatred. It can also include other affective reactions such as pity or envy,” (p. 267). This statement explains why other ethnic groups that experience failure may envy and blame Asian Indians. In general Asian Indian students are praised for their hard work, their scholarship, and their humble behaviour. However, often praises are laced with disguised envy and prejudice. Often Asian Indian students who do not fit their positively stereotyped image are ridiculed in schools and viewed as failures.

Our story

Van Manen (1990) asserts that in phenomenological research the goal/question of the research “must not only be made clear, understood, but also ‘lived’ by the researcher...phenomenological questioning teaches the reader to wonder, to question deeply the very thing that is being questioned” (p. 44). So, we provide our lived

experiences for readers to understand the nuances of our research and the nature of the phenomena we are researching. We paraphrase Van Manen, ask ourselves and question how our phenomenological knowledge, accumulated as educators and teachers of immigrant origin, relates to our research topics and issues? We lean on phenomenological perspective that guides us to relate “theoretical abstraction” to reality of our lived experiences and connect it to our research.

MY LIVED EXPERIENCES

This study grew out of my experiences as an immigrant Asian woman, community member, teacher, a learner, and a mother of three children. For me, as an Asian and immigrant woman writing a scholarly book has been a fascinating challenge. However, my educational, cultural and social experiences provide me resources to better understand the social construction of the American education system and become an elementary school teacher, and a mathematics education faculty. This biographical piece illuminates my experiences, which help me focus my research goal.

I Rupam Saran, remember my grandmother’s story of her educational plight in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In those days it was customary for upper middle class or lower class Indian women not to attend schools or colleges. Lucky ones were educated by their parents only enough to read religious books or to write their names. As a result very few women could read or write fluently. My grandmother was very lucky to be tutored by a private tutor at her home in the supervision of her parents. She could read and write Hindi (an Indian language) fluently. She learned English as well. Although she was not fluent in English she taught her seven children beginning English at a very early stage. She was very fond of reading. She and her husband (an engineer by profession) valued education and believed in meritocracy. They did their best to educate their children. While their children attended schools, my grandparents arranged private tutors for their children so that they could excel in schools. All their children attended colleges and earned undergraduate and graduate degrees and are economically successful in life.

I grew up in a large extended family with four siblings and many uncles and aunts. While I was growing up school and education seemed most important and our lives revolved around our school. We were encouraged to get good grades in school, to become toppers in our grades, compete in debate and get involved in extracurricular activities. *Failing* in school was not allowed and we tried our best not to only pass but pass with high scores. Although my family was and still is traditional, the family philosophy was that women should be educated and they should be able to support themselves in bad times.

Coming from a meritocratic family I learned to value education from a very early age. I was taught that no wealth can replace education, and education is the best wealth one can have. My grandfather envisioned medical profession for me. His dream was to make me a medical doctor. When I was young in India students were tracked in science and arts tracks on the basis of seventh grade math and science scores. My seventh grade math score was not very high and I was placed in

the Arts track. That was the end of my dream to go to Medical school. However, I have been able to fulfill his dream. Although I am not a medical doctor I have been able to earn a doctorate in education, and teach at a college.

At the age of eighteen I left India as a young bride of a Ph. D student at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. All my family members were happy for me because I had the opportunity to be educated in the United States if I wanted. I stayed home for twenty years for my husband & my children. After my husband had established himself in his college teaching career and my children were grown I went back to college to get my second B.A. While my first daughter joined an undergraduate program at Columbia University I joined an undergraduate program at Queens College, CUNY because it was closer to my home and the tuition was affordable. After finishing my B.A., I was able to get a tenure track job as an elementary school classroom teacher. Although it was very hard to work full time as a classroom teacher in an inner city school, raising a family, fulfilling all social obligations of a close knit ethnic community, and do graduate work, I managed to finish my Masters work in education in two years. While my youngest daughter enrolled in B. A. program at Emory University, I joined the Ph.D. program in Urban Education at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York. First two years of my Ph. D. work I worked full time. In four years we both graduated, my daughter with a B. A. degree in Political Science, and I with a Ph.D. in Urban Education.

During my college years in America, often, positive comments that I received from my professors and peers were preconceived stereotyped assumptions inspired by model minority discourse. During my undergraduate work, in one of my classes I scored 98 out of 100 and my professor disappointedly asked me “what happened to you? I thought you would breeze through.” He expected me to get perfect score because I was an Indian and hard working student. In another class a professor exclaimed, “Your people are highly educated. I know so many Indians they are professionals...they are very good students.” These comments and many more like these stereotyped assumptions pressured me to meet challenges of high expectations and do well academically. Although these comments were complimentary I wanted to tell my friends and my professors “You are wrong. All Indians are not high achievers,” however, I was too polite to contradict them and start a conversation on this topic. During the parent teacher conferences I heard same kind of positive remarks from my children’s teachers. All of my children’s teachers implied that my children were typical of well-behaved, hardworking, polite (passive) Indian children and we were very cooperating parents.

However, as a teacher in inner city schools I experienced the intra-diversity within the new Asian Indian immigrant population. During my public school years I came across many high-achieving Asian Indian students who conformed to model minority image. On the other hand I met with many Asian Indian students who were struggling in schools and needed support. I had many opportunities to hear and see richness of lived experiences of school, conflict between school and home culture, identity threat, and language barrier that mediated school performance of Asian Indian students.

Today, when I am writing about educational experiences of second-generation Asian Indian students and their stereotyped image I critically reflect upon my lived experiences and my life journey. In this reflective process my experiences have become the object of reflection and critical interpretation. My lived experiences capture the complexities of a minority Asian woman's experiences and contribute to the understanding of the cultural process responsible for academic achievement or failure. Culturally and academically I have a privileged background, however, I represent a marginalized population- an Asian women in American university as a student and as an educator in academia. I understand my participants' marginalized position in urban schools.

