The Skew of Pathways:

The Structural Explanation for the Asian American Academic Achievements

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Abstract: In this paper, I develop a structural explanation for why 1.5 and second generation Asian Americans have higher academic achievement than white Americans in the United States. In the American job mobility structure, there are two pathways to upward mobility: developing interpersonal skills to obtain managerial occupations and developing technical skills to obtain technical occupations. Asian immigrant parents find that the former pathway is inaccessible because they experience structural disadvantages in the white American social environment due to their foreign cultural background and non-native English skills. Meanwhile, they find the latter pathway accessible because they experience positive treatment and insignificant disadvantages in the white American academic environment (especially in the STEM fields). To maximize their children's likelihood of obtaining upward mobility, Asian immigrant parents encourage their children to develop technical skills and discourage them from developing interpersonal skills. Consequently, 1.5 and 2nd generation Asian Americans have higher academic achievements but lower likelihood to obtain upper-managerial occupations than white Americans. This paper suggests that to eliminate the Asian-white academic achievement gap, we should create "culture-neutral environments" in the upper-middle class education and work institutions in the United States.

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Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that in the United States, Asian Americans[2] on average have higher academic achievements than white Americans. A national survey report published in 2016 shows that 52 percent of Asian Americans age 25 and older have a college degree, compared to 33 percent of whites, 19 percent of African Americans, and 14 percent of Hispanics (Musu-Gillette et al. 2016:130). Among students who began college in 2007 for a full-time bachelor's degree, 71 percent of Asian Americans graduated within 6 years, compared to 63 percent of whites, 41 percent of African Americans, and 53 percent of Hispanics (Musu-Gillette et al. 2016:108).

In *The Asian American Achievement Paradox*, Lee and Zhou (2015) provide an explanation for why 1.5 and second-generation Asian Americans[3] have higher academic achievements than white Americans. Lee and Zhou (2015:56) introduce the concept of "the success frame," which refers to a set of high academic expectations that Asian American parents apply to their children. While white American parents congratulate their children for getting a B in school, Asian American parents pressure their children to get an A plus. While white American parents view obtaining college degree as an achievement, Asian immigrant parents expect their children not

[2] In this paper, Asian Americans refers to American citizens that have ancestral descent from East Asia and Southeast Asia, because this group shares the same skin color in the eyes of average American citizens. This paper does not discuss American citizens that have ancestral descent from South Asia or the Middle East.

[3] First-generation Asian Americans (Asian immigrants) refers to Asian Americans who are foreign-born and first in their families to become American citizens. First-generation Asian Americans mostly receive their education before college outside of the United States. The 1.5 generation Asian Americans refer to Asian Americans who are foreign-born and the children of the first-generation Asian Americans. Second generation Asian Americans refers to Asian Americans who are born in the U.S. and are the children of first-generation Asian Americans. Both 1.5 and second generation Asian Americans receive all of their education in the United States.

only to graduate from an elite university, but also to obtain an advanced degree. Lee and Zhou show that students from families that implement the success frame spend more effort studying than students from families that do not adopt the success frame. The differential effort in studying explains a significant proportion of the differentials in academic achievement between Asian American students and white American students (Hsin and Xie 2014).

Through interviews, Lee and Zhou (2015:58) find out that Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant parents from both educated middle-class and uneducated working-class backgrounds consistently implement the success frame on their children. In contrast, Mexican immigrant parents and native born white American parents from both educated middle-class and uneducated working-class backgrounds do not implement the success frame (Lee and Zhou 2015: Ch.5). Why does the former group implement the success frame while the latter does not? Lee and Zhou's book (2015) and this paper provide two different explanations.

Lee and Zhou (2015) highlight the importance of highly and hyper-selective[4] nature of Vietnamese and Chinese immigrants to the United States. After changes in the new U.S. immigration policy in 1965, Vietnamese and Chinese immigrants are highly and hyper-selected. Educated middle-class immigrants import the class-specific success frame to the United States,

[4] An immigrant group is highly-selective when the percentage of college graduates in the immigrant group is higher than the percentage of college graduates in the country of origin of the immigrant group (Lee and Zhou 2015:29). Meanwhile, an immigrant group is hyper-selective when it satisfies two conditions. First, the immigrant group is highly-selective. Second, the percentage of college graduates in the immigrant group is higher than the percentage of college graduates in the host country (Lee and Zhou 2015: 29-30).

share abundant ethnic capital[5] within co-ethnic communities,[6] and cause Americans to develop stereotype promise[7] toward Asian Americans in the academic environment. I interpret Lee and Zhou to mean that getting access to success frame, ethnic capital, and stereotype promise in the academic environment are the three necessary and sufficient conditions for an immigrant group to fully implement the success frame. Because both the educated middle-class and uneducated working-class Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant parents have access to all three conditions through co-ethnic networks, they are able to implement the success frame (Lee and Zhou 2015:59, 116-117). In contrast, because Mexican immigrants are hypo-selected,[8] they do not have access to the success frame, ethnic resources, or stereotype promise. Therefore, they fail to implement the success frame.

