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African Americans have tougher life than Chinese Americans in our student body

Life is tough! As students, we all experienced different kinds of pressure. Many of us experience racial stereotypes that strangers in the community expect us differently based on our race and skin color. Compared to other forms of social pressure, the one from racial stereotypes is extremely difficult for us to process since our race is not what we can control and change. In the article “Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior.”, by Yale professor Amy Chua, and “Just Walk On By: A Black Man Ponders His Power to Alter Public Space.”, by Pulitzer Prize winner Brent Staples, the authors discussed challenges of social stereotypes unique to their race. The combination of these two papers provided a way to examine the different expectations youth in these two cultures may experience. In this article, we contrast them in terms of the source of their pressure, the area of the impact, and their long-term consequence. We found it is more difficult for an African American student than a Chinese American student in the United States due to the source of pressure, area of impact, and long-term consequences. It is much harder to live as an African American student than a Chinese American student in the United States.

Worldwide, many Chinese students experienced expectations of high academic achievement from their parents. In general, most Chinese parents invest much more resources and time into the education of their offspring. As indicated by Amy Chua, “... compared to Western parents, Chinese parents spend approximately ten times as long every day drilling academic activities with their children” (403). This phenomenon is probably rooted from the

widely accepted traditional Chinese “four peoples” ranking system, “In ancient times, Chinese society was classified into the ‘four peoples’, which entailed a clear ranking: educated officials at the top, followed by peasants and craftspeople, with merchants coming last” (Amelung and Schefold 261). Because of this, all Chinese parents experienced peer pressure from their friends to invest their best resources in their children on their educational achievement. Chinese Parents will be looked down on by their friends in the society if their children drop out from school, or attend a lower ranked college. They will be considered as failing their parental duty, not only by their own parents, but also everyone who knows them. I still remember, when my wife and I homeschooled both of our children in their highschool time and decided not to send our children to any SAT and ACT prepping school and just let them study the material themselves, Tiffany, one of our best friends shockingly said, “How could you not prepare your children for their college education? You are going to ruin their life!” Most of the time, Chinese parents transfer their own social pressure into their children and build up extremely high expectations on their poor young teens. Therefore, most Chinese students receive a lot of pressure from their parents about what they are going to major in college, could they keep their perfect 4.0 GPA, or what types of extracurricular activity they are involved in to help them to transfer into the best college they could possibly get into. In one way, we could view these pressures came from their parents, but the reality is it is actually a transferred pressure their parents experienced from the society. It is really a transformed, transferred, filtered, and indirect social pressure, through their parents. On the other hand, black students experienced the social pressure very directly from anyone around them. Most newspapers and other media overemphasis the lack of academic achievement from black students to lobby for more academy resources and increase their higher education acceptance rate. However, such a message also created a social stereotype of black students as

being low performers in their class and they need more assistance than others. A more troublesome social pressure for the black students is the racial profile. Although federal laws and many state laws already outlaw their law enforcement officers utilize racial profiling (Stelter et al.), regular citizens in many communities still assume black people in their community could be “dangerous”. This kind of incident happens way too frequently to black Americans, “Such episodes are not uncommon. Black men trade tales like this all the time” (Staples 236). Black students experience this kind of pressure not only from a small group of people, but generally from a supermajority of the population in our society today. They experienced this social pressure more directly and widely, compared to the kind of social pressure suffered by Chinese students.

The social pressure impacting the Chinese students are narrowly on their academic achievement, measured mostly by their test score, or grades: “If a Chinese child gets a B- which would never happen- there would first be a screaming, hair-tearing explosion. The devastated Chinese mother would then get dozens, maybe hundreds of practice tests and work through them with her child for as long as it takes to get the grade up to an A” (Chua 405). As my dear friend Rev. Kwon summarized well once about how Chinese parents read the score card: “A stands for Average, B is Bad, C goes Chaos, D will be Disowned, F finds a new home”. The supermajority of pressure Chinese students take is focusing on their GPA and ignoring their general wellbeing. Oftentimes, they suffer from mental diseases such as depression and anorexia (Sue et al). In other cases, that could cause a broken relationship with their parents. On the other hand, black Americans need to worry for the safety of their life from these social pressures, “Where fear and weapons meet- and they often do in urban America - there is always the possibility of death” (Staples 234). In the last several years, we observed way too many incidents of unjustified

misuse of arm forces on black Americans that caused the “Black Life Matter” movement (Boudreau et al). Therefore, the impact of the social pressure toward Chinese students on their mental health and family relationship; in contrast, it threatens the life and personal safety of black students.

Interestingly, many Chinese parents, even those who once experienced the same kind of pressure themselves, consider what the burden they created and pressed on their children not only is justified but also part of their “responsibility”. In many cases, these pressures actually push their children to overachieve not only academically but also financially in their future career, although some of them may experience unhappy life or mental disorders. One of my friends once commented, “It is better if my children have a good job that their health insurance covers the cost for them to see a psychologist, rather than they cannot afford to see one”. So she keeps pressing her child to study harder even after she realizes her child suffers from a minor mental disorder. For regular Chinese parents, academy achievement is part of the basic survival skills they believe they must equip their children just as a mother bird feels the strong need for them to teach their chick to fly. One thing we should not ignore is this stereotype also starts from a positive view of their children, “Chinese parents demand perfect grades because they believe that their child can get them. If their child doesn’t get them, the Chinese parents assume it’s because the child didn’t work hard enough” (Chua 405). So while these pressures are huge and often crush many teens, Chinese students seldom think they lack necessary DNA to achieve what their parents ask them to do. They often blame themselves for not working hard enough, or spending too much time on procrastination. Therefore, although the long term consequences of this kind stereotype often conflict with their personal interest or motivation, it seldom questions their natural ability. On the other hand, the kind of social pressure black students had received,

unfortunately, is far worse. They were assumed, told, reminded, and “confirmed” endless times in their life they “lack” the natural quality to be good. “Unfortunately, poor and powerless young men seem to take all this nonsense literally. As a boy, I saw countless tough guys locked away; I have since buried several, too” (Staples 235). They experienced way too many biases in their daily life. In many cases, these stereotypes may confuse them and make them start to doubt what is the right way to live their life normally. The consequence is a tougher life which always has to be very careful and intentional, if they want to keep living. The impact of these social pressures often crush young black students and mislead them to believe they are fighting against the current and it would be easier to just give up since there is no hope. Comparing the impact of the biases experienced by these two student groups made me realize it is much much harder for black students to succeed in college.

By examining the root cause, the scope, and the long term impact of the kind of social pressure Chinese and black students experienced in our society, we believe the pressures Chinese students experienced were indirect, limited, filtered, transformed, and transferred through their parents, narrowly on their academic achievement, and sometimes beneficial. On the other hand, those experienced by African American students are more direct, wildly coming from everywhere, doubting their basic quality and goodness and often destructive. Therefore, we believe being an African American student is much harder than a Chinese American student in college.

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