I ponder on the question what would have happened if I would have failed to internalize my family's achievement ideology and meritocratic values or I had no education and social capital to survive in the American education system. I think I would not have gone back to college. I wonder how my children would have turned out if they did not have economic privileges and access to elite schools. How my story would have been different if I had no time or tools to oversee my children's school performance. What happens to those Asian Indian students who lack a higher level of educational capital and whose families do not have know-how of the American educational system?

When I analyze my childhood and adolescent years I realize that I always experienced identity threat and was constantly pressured by high expectations of my teachers and my family members. My experiences resonate with those students who are either constantly struggling to maintain their image of high achiever. Since I have experienced identity threat I understand behaviors that are the ramification of identity threat. Although I am driven by meritocratic values of my family and unconsciously believed that hard work in school pays I realize how cultural forces, racism, and unequal access to educational practices can shatter meritocratic values and achievement ideology of a family. Specifically, in the context of new immigrants and their children's academic achievement and school performance are not secured by only meritocratic values and achievement ideologies.

I agree with Alberto J. Rodriguez's idea (2005) that "Meritocracy myth is a social construct that needs to be rethought" (p.126). Meritocracy myth denotes that in America everyone "can make it" by working hard and the ones who cannot "make it" are failures and they did not work hard to become successful. Meritocratic values of American society blame individuals and ethnic groups for their academic achievement and failure without taking account the social, economic, and racial mediators of success.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

As a Latina with a PhD, an Associate Professor at a CUNY institution and a mother to four beautiful Latinas, I am perceived by many as the embodiment of "the American Success Story", the antithesis of the negative stereotype of the lazy, low achieving, unmotivated Puerto Rican. When they hear my story, they often look at me in wonder as if I were an anomaly, a freak. At such times, I have often

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visualized myself through their eyes, the lone survivor of an automobile accident in which the car has crumpled like a tin can, or a piece of discarded paper, and the passenger miraculously survives unscathed. People look on in wonder and think “how is it possible?”

I was born on the island of Puerto Rico. I came to New York City at a very early age. My parents, like so many immigrants, before them saw the United States as the land of opportunity; a place where they could realize the dreams and ambitions of their youth. These illusions quickly came crashing down around them as they came to realize that without resources, a social network, an education, a working knowledge of the English language, and financial capital, they were destined to failure. They did not understand the overarching social and political climate that relegated them to a lower class in a system of stratification, largely based on race and ethnicity. My father, a typical Latino macho, felt ashamed of not being able to provide for his young wife and three children. His shame took the form of violence and he beat my mother regularly, until neighbors, alarmed at the intensity of the beatings, felt compelled to call the authorities. It is a very common story. My father returned to the island and abandoned my mother in New York City with three small children. She had no job, no familial or social supports, and she spoke absolutely no English. Before long she was forced to apply for public assistance and moved into an inner city minority (mostly African-American) neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. As an involuntary minority, defined by John Ogbu as “people who were brought into their present society through slavery, conquest, or colonization” and who “resent the loss of their former freedom and perceive the social, political and economic barriers against them as part of their undeserved oppression” (Ogbu, 1996), my story should have taken a very familiar and tragic bent. However, that was not to be the case. I have often asked myself why. What distinguished me from the thousands who came to these shores with hopes of a better tomorrow only to be mercilessly and quite literally shot down in the streets?

In the USA Latinos, specifically Puerto Ricans and Mexicans, have the lowest graduation rate of any other ethnic/racial group. We are stereotyped as the lowest of the low. There is probably no other ethnic/racial group in the US that is academically worse off than the Puerto Rican, though we often share this distinction with Native Americans. My mother, having just arrived from the island, was blissfully unaware of any of this. Though she herself had only acquired an 8th grade education, she valued education very highly and totally bought into the meritocracy myth. She expected us to succeed. This expectation persisted in spite of the fact that she did little to assist us in this process. She did not have the time for PTA meetings or parent-teacher conferences. She never checked on homework, encouraged us to read or even purchased books for us. We had absolutely no social life, as we lived in an “unsafe” neighborhood and my mother did not feel that the benefits of extracurricular activities warranted risking our safety. This proved to be ironic considering the fact that we experienced more violence and abuse within the confines of our apartment building in those early years than most experience in a lifetime. As a result I became an avid and voracious reader – after all what else was there to do in a small

cramped apartment but read. In the 4th grade I took my first standardized exam in reading and achieved a perfect score, which indicated I had a college-level reading score. With this one simple act, I had completely contradicted my stereotyped image and the teachers and administrators in the school were duly astounded. I was promptly removed from that school, which mostly served an African American population, and moved to a school for intellectually gifted children. Suddenly and for the first time in my life I saw children of other races and ethnicities, white and Asian children.

Unfortunately, survival was more important than academic success in our lives, and due to unavoidable family circumstances I was moved to three different schools in the following three years. In spite of this, I had an unshakeable belief in my own ability to overcome all obstacles and succeed, perhaps partly attributable to a faith in the meritocracy myth that I had internalized from my mother. I graduated from John Dewey High School in 1978 (two years early) and entered Hunter College at the age of 16. It was at this point that my self-esteem began to inexplicably crumble. For young women of all ethnic and racial backgrounds, adolescence can be a dangerous time. Dr. Mary Pipher discusses this developmental stage in her book on adolescent girls, *Reviving Ophelia*.

Something dramatic happens to girls in early adolescence...they crash and burn in a social and developmental Bermuda Triangle. In early adolescence, studies show that girls' IQ scores drop and their math and science scores plummet. They lose their resiliency and optimism and become less curious and inclined to take risks. They lose their assertive, energetic and "tomboyish" personalities and become more deferential, self-critical and depressed. They report great unhappiness...(Pipher, 1994).

For second generation immigrant teens, perhaps not as fully grounded in their own or the new host culture, the issue of identity construction can be even further convoluted. Latinas are often caught in the crossfire between familial obligations and the need to adapt to the overarching socio-cultural order. The emotional and psychological stresses can be overwhelming and often eclipse all other concerns. "Unquestionably, the struggle to weave Hispanic tradition and North American innovation into a satisfying bicultural lifestyle can make for a great deal of unhappiness and self-doubt if it isn't understood and dealt with for what it is...for the woman is at odds not only with herself but with others in both the Anglo and Hispanic spheres (Gil & Vazquez, 1996).