The problem with Lee and Zhou's emphasis on immigrant high-selectivity is that it cannot explain why educated middle-class native born white American parents fail to implement the success frame. Since these white American parents come from educated middle-class background, have sufficient financial resources to create ethnic capital to support their children's

[5] Lee and Zhou (2015:6) define ethnic capital as the tangible and intangible academic resources that Asian Americans share within the co-ethnic community. Tangible academic resources include after-school tutoring and academic enrichment programs. Intangible academic resources include knowledge and strategy of how to get access to public resources in the U.S. education system (Lee and Zhou 2015:35-36).

[6] Co-ethnic communities refer to communities in which most residents share the same ethnicity.

[7] Lee and Zhou (2015:7) define a stereotype as an "oversimplified, generalized belief about the characteristics or predominant cultural view of a particular group." A stereotype threat is a negative generalized belief toward a group. Stereotype threat is equivalent to discrimination. Meanwhile, a stereotype promise is a positive generalized belief toward a group. Stereotype promise is the opposite of discrimination.

[8] An immigrant group is hypo-selected when it satisfies two conditions. First, the percentage of college graduates in the immigrant group is lower than the percentage of college graduates in the country of origin of the immigrant group. Second, the percentage of college graduates in the immigrant group is lower than the percentage of college graduates in the host country (Lee and Zhou 2015: 33).

education, and have children who experience favorable treatment in schools, they should—according to Lee and Zhou's argument—be able to implement the success frame; however, this is not the case.

To prevent their argument from falling apart, Lee and Zhou (Ch. 7) introduce the ad hoc notions of "growth mindset" and "ability mindset." Asian parents adopt a growth mindset, which "stems from Confucian philosophy" (Lee and Zhou 2015: 146). A growth mindset is the belief that a student's academic performance reflects the student's effort rather than innate talent and intelligence. Asian parents believe that increasing effort will significantly improve academic performance. Therefore, a strict success frame is logically attainable. In contrast, Lee and Zhou (2015: Ch.7, 102-106) show that white American parents hold an ability mindset, which originates from white American culture. An ability mindset is the belief that a student's academic performance reflects the student's innate talent and intelligence, rather than effort. White American parents believe that increasing effort will not affect academic performance. Therefore, adopting a success frame is unrealistic and harmful to children's mental health. Lee and Zhou conclude that the ability mindset, which is inherent within white American culture, prevents educated middle-class white American parents from implementing the success frame.

Because Lee and Zhou rely on culture to save their argument, they fail to escape the trap of making a culture-of-poverty argument: Lee and Zhou's argument suggest that in the academic environment, adopting an ability mindset, which is inherent within white American culture, prevents white American parents from implementing the success frame, a positive social norm.

In this paper, I present a structural explanation for why Asian immigrant parents implement the success frame on their children, while Mexican immigrant parents and white American parents fail to do so. I show that the American job mobility structure introduces two types of

occupations that promise high socioeconomic status: technical occupations and managerial occupations, both of which function within the white American cultural environment.[9] A person obtains technical occupations by developing technical skills (studying) in the white American academic environment. A person obtains managerial occupations by developing interpersonal skills (socializing) in the white American social environment. On the one hand, Asian immigrant parents find that developing interpersonal skills is an inaccessible pathway to upward mobility because they experience a significant structural disadvantage and negative treatment[10] due to their foreign cultural background and non-native English skills. On the other hand, Asian immigrant parents find that developing technical skills is an accessible pathway to upward mobility because they experience positive treatment (due to hyper-selectivity) and insignificant structural disadvantage in the white American academic environment (especially in the STEM fields[11]). Parents predict their children's prospect of upward mobility based on their personal experience. To maximize likelihood of attaining upward mobility, Asian immigrant parents skew the emphasis toward developing their children's technical skills and away from developing their children's interpersonal skills. This skew of pathways results in the formation and implementation of the success frame.

