Exploring the College Access and Achievement Issues for Asian American Students

AMANDA E. HAMM
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS
5TH ANNUAL TEXAS HIGHER EDUCATION SYMPOSIUM – UTSA
AUGUST 2, 2013
SECOND-FASTEST GROWING RACIAL GROUP IN U.S.

FREQUENTLY EXCLUDED FROM EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES THAT PROVIDE SUPPORTIVE SERVICES TO MINORITIES. (I.E. EOP, FINANCIAL AID, SCHOLARSHIPS)

UNDERREPRESENTATION IN ADMINISTRATION & FACULTY POSITIONS.

DISCREDIT STEREOTYPES AND MYTHS
Asian Americans are relatively excluded from higher education research because:

- Barriers stemming from the Model Minority Myth – the assumption that all Asian Americans achieve universal and unparalleled academic and occupational success.

- Why invest time, energy, and resources studying a successful population?

- Lack of financial resources and support.
  - Asian Americans are not considered underrepresented minorities

(Museus, 2009)
The “Model Minority” Myth

- 1966 – Height of Civil Rights Movement

“Asian Americans are the “good” minority that seeks advancement through quiet diligence in study and work and by not making waves; the minority that other American minorities should seek to emulate.”

- “Racist Love”
- Popular Media Hype continues… especially in education.
Model Minority Images in Education

August 31, 1987

Dr. Cristina Yang
Grey’s Anatomy

“Are Asian Students Smarter?”
Anderson Cooper Show, CNN – May 16, 2007
Asian American Population

The U.S. Census Bureau categorizes all Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) as “Asian American”

- 50 Ethnic Subgroups: East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Pacific islanders
- Over 300 languages spoken
- 79% speak another language at home
- 69% are foreign-born

-U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division
Higher Education: “High Achieving”

- **East Asians** - Chinese, Japanese, & Korean
- **South Asians** – Asian Indian & Pakistani
  - Both Parents in Home – More Pressure & Support
  - Early Immigrants – Pursuing The American Dream
  - Highest Admittance via Employment Preferences (professional elites in their native countries)
  - Highest Educational Attainment–Bachelors or Higher

(Suzuki, 2002)
Higher Education: “Underachieving”

- **Southeast Asians** – Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, & Hmong
- **Pacific Islanders** – Polynesians, Micronesians, Melanesians, Guamanians, Samoans, & Tongans
  - Single parent homes – larger families or split families
  - War refugees fleeing to U.S. with nothing - PTSD
  - Highest rate of attrition during college
  - Highest proportion that attend two-year colleges
  - Live below poverty and depend on public assistance

(Suzuki, 2002)
Stereotypes & Myths Associated with AAPIs in Higher Education

- One homogenous racial group
- “Outwhiting” whites
- Intellectual overachievers
- Attend elite four-year universities
- Successful primarily in STEM
- Higher-than-average family incomes
- Low rates of psychological disorders & stress

(Suzuki, 2002)
College Access & Achievement Issues

- From lower-income families
- Depend on public assistance and Financial Aid
- Survive in an underground economy (Chinatowns)
- Limited English Language Ability
- Lack Economic & Cultural Capital
- Demand Remediation Courses
- Low SAT Verbal Scores and Overall Averages

(Suzuki, 2002; Park, 2006)
82% of AAPIs in college attend public institutions.

- 39% of AAPIs attend public two-year colleges

California and Nevada - over half of all AAPIs enroll in community colleges.

2000 - Two-thirds of AAPIs concentrated in 200 U.S. institutions in only 8 states.

Media focuses on the small percentage attending elite private institutions

(Teranishi et al., 2004) (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education [CARE], 2008)
Asian American Community College Students

- Little to no research focusing on the college choice of AAPIs
- Lack of empirical data on AAPIs in Community Colleges
  - Asian Americans are left out of studies involving community college minority students because they do not fit the patterns, face the same issues as other racial groups, or are not considered underrepresented.
- Significant proportion of Asian Americans attending community colleges struggle with serious academic, economic, and linguistic challenges.

(Park, 2006)
Asian American students feel more pressure from parents, culture and community to succeed academically and attend a “good” college, than other minority students.

Parents, culture, and community determine what is considered a “good” college.

“Relative Functionalism” - Parental belief that education allows social mobility within a discriminatory society.

(Kim & Gasman, 2011) (Ogbu, 1974; Sue & Okazaki, 1990; Teranishi et al., 2004)
2003 study finds more than half of undergraduate degrees awarded to Asian Americans were not STEM.
Overview of Achievement Barriers

- Prone to high levels of stress, depression, and poor self-efficacy
  - Family and Financial Pressures
  - Minority Myth & Racism
  - Cultural & Religious Conflicts
  - Immigrant Status & Refugee Experiences
- Increasing rates of unexplained deaths and suicides among Asian American College Students
- Lack of Asian American Educators, Administrators, and Counselors
Implications & Recommendations for Educators & Researchers

✓ PURSUE AND PROMOTE NEW ADEQUATE RESEARCH ON AAPI STUDENTS AND THE AAPI COMMUNITY

✓ RECOGNIZE THE SIGNIFICANT DISPARITIES THAT EXIST AMONG AAPI STUDENTS

✓ INCREASE RESOURCES FOR INSTITUTIONS SERVING AAPI STUDENTS (FEDERAL AND STATE LEVELS)

✓ ALIGN CAMPUS PROGRAMS AND STUDENT SERVICES WITH NEEDS OF THE AAPI STUDENTS

✓ ENCOURAGE ASIAN AMERICANS TO CONSIDER POSITIONS IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND STUDENT DEVELOPMENT
Thank You!