At the age of 17, death was all around me. In that one year, still reeling from my first failed romance, I lost three close friends to street violence. Overcome by depression, suicidal urges and a failing sense of my own purpose, I quit school and married a neighborhood gang warlord. The events of the following three years are the stuff of tragic novels and I will not go into those details here. Suffice to say, I barely escaped with my life and a beautiful baby girl. I continued my education, while working full-time and raising my child. It was a long arduous process, one I privately despaired I'd ever complete. However, in 1986, with my four year old

daughter and my mother in the audience, I graduated from New York University with an English Education degree – the first in my family to do so. That same year I got my first teaching job at the secondary school level.

I wish I could say that I lived happily ever after, but of course that has not been the case. My life has consisted of a series of occasional euphoric highs, (the births of my four daughters, attaining my Master's degree and then my Doctorate), and devastating lows (financial struggles, failed relationships, loss and isolation). I constantly walk a line between my cultural background/identity, embodied in the constant criticism, demands and support of my family, and the needs/demands of my host country, and I live in constant fear that if I cease to struggle, even momentarily, I will slip back into the social and economic abyss from which I, perhaps mistakenly, escaped. Why me? Am I truly entitled to success? My success seems a fragile thing. I often feel myself to be the sole representative of my family, my culture, my people and I worry that I am not sufficient to stand in this role, or to attempt to change what is for those who will come after. I struggle with my own demons constantly.

As a teacher of minority inner city teens for over 20 years, I have seen my own struggle reflected in their lives and I have marvelled at the courage and awe-inspiring spirit that enables many of these young people to succeed against all odds. Several years ago, I taught a young second-generation Latina, whose mother was killed by a jealous ex-boyfriend in the middle of her senior year. After taking a few days off, this young woman returned to school, passed all her exams and graduated with her classmates. In her tearful valedictory address, she credited her mother with giving her the strength and courage to overcome all obstacles. Prior to this, I worked for several years as a drama coach and watched in amazement as young survivors of rape and incest transformed their pain into the most moving dramatic interpretations I have ever experienced. These young women defy all the stereotypes imposed upon them. They not only survive but they grow and flourish and contribute to the world around them in immeasurable ways. The question again is how do these young women, coming out of what would appear to be insurmountable odds, succeed where so many others fail?

My own research has been an attempt to investigate the answers to this question. Critically reflecting on my own lived experience has provided me with invaluable insight into the lives of my own daughters, students, and research subjects. In my chapter in this book, I focus on social networking and interconnectedness as a possible factor in understanding how these urban Latina students are able to reach beyond their ascribed stereotypes and achieve success. In my own life, I have often felt alone – me against the world – but the reality is that there were always others in the background supporting my success – a mother who loved and believed in me unconditionally, a sister who fought my elementary school battles for me and encouraged my poetry and dreams, a brother who sacrificed his childhood to be the man of the house and keep our reputations intact from neighborhood gossip, and a legion of aunts, uncles grandparents, both in New York and on the Island, who instilled in me a strong sense of my own cultural identity and heritage. I personally never questioned who or what I was. I have

always been a Latina – heart and soul – with the added advantage of an American education. Was this bicultural identity a major factor in my own success? Is it possible that it is the biculturalality of 1.5 and second generation students that provides that extra advantage that allows them to overcome so many obstacles? There are things that no amount of research can ever tell us. Examining our own lived experiences helps us to understand that human beings are complex organisms, existing within an even more complex web of relationships, and no theory can encompass the infinite possibilities inherent in the wide spectrum of human variation. There is no formula, no set rules to follow. In spite of this, we as parents, educators and researchers strive to understand and offer young people all the tools at our disposal to assist them, understanding that they are not alone on their journey – that every time they succeed, they do so on behalf of a whole network of family and friends who succeed with them. Today when people look at me as an anomaly, I tell them I may be the lone survivor of that automobile accident but I was not the sole passenger. I am not the exception in my family and culture; I am the product, the amalgam of all their hopes dreams and ambitions, as are all the young people presented in this volume.

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CHAPTER 2

THE MODEL MINORITY STEREOTYPE AND THE UNDERACHIEVER

Academic and social struggles of underachieving Korean immigrant high school students

INTRODUCTION

Although the first documented arrival of Korean immigrants dates back to the turn of the twentieth century, most of the current Korean Americans are a part of a larger group who are often referred to as post-1965 immigrants. This group of immigrants are a culturally, economically, and racially diverse group of immigrants who were allowed to legally immigrate to the country as a result of the Immigration and Nationality Services Act of 1965 (INS Act of 1965). There are few other legislations that changed the face of America in the way that the INS Act of 1965 did. Prior to that legislation, legal admission to the country was largely dependant upon an immigrant's country of birth where seventy percent of all immigrant slots were allotted to the natives of United Kingdom, Ireland and Germany. The immigrants from eastern and southern Europe shared the remaining slots. Influenced by the Civil Rights movement and legislations of the era, the INS Act of 1965 sought to eliminate national origin as the criteria for admission and replaced it with the concept of family reunification and needed skills. Although other groups have increased their numbers through post-1965 immigration, Asian Americans, as a group, increased exponentially. During the period of 1971 to 2002, over seven million people from various countries of Asia immigrated to this country. This number is the second largest after nearly ten million immigrants from other parts of North America.

Of the seven million Asian immigrants, over eight hundred thousand Koreans immigrated during this period. According to the Census 2000, there are over a million Koreans living in the United States, and their numbers make up roughly ten percent of Asian Americans. This study explores the academic struggles faced by working class Korean American students. In particular, we will examine the impact of the model minority stereotype on student experiences and opportunities.