In contrast, white American parents find that both developing technical skills and interpersonal skills are accessible pathways to upward mobility because they experience neither negative treatment nor structural disadvantage in the white American academic and social

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[9] A cultural environment refers to an environment dominated by a specific set of cultural norms. A white American cultural environment refers to an environment dominated by the white American cultural norms.

[10] Negative treatment is equivalent to discrimination. Positive treatment is equivalent to reverse discrimination.

[11] STEM fields are those related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

environments. Therefore, white American parents expect their children to balance their time between studying and socializing, rather than implementing the success frame that prioritizes studying over socializing.

Mexican immigrant parents find that developing technical skills and interpersonal skills are both inaccessible pathways to upward mobility because they experience negative treatment in both the white American academic and social environments. Therefore, Mexican immigrant parents have low expectation for their children to obtain high-income technical and managerial occupations in white American corporations. Instead, they encourage their children to start family business as a third pathway to upward mobility (Lee and Zhou 2015:97-99).

This paper is divided into two sections. In the first section, I distinguish between cultural norms and social norms to show that Lee and Zhou (2015) make a culture-of-poverty argument. In the second section, I present a structural explanation for why Asian immigrant parents implement the success frame on their children, and why native-born white American parents and Mexican immigrant parents fail to do so.

Culture-of-poverty Argument

Gould (1999) distinguishes between cultural norms and social norms. Cultural norms "define the shared structures of meaning" (Gould1999:185). In an environment dominated by a particular set of cultural norms, an action that is consistent with cultural norms makes sense, while an action that violates cultural norms does not make sense. Cultural norms are morally neutral; two cultural norms may be different, but we cannot say that one cultural norm is inherently better or worse than the other one. Meanwhile, social norms "constitute 'right/wrong' distinctions" (Gould 1999:184). In an environment dominated by a set of social norms, an action that is

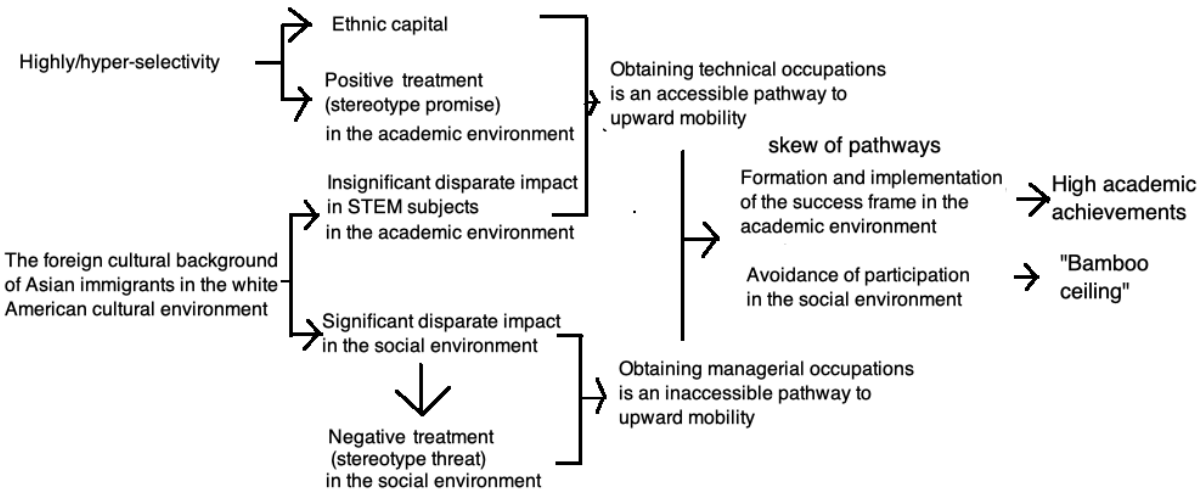
consistent with social norms is morally good, while an action that violates social norms is morally bad; one social norm may be better or worse than another social norm.

For example, Prudence Carter shows that "acting black" and "acting white" differ in "certain cultural styles and tastes in music, dress, food, and speech patterns" (Lee and Zhou 2015:185). I argue that "acting black" and "acting white" are two different cultural norms. Both are morally neutral. We cannot say that one is inherently better or worse than the other. In contrast, the success frame sets high academic expectation, while anti-achievement ideology sets low academic expectation. Setting high academic expectations is always better than setting low academic expectations. Therefore, adopting the success frame is a positive social norm, while adopting an anti-achievement ideology is a negative social norm.

A culture-of-poverty argument conflates cultural norms with social norms. It claims that a cultural norm internalized by a group necessitates either the group's adoption of a deficient social norm or its inability to adopt to a positive social norm. Hence, culture-of-poverty arguments necessarily arrive at the conclusion that the group's cultural norm is deficient.