The Model Minority Stereotype of Asian Americans

A large body of literature (Lee, 1996, 2005; Lew, 2006; Li & Wang, forthcoming; Louie, 2004) shows that the model minority stereotype is influential in the school experiences of all Asian Americans regardless of their length of residency in the

US or their ethnic backgrounds. Generally speaking, the model minority stereotype asserts that Asian Americans have succeeded in becoming accepted into white, middle-class society through “hard work, uncomplaining perseverance, and quiet accommodation” (Suzuki, 1995: 113). Robert Suzuki (1995) argues that the model minority stereotype was created in part to invalidate the calls for racial justice in the late 1960’s by pointing to the “success” of Asian Americans. While people of color have protested against racial injustices throughout the history of the United States, during the 1960’s people of color had successfully mobilized themselves and made an effective alliance with sympathetic whites. By highlighting the perceived success of Asian Americans, the dominant group sought to silence “the charges of racial injustice being made by African Americans and other minorities (Lee, 1996: 7).” Suzuki (1995: 116) explains that an idealized perspective on American education came to be influential around this time.

This view portrayed the public school system as “the institution that serves as the ‘great equalizer’ by giving all children, regardless of their backgrounds, a chance to succeed and realize the American dream (Suzuki 1995: 116).” To those who held this view, Asian Americans’ perceived school success became a useful example to prove that schools actually fulfill its promise. According to the rhetoric of the model minority stereotype, those who are not realizing the American dream through success in schools have simply failed to take advantage of the opportunities open to all. Thus, the picture of Asian American success was a message to Americans that discrimination can be overcome through hard work. In the process, Suzuki (1995) further explains “the actual status of Asian Americans was distorted to fit this model minority image to discredit the protest and demands for social justice of other minority groups by admonishing them to follow the ‘shining example’ set by Asian Americans (Suzuki 1995: 114).”

The model minority stereotype has both academic and social implications for the students in this study. Academically, the stereotype draws attention away from underachieving Asian American students. Because the model minority stereotype suggests that all Asians are successful Asian American students in need of academic assistance are often overlooked (Lee 1996). Furthermore, the stereotype is used to blame the underachievers for their own failures thereby locating the problem away from schools. As mentioned earlier, Asian Americans’ perceived school success as a group became a useful example to prove that the school system actually fulfills its promise as the great equalizer. Consequently, one’s failure to succeed is rationalized as an individual failure, thus, shifting the blame away from schools.

Socially, the stereotype may further marginalize underachieving students from their co-ethnic peers. In her study of Hmong American students, Lee (2005) found, for instance, the particular social construction of Asian American identity has resulted in some Hmong American students being labeled as “good” Asians and others labeled as “bad” Asians. Because academic achievement is an important aspect of the co-ethnic community’s value, academically successful students were seen as “good” and “traditional” Asians while those who were less successful were called “bad” and “Americanized” Asians by many in the school

and the co-ethnic community. Such division fostered tension amongst the co-ethnics who viewed one another negatively. “Good” Asians viewed “bad” Asians as academic “delinquents” who didn’t live up to the expectations of Hmong culture, while the “bad” Asians considered the “good” Asians as “FOBs (Fresh Off the Boat)” who were socially inadequate in the mainstream American culture.

Methods

Data for this article was generated as part of a one and one-half year ethnographic study that looked at the Americanization process of recent Korean immigrant students in a multiracial urban public high school in City, one of the largest cities in the Midwest. The first author was in attendance at the school two or three days a week during the period of data collection. Specific ethnographic tools employed include participant observation, interviews, and textual analysis. As a participant observer, the first author took part in their daily activities, often shadowing them throughout the course of the day in and after school, as a way to learn what it is like to be them. Particular focus was on the nature of social interactions of the participants with their peers as well as with other students and school personnel. Both formal and informal interviews were used. Formal interviews consisted of a set of prepared questions with a focus on their ethnic and racial identity in the context of the school as well as larger society. Informal interviews were casual conversations with the participants. These interviews were taped whenever possible. Other times, notes were taken either during or after the interview. Also, textual productions like flyers, newsletters, and other materials produced by the district, school, student organizations were analyzed in order to better understand the social environment in which such social processes take place. Pseudonyms were used for the names of the participants and the location in an effort to protect confidentiality.

City High is an average inner city public high school located within a racially diverse neighborhood of the city. According to the district, the school had Latino students in the majority at 35.6 %, followed by Whites (27%), Asians (23%) and African Americans (11%) in 2005. Consistent with the trend of the city, over 86.3% of the students were from low-income households. Approximately, 20% of the students were labeled LEP in 2005. City High has its share of problems with gang activities and drug abuse, along with other inner city schools in the country. Overcrowding was another issue. According to a member of the school staff, the school was designed to accommodate 1200 students but there were over 1900 enrolled during the time of data collection.

During the school year of 2004-5, the state’s board of education reported that 23% of classes are not taught by “highly qualified teachers” and 4% of the school instructors have emergency or provisional credentials. Using the No Child Left Behind Act, the state defines “highly qualified teachers as being certified to teach in the subject areas for which they are employed (State Board of Education, 2004-5).” Many critics have rightly pointed to the limitations of the NCLB definition a “highly qualified teacher” for failing to consider a teacher’s understanding of multicultural issues that today’s students face daily (Pang, Kiang & Pak, 2003).

Even when the definition of “highly qualified teachers” is uncritically adopted, the high percentage of uncertified teachers (27% of all teachers) at City High is alarming when compared to the state’s average (4% of whom are not certified to teach). Although the exact figure on how many teachers were “highly qualified” across three different formal tracks is unclear, our research suggests that there were more of them in the lower LEP track than others.

The primary participants in this study were high school aged immigrant students from Korea who were identified by teachers and other Korean students to be facing either academic and/or social difficulties. All the participants are from working class backgrounds and are relatively recent immigrants who have been in the US less than ten years. Many of their parents work long hours in small businesses owned by their middle class co-ethnics. A few students in this study lived with a close or extended family members who acted as guardians. As a bicultural American from Korea studying recent Korean immigrants in his old neighborhood, the first author enjoyed the status of insider ethnographer. At the same time, it was clear to the first author that the participants did not see him as a peer because of his age. Instead, the first author was called *hyung* [older brother], *sunbai* [one with seniority, predecessor], *sunsaengnim* [teacher], or *samchun/ajussi* [uncle] in Korean. Significantly, the insider status allowed the first author to establish a rapport with many of the participants who saw him as someone who understood what it was like to be a Korean student at City High.

In the sections that follow, this chapter focuses on the academic and social difficulties faced by underachieving recent immigrant students from Korea in an urban public high school. The guiding question of the study is: how does the Model Minority stereotype affect the school experiences of underachieving Korean immigrant students? In looking at their struggles, it aims to illuminate the process through which these students become marginalized in the school. The goal is to contribute to the current body of literature on Asian American students by looking at the effects of the stereotype on a group of struggling recent immigrants whose school experiences as Asian Americans has been largely overlooked in the literature. In the process, it seeks to make suggestions for schools to better serve these students.

Academic Struggles & the Stereotype

The argument we make in this section is that the City High teachers’ belief that most Korean students are “good” kids (i.e., model minorities) has rendered the Korean underachiever invisible and placed the blame for their inability to realize academic success away from the school. Not insignificantly, there is a body of research that points to the academic success of Asian American students thereby appearing to confirm the model minority stereotype. Aggregate data on Asian Americans appears to support the stereotype of Asian American success. Here, the success of some ethnic groups masks the difficulties faced by other Asian groups. Even data disaggregated by ethnicity may hide differences based on social class. For example, Lew’s (2006) research on Korean American high school students points to the significance of social class shaping access to social capital which

in turn shapes educational opportunities and outcomes (2006). Similarly, recent research on Chinese Americans points to the way social class informs parental involvement in ways that advantages middle class Chinese American students (Louie, 2004). At City High School, the model minority stereotype masked the many obstacles faced by Korean immigrant students.

Underachieving “Good” Korean kids

Initially, the teachers at City High pointed me to a group of Korean students whom they identified as “good” students when I asked for help with recruiting participants for the study. Among them are Jaewoo and Timmy who turned out to be underachievers. Below are some of the comments made by their teachers.

They (Jaewoo, Timmy, and a couple of other high achieving Korean students) are a good team. They’re honest [in the game of soccer] to each other and their teammates. (They have) good sportsmanship. They play fair. [Coach David, Soccer Team]

 I like having those boys (Jaewoo, Timmy, and a couple of other Korean kids) in the class. They’re nice. They work hard. [Ms. Steve, Computer]

 Jaewoo is a diligent student. He works hard. He always turns in the assignments on time. . . . He is focused. [Mr. Harland, English as Second Language]

 Ms. Peterson: They’re good students. They aren’t very vocal about their opinions, but they are very attentive. They always turn in assignments on time. [Ms. Peterson, U.S. History]

 They’re (Jaewoo & Tony) respectful! They’re so different (from other LEP kids in his biology class that was discussed earlier). I think it’s their (Asian) culture to be respectful. There are other Korean kids (i.e. Sookang) that I wouldn’t say the same thing about. [Mr. Doe, Biology]

While the teachers had initially suggested that the boys were academically successful, the descriptions refer more to their behavior than to their academic achievement. Significantly, the “goodness” of the boys was attributed to them being honest, fair, hard working, attentive, and respectful in the classes taught by the teachers. These words are too often associated with the model minority stereotypes of Asian Americans in general (Suzuki, 1995; Lee, 1996 & 2005; Tuan, 1995 & 1998; etc.).

The “good” behavior of the Korean students was often contrasted with the behavior of non-Asian immigrant students who were perceived by faculty to be disrespectful and difficult. One ESL teacher complained that his students talked out of turn, walked around at whim and openly challenged his authority as the teacher. By contrast, his Korean students were quiet and they were rewarded for their “good” behavior with passing grades. In fact, they managed not to draw his negative nor positive attention.

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Although the teachers viewed them as “good” Koreans kids, many of them faced academic struggles, as they could not comprehend the course content due to their limited English fluency. The Korean immigrant students in general did better in subjects like math and science where the command of English is relatively less important. When it comes to subjects like U.S. history or geography, the Korean students with limited English proficiency struggle. Often times, these students would complete the requirements of the course without good comprehension.

The teachers’ emphasis on student behavior reflected their teacher-centered pedagogy that encouraged passive student learning. For instance, much of the ESL instruction used worksheets to teach the correct usage of spoken and written English. In doing so, learning content was often removed from the real world context. Also, using workbook problems in a format of multiple questions to reinforce the learned concept further isolated the learning from its context. In solving the problems where students are to choose the best answer from a list of possible answers, the students learn how to choose the answer as opposed to how to use it in daily contexts. Moreover, many teachers reduced their role as a teacher into a monitor of students’ progress on workbook problems. More time was spent checking their progress on both in and out of class assignments than was spent explaining the key concepts. In short, many ESL classes fell short in helping the LEP students “to understand, speak, read and write English fluently, competently and proficiently in order to succeed academically and participate actively in the U.S. social, economic and political environment (City School District, 1999)” as stated in the district’s goals for the ESL program.

For underachieving students like Jay, playing the game of “good” Asian students was enough to pass the course. Jay seems to have learned that the key to passing courses was good behavior. He understood that perfect attendance and silence in the class, which many teachers saw as being respectful, would be enough to pass the course. In other words, he knows what the teachers expected him to do, and he played along. While the “good” behavior has rewarded him with passing the course, it has ultimately hindered him from gaining the necessary academic preparation to fulfill his dreams of going to college and getting a professional job.

Jay: That (ESL) was bull-s*. I learned nothing (in there). I can’t believe they made me go there. It was a waste of time. I spent three years there [at City High], and two before that. Man, you know what I got on my ACT (American College Test)? I got 14. Do you believe it? 14! Let me say this again, I learned nothing.

Researcher: You must have learned something. I mean you passed all the classes, right? I mean you graduated.

Jay: That doesn’t mean s*. All you gotta do is show up and shut up. I mean, as long as you do that they will pass you. Teachers don’t care. They want to out as soon as they can get rid of you.