Lee and Zhou (2015: 7) admit that white Americans fail to implement the success frame, a positive social norm, because they internalize the ability mindset, a white American cultural norm. In contrast, Asian immigrant parents are able to implement the success frame partly because they internalize the growth mindset, an Asian cultural norm. They imply that in the academic environment, the white American cultural norm is inherently inferior to the Asian cultural norm. Therefore, Lee and Zhou implicitly make a culture-of-poverty argument.

The Structural Explanation for the Success Frame



Graph 1

In this section, I introduce a structural explanation for why Asian immigrant parents from both educated middle-class and uneducated working-class backgrounds form and implement the success frame. I summarize my explanation in Graph 1. I also explain why white American parents and Mexican parents fail to implement the success frame.

In the American job mobility structure, there are two major types of socially accepted occupations that promise a high socioeconomic status. I call them "technical occupations" and "managerial occupations," both of which function within the white American cultural environment. Obtaining the former requires the development of technical skills[12] by studying in the white American academic environment. Obtaining the latter requires the development of interpersonal skills by socializing with peer groups in the white American social environment.

For all Americans, developing technical skills in the white American academic environment and developing interpersonal skills in the white American social environment are the two

[12] Lee and Zhou (2015: 58) refer to technical skills as "hard skills."

pathways to upward mobility. I argue that the former pathway is accessible when a group possesses sufficient financial resources and experiences an absence of negative treatment and disparate impact in the white American academic environment. The latter pathway is accessible for a group when the group experiences an absence of negative treatment and disparate impact in the white American social environment.

It is important to clarify the concepts of *disparate treatment* and *disparate impact*. Disparate treatment refers to the unequal influence on performance caused by people, while disparate impact refers to the unequal influence on performance caused by rules and structures. For example, let us imagine that two students, Fred and George, are taking the SAT exam in English. If a teacher arbitrarily gives Fred ten more minutes to take the exam than George, the teacher causes Fred and George to experience disparate treatment. If Fred's native language is English, while George is native German who does not understand any English, the SAT exam in English causes Fred and George to experience disparate impact.

Disparate treatment can be either positive or negative. Positive treatment will positively influence the person's performance, while negative treatment will negatively influence the person's performance.[13] Meanwhile, disparate impact can be either present or absent. The presence of disparate impact will negatively influence the person's performance.

I define a cultural environment as an environment dominated by a specific set of cultural norms. In the last section, I argued that cultural norms are neutral and cannot directly influence a student's academic performance. However, a set of cultural norms that a student internalizes may negatively impact the student's performance in an alien cultural environment. For example, the

[13] Positive treatment is equivalent to stereotype promise (in Lee and Zhou's terms) and reverse discrimination. Negative treatment is equivalent to stereotype threat and discrimination.

German language is a set of cultural norms different from, but not deficient to, English. Yet, only knowing German will negatively impact George's SAT score. The cause of George's poor performance in SAT is not German language, but George's foreign language background within an English cultural environment.

A person who grows up internalizing the dominant cultural norm may not experience disparate impact within the cultural environment. The absence of disparate impact is called privilege. In *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School*, Khan (2011: 101-113) shows that Carla, a black student, fell behind in humanities classes in her first year at St. Paul's School[14] not because she was less intelligent or experienced negative treatment from teachers, but because her black cultural background caused her to experience disparate impact in the white upper-class academic environment. As Carla began to assimilate to the white upper-class cultural writing style ("acting white"), her grades improved. She argues, however, that writing in white cultural style and in her own cultural style were "the same thing, only different… one way is privileged over the other in the elite world" (Khan 2011:104). Carla means that though writing in the white cultural style is not inherently better than writing in the black cultural style, assimilating to the former cultural norms enables her to avoid experiencing disparate impact in the white American academic environment.

Middle-class white American parents

Parents predict their children's prospect of attainting upward mobility based on their personal experience. For the middle-class white American parents who internalize white American

[14] St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire is one of the most prestigious high schools in the United States.

cultural norms, they experience neither negative treatment nor disparate impact in the white American academic environment and social environment. And because they have the financial resources to support their children's education, middle-class white American parents believe that both pathways to upward mobility are accessible to their children. As a result, middle-class white American parents encourage their children to balance the time between studying and socializing.

Middle-class Asian immigrant parents

For the middle-class Asian immigrants who receive higher education in the United States, they find that developing technical skills is an accessible pathway to upward mobility because they have access to ethnic capital, and experience positive treatment and insignificant disparate impact in the academic environment.