Jay was not alone in this matter. Students like Jaewoo, Timmy, Chumi, Taeji, Youngwoo, Yeonah, and Minsoo were not able to score high enough to be admitted to a four-year college even though many of them graduated with at least

“C” averages. Even those who started at four-year colleges like Kunchang and Minhee transferred to two-year colleges during their first two years after struggling academically. In short, these students’ academic struggles stemmed from the school’s inability to provide adequate academic preparation.

Shame & Self-Silencing

Previous studies have revealed that some underachieving Asian American students may hide their academic difficulties because they are ashamed about not living up to the expectations of the model minority image (Lee, 1996). At City High, Korean immigrant students’ desire to uphold the model minority stereotype led them to engage in self-silencing, and prevented them from advocating for themselves. We found that the bilingual services offered to speakers of other languages were not available to Korean speakers. City High provides bilingual programs for the speakers of Assyrian, Cantonese, Gujarati, Arabic, Russian, Servo-Croatian, Spanish, and Urdu languages. In these programs the course content was taught in the native language of the students at least partially. When instruction in their languages was not provided, textbooks in their native languages were available to the students in the program. Apparently, these bilingual services were made available when students, parents and/or community members advocated for them.

With the knowledge that Korean immigrant students were entitled to a bilingual program the first author approached two Korean immigrant students and informed them of their rights. The students responded by asserting that the school should not be held responsible for providing instruction in Korean for them because their numbers are small. When pushed harder, one student stated that a student’s job is to work hard, do well and not to tell the school what to do. He also explained that his limited English would be a problem even if he wanted to challenge the school. When the first author offered to be of assistance, he politely declined by saying, “we [Korean students] are okay, no thanks.” The student continued by suggesting that Korean students are “good” students and don’t need “extra” help from the school. In other words, this student and his friends appeared to have bought into the model stereotype that suggests that individual effort alone will bring about success. Unfortunately, the students’ attitudes prevented them from accessing the help that they needed.

The desire to maintain the model minority image also influenced the way the one Korean member of the City High staff responded to Korean immigrant students. In the following quote, Ms. Kim laments the change in the Korean student population:

When I started (working at City High), many years ago, I was so proud (of the Korean students). Whenever there was an announcement of some sort of [academic] recognition, I heard so many Korean names. It was good. But times have changed. I don’t hear Korean names as much (during the announcements). Things have changed. Their level went down so low.

She says that she has witnessed a decline in the quantity and quality of ethnic Korean students. According to her, the current group of Korean students is not as “good” as the Korean students in the past. For one, today’s Korean kids at City

CHAPTER 2

High aren't as respectful as the ones before as she locates the problem with their lack of display of traditional Asian qualities like the respect for the authority. In other words, if they were more like "model minority" there would be fewer academic problems. Unfortunately, Ms. Kim carries her negative attitudes towards the new Korean immigrant students into her work when tutoring math for LEP students.

Social Marginalization & the Stereotype

In addition to academic struggles, we argue that higher achieving Korean students accepted the model minority stereotype uncritically and socially punished underachieving Korean students who did not fit into the stereotype. High achieving Korean students punished underachieving Korean students by denying them access to the social capital embedded in co-ethnic peer relations. Socially marginalized from the potential academic support of their co-ethnic peers, the underachievers were left to flounder on their own. To demonstrate, we will first look at two students who were labeled as "bad" students. This is followed by a discussion of how the higher achievers who embraced the model minority stereotype socially distanced themselves from the underachievers. Lastly, we will take a close look at the resources available in the co-ethnic peer network of "good" students that the "bad" students were excluded from.

"Nalari" as "bad" underachievers

During lunch with Kyunghee, one of the high achieving Korean girls, the topic of "good" and "bad" kids came up. In using these words, I noticed that Kyunghee placed Sookang into the category of *nalari*. Although in a different language, the use of these words is similar to "bad Asians" that Lee (2005) reported concerning Americanized Hmong youth at University Heights High. The literal translation of *nalari* into English is "one who plays". This term is frequently used to refer to those who are not serious about their responsibilities in school or life. The following is from an interview in which Kyunghee explains the use of the term.

Kyunghee: Let's see ... Sookang... Have you met him, yet? Well, if you do, don't tell him I said this.

Researcher: Okay.

Kyunghee: Sookang is a nice guy. He's sweet. But, you know he always cuts classes... gets in fights ... he drinks ... You know, he's not a good kid.

Researcher: Do you mean that he is not a good kid because he is not a good student?

Kyunghee: Yeah, that's right.

Kyunghee's use of the word suggests that a "good" kid is a good student who upholds the images held by the teachers as mentioned earlier. Conversely, a "bad" kid is a bad student who does not fit into such an image. By using the image of "good" students, some Korean students like Kyunghee were sorting out good

students from *nalaris*. This use of a “good” kid is consistent with the image of Asian American students as model minorities. Furthermore, it can be argued that those who deviated from the stereotype were given the label of *nalaris*.

When using the term, the names of two students appeared regularly: Sookang and James. What they have in common is that they do not fit the teachers’ or high higher achieving students’ definitions of “good” students, as they are less “respectful” towards teachers and struggle academically. Sookang was a third year student who was largely absent in school both physically and mentally. He frequently didn’t come to school. When he came to school, he often left early or came late. When he went to classes he was often absent mentally as he seemed to use the time to catch up on sleep. During informal conversations, we talked about his attitude toward school.

He (Sookang) talked about how Koreans used to get “respect” from others because they were always together. Now that he was the only remaining one from the group, he feels vulnerable. He then went on to tell me about a recent incident when he was picked on by *mikuk sarham* (Americans). It appears that a group of white students, whom (we) know to be eastern European immigrants, threw some things at him while laughing at him during one of his classes. He didn’t remember what was said about him, but he felt it was about him being Korean. So, he waited and punched one of the boys as soon as he had the chance.

It appears that City High was not a safe place for Sookang. It wasn’t clear whether teachers were aware of Sookang’s struggles or not. It seems that Sookang did not think that the teachers could or would intervene on his behalf. Although it isn’t entirely clear whether Sookang was the target of anti-Asian sentiment, he clearly believed that he was and this shaped his feelings about the school. It should be noted that research suggests that Asian students are frequently the targets of anti-Asian sentiment, and that school officials are often remiss in addressing these situations (Rosenblum & Way, 2004).

James is another student who is labeled as a *nalari* by other Korean students on campus. The first author had a chance to ask him how he felt about that.

James: I think they’re just jealous ... because I am having fun and they are not.

Researcher: How do you know that they’re not having fun?

James: Well, look at ‘em. They’re always together, who knows what they’re talking about. I mean, they’re nerds. (While pulling his eyes to exaggerate slanted-ness)

Researcher: So you have fun, right? Tell me about your fun times. What do you do?

James: I go out. I go places. I talk to girls. I don’t know.

James is aware that others call him a *nalari* and reported that it doesn’t bother him because he is having fun. In order to make his point, he uses a racially derogatory gesture that may have been used against him at some point to ridicule other Korean student whom he calls nerds. Implied in this is the internalization the dominant group’s negative stereotypes towards Asian Americans. Additionally, it appears to

be James' choice to set himself apart from the image of Asian Americans that he considers to be negative. He does not want to be associated with the group of "good" Koreans who keep to themselves and are studious. In rejecting the image, he seeks to have fun. His meaning of having fun is going out, and he actually does leave the school building very frequently during school hours. When he's in school he is seen more with other ESL students of diverse backgrounds including European immigrants as well as Asian students. He is often seen in a corner of the parking lot smoking with some of these boys.

Socially Distanced from "Good" Students

Labeled as *nalari*, both Sookang and James found themselves socially distanced from their co-ethnic peers. It appears that other Korean students socially punished them for their failure to live up to the model minority stereotype and further pushed them out of the school. Sookang spent more time with his Korean friends who no longer attended City High. James spent more time at the Internet café than in the classroom. Sookang failed more classes than passed. In fact, he was considering moving to different district before he could be expelled from City High. James managed to get mostly "D's" and "C's." Neither James nor Sookang lived up to the expectations of their co-ethnic peers. The data doesn't clearly show the temporal order of social distancing or punishing in terms of who rejected whom initially. Did the underachieving boys socially distance from the Korean co-ethnic peers first? Or, was it that the higher achieving Korean students rejected Sookang and James initially? Also, it was not clear if the "good" students actively sought to exclude James and Sookang since their paths rarely crossed both in and out of school. What is clear, however, is that these "bad" boys were aware that they weren't welcome by their co-ethnic peers at City High. We found that they were indeed unwelcome by a group of higher achievers.

A group of Korean students whom the teachers identified as good students like Jaewoo, Timmy, Peter, Hynwoo, Youngmi, and Kyunghee met the first author after school on Thursdays and Fridays at a local public library. Together, the students did homework and studied for upcoming exams. When these students learned that the first author extended the invitation to Sookang, they showed a sense of unease. Although they didn't outright say that they weren't happy, it was clear that they were happier when Sookang didn't show up. Also, Peter and Timmy were quick to point out that James could be a bad influence. Peter talked about the time when he smelled alcohol on James' breath. Timmy chimed in to say that he is one of those people who give a bad name to Koreans. The negative attitudes towards *nalaris*, in fact, help the "good" students to solidify as a group.

Shibutani and Kwan (1965:42) explain that the formation of group identity is often preceded by the recognition of common experiences and worldviews as a group, which is often expressed by social distancing from others. In highlighting the perceived negative qualities of the *nalaris*, the higher achievers situated themselves as "good" students and rewarded the "good" underachievers who displayed

behavioral traits associated with the model minority stereotype. In the following quotes, we hear higher achieving Korean students uncritically adopting the model minority stereotype.

We're all Asians. We're good in school. If I have problems with homework they can help me and I can help them. In my pre-Calc class it's the Asian kids who are doing well. If they don't know the answer probably nobody else will. [Woosup]

We (Asian Americans) are always studying. We're always talking about school. We want to do well in school. That's just how Asians are. [Namjoo]

I like those kids (referring to Woosup and his high-achieving Asian friends he occasionally eats lunch with), they're smart and they study hard. I see them doing homework together at lunch when everyone else is playing. Those are good kids. [Peter]

These students voiced the qualities associated with the model minority stereotype as the markers of being a "good" kid like doing well in math, having all the answers, invested in school, being smart, and hard working. It appears that academic achievement is an important criterion for being a "good" Asian kid. In other words, they viewed themselves as a member of a community that "does well" in school because they worked hard.

Also important is how they equated "good" achievement and "good" behavior as mentioned by the teachers. As mentioned earlier, there were many students who were identified as "good" like Jaewoo, Timmy, Chumi, Taeji, Youngwoo, Yeonah, and Minsoo who struggled academically. Their academic struggles were not unknown to high achievers like Woosup and Peter; however, these students were rewarded the status of "good" students because, unlike Sookang and James, they acted like "good" students. In doing so, the students embraced the teachers' view that the positive and respectful attitude towards school was equally, if not more, important than academic performance to be "good" students.

Socially Distanced from Co-Ethnic Peer Social Capital

Being labeled as *nalaris*, Sookang and James faced both academic and social consequences. Academically, these students were not able to access support from higher achieving peers in the form of social capital. James Coleman (1988) explains that social capital is an intangible commodity whose value is embedded in social relations. Unlike human or cultural capital that relies on individuals' attributes (i.e. wealth, education, etc.) social capital "comes to being whenever social interaction makes use of it (Valenzuela, 1999: 27)." In other words, social capital empowers individuals with the necessary means to achieve a goal or to produce a desired result (Coleman, 1988).

Valenzuela's study (1999) demonstrates how social capital embedded in the co-ethnic peer relations can positively affect a struggling student. In the field, Valenzuela learned that one student had a serious problem as a result of his father's departure a year ago. Unable to deal with the problem alone since his mother

“fell apart,” the student said he was about to either drop out of school or hurt himself. Recognizing the gravity of the situation, a group of friends provided support in many ways including having him stay with one of the members for three months. As a result of this help, the student was not only able to help himself by not dropping out of school but to help his mother as well. In this case, the student activated his social capital, which allowed him to finish school. The activation of social capital was possible because of the preexisting relationship with the co-ethnic peers; in turn, the relationship was established and maintained as the student claimed membership to the group.

Similarly, we found that there was social capital embedded in the co-ethnic peer relations amongst the high achieving Korean kids themselves who embraced the model minority stereotype. Academically, we found that embracing the model minority stereotype allowed many “good” Korean students to tap into the social capital embedded within the network of “good” Asian American peers. Timmy, who’s spoken English was near fluent, found it easier to befriend high achieving Asian immigrants in the same LEP track and some Asian American students in the advanced track with whom he often ate lunch. Even the non English speaking, more recent immigrants like Hyunwoo, however, had access to other Asian American students with help from bilingual students like Timmy, Woosup, Youngmi, and others, who had already established some social capital generating relationships with high achieving Asian American students. We have often seen more recent immigrants like Jaewoo, Peter, and Hyunwoo interacting with other Asian students, exchanging greetings as well as information regarding school, both with and without the presence of bilingual Korean students.

The “good” students were seen together in places like the library, lunchroom, and cafeteria studying together or exchanging valuable information pertinent to school success when not merely socializing. This information included something very basic in terms of what the homework was which is difficult for some LEP students to comprehend. They also shared where to find the textbooks written in Korean. While unavailable at City High, some of the City High’s textbooks translated in Korean were available at a library on a college campus nearby. The network of “good” students shared where to find these with one another. Also, the students shared their experiences with teachers. The students who had taken a class with a particular teacher will advise others what to expect in the class. At other times, some of these students would share their exams and quizzes with the current students. Needless to say, such help enabled academically struggling students amongst them to do better academically. On the other hand, such information was not available to the students like Sookang and James.

In addition, social support was not available to Sookang and James in their encounters with racism. As mentioned earlier, both Sookang and James had encounters with racism. For Sookang, it was racially motivated harassment, which he fought back. He was not able to go to the school staff because he felt they wouldn’t and couldn’t help him. To make the matter worse, he couldn’t reach out to his co-ethnic peers because he seemed to be aware of their negative attitudes toward him. Additionally, Sookang may not have the victim of what he perceives

to be racial harassment if he was not seen as a loner by the perpetrators. The first author heard the reports of direct and physical racial harassments from “bad” Koreans while “good” students who were always seen as a group was rarely singled out for such. Being isolated from both school staff and other Koreans, Sookang was left alone to defend himself and this made the school a more hostile place for him. For James, the issue was the internalization of racism as he mocked his co-ethnic peers racially. Perhaps, this would not have been the case if he had a close relationship with a co-ethnic peer. Perhaps, a close relationship with other Koreans would have helped James to question, if not challenge, the negative portrayal of Asians by others in the school.

Conclusion

In sum, this chapter examined the impact of the model minority stereotype on the academic and social difficulties faced by underachieving working class Korean American students in an urban public high school. It aimed to illuminate how the model minority stereotype helped to marginalize these students in the school. We found that the homogenizing effect of the stereotype denied much needed service to the underachieving students because the teachers didn’t recognize differences in the Asian students’ academic needs. Students like Jay and Jaewoo learned to play the “game” of the model minority stereotype to “pass” their courses without learning. Also, the model minority stereotype discouraged the students from taking advantage of bilingual services. Furthermore, the stereotype worked to place the blame for their academic struggles away from the school. The data strongly suggest that poor pedagogy offered to students at City High were responsible, in part, for the academic struggles faced by the students.

Additionally, the underachieving students were ostracized by their higher achieving Korean peers. The higher achieving students used the model minority stereotype to define who they were, and to justify punishing those who did not conform to the “good” image of Asian students. The stories of James and Sookang who were labeled as *nalari* tells the impact of the stereotype in the school experiences of such students. Put differently, the stereotype made it difficult for some Korean students to access the resources available in the co-ethnic peer community, which could have helped them to overcome some of their academic struggles as mentioned earlier.

These findings on underachieving recent Korean immigrant students school experiences add to the current understanding of Asian American school experiences in three ways. First, the model minority stereotype affects all persons of Asian descent in schools. Asian appearance alone lumps those of Asian descent into the category of Asian Americans regardless of the length of residency in the U.S., the nature of legal status, or their citizenship. Consequently, the school experiences of more recent immigrants from Korea were affected by the same stereotype that affects fourth generation Chinese or Japanese American students. Second, the study adds to the growing body of literature (Lee 1995, Lew 2006) that examines the school experiences of underachieving students of East Asian

background whose experiences have largely been framed as the classic example of Asian success stories in the media. Related to this is the idea that, third, the social process through which the stereotype negatively affected the underachievers' school experiences offers an insight into the role of school staff in constructing the nature of the stereotype's hold on the students.

Recall, the "good" Korean students used academic success as an important aspect of how they saw themselves as a model minority. Coupled with this is the finding that City High played an important role in the underachievers' academic struggle by falling short in fostering a positive learning experience. In other words, City High helped to label Sookang and James as *nalari* facing social isolation from their co-ethnic peers. In addition to serving as a social context in which the underachievers struggled academically and socially, City High took part in making their experiences negative. Recognition of City High's active role in their struggles suggests the following implications for educational practice.

First, schools need to deliver its promise that the system is "fair". All students should have an equal chance to succeed by having good instruction to help them learn. Also, the students deserve to have truly qualified teachers who take responsibility for the students learning in addition to having the appropriate training in the subjects they're teaching. When these aren't met, schools play a role in fostering academic struggles as outlined in this chapter.

Second, schools need to bring the discussion of race into the center of the school. While this is true for persons of all races, it is especially true for Asian Americans whose experiences are often gets left out in the discussion of race as a Black and White dichotomy. By bringing the issue of race to the center of the school, we are advocating the kind of curriculum, teaching, and school organization that clearly recognizes the salience of race in the lives of all in the U.S. in all aspects of its operation. More specifically, the damaging effects of the model minority stereotype on Asian Americans must be understood not only by the students themselves, but also the school staff who take part in constructing it in school.

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