Because most Asian immigrant ethnic groups are highly-selected, they have the financial resources to create and concentrate ethnic capital in co-ethnic communities to support students' academic learnings (Lee and Zhou 2015: Ch.4). Furthermore, after the U.S. congress enacted the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, most East Asian immigrants (from China, South Korea and Japan, and Taiwan) are hyper-selected, which means that the average educational level of these immigrant groups in the United States is significantly higher than that of American citizens. For example, a United States Census Bureau report published in 2010 shows that 50 percent of Chinese immigrants (age 25 and older) in the United States had a college degree, compared to 4 percent of general population in China, and 28 percent of general population in the U.S. (Lee and Zhou 2015:31).

Because hyper-selected Eastern Asian immigrants (from China, South Korea and Japan, and Taiwan) constitute a significant proportion[15] of the total number of Asian immigrants in the United States, Americans develop stereotype promise toward all Asian students in the academic environment. Lee and Zhou (2015:117) put it this way: "teachers and school administrators assume that Asian students—regardless of ethnicity, class, nativity, or gender—are smart, hardworking, and high-achieving." They show that stereotype promise causes Asian students to experience positive treatment in the academic environment. As a result, teachers and guidance counselors often give Asian Americans students favorable treatment in class and provide them access to institutional resources like AP and honors classes (Lee and Zhou 2015:118).

In humanities and social science subjects like English literature and history, which require extensive English reading and writing skills as well as a Western cultural background, Asian immigrants may experience disparate impact compared to white Americans due to their foreign cultural background and non-native English skills. However, in STEM subjects that only require minimum English reading and writing skills, Asian immigrants experience insignificant disparate impact. Therefore, the educated middle-class Asian immigrants believe that developing technical skills to obtain technical occupations (especially in STEM fields) is an accessible pathway to upward mobility.

Meanwhile, middle-class Asian immigrants find that developing interpersonal skills is an inaccessible pathway to upward mobility because they experience significant disparate impact and negative treatment in the white American social environment. Because Asian immigrants come from foreign cultural backgrounds and have non-native English skills, they are structurally

[15] In 2014, East Asian immigrants comprised 48.7 percent of the total Asian (East Asia and Southeast Asia) immigrant population (Zong and Batalova 2016).

disadvantaged compared to white Americans in developing interpersonal skills in the white American social environment. In an interview, several Taiwanese graduate students in the United States express that limited English speaking and listening skills cause frequent misunderstanding between white American students and themselves (Swagler and Ellis 2003: 423). As a result, these Taiwanese graduate students experience tremendous social stress and embarrassment when interacting with white American students in the white American social environment. Furthermore, due to cultural differences, Asian immigrant students frequently experience difficulty in finding common interests and establishing genuine relationships with white American students (Mori 2000).

Because Asian immigrants experience disparate impact in developing interpersonal skills in the white American social environment, white Americans develop negative treatment (stereotype threat) on Asian immigrants, viewing them as passive and cold and falsely concluding that their passivity is the product of "Asian culture" (Lee and Zhou 2015: 131). The combination of significant disparate impact and negative treatment in the white American social environment causes the Asian immigrants to believe that developing interpersonal skills is an inaccessible pathway to upward mobility.

Educated middle-class Asian immigrants predict their children's prospect of upward mobility based on their personal experience. On the one hand, the educated Asian immigrant parents believe that their children will not face significant disadvantage compared to white Americans through the pathway of developing technical skills in the white American academic environment (especially in STEM fields). On the other hand, Asian immigrant parents believe that their children will face significant disadvantages compared to white Americans through the pathway of developing interpersonal skills in the white American social environment. To minimize

disadvantage and maximize the likelihood of attaining upward mobility, the Asian immigrant parents skew their emphasis toward developing their children's technical skills and away from developing their children's interpersonal skills, which results in the formation and implementation of the success frame. Because 1.5 and second generation Asian Americans on average spend more effort studying, they develop better technical skills and obtain higher academic achievements than white Americans.

Meanwhile, because 1.5 and 2nd generation Asian Americans generally spend less effort socializing, they have lower interpersonal skills than white Americans and are significantly less likely to obtain upper-level managerial positions. Lee and Zhou (2015: 133) refer to this phenomenon as the "bamboo ceiling." Though Asian Americans account for 15 to 20 percent of every Ivy League class, they "make up only 0.3 percent of corporate officers, less than 1 percent of corporate board members, and about 2 percent of college presidents… In the San Francisco Bay Area, Asians make up 50 percent of the high-tech workforce…, but account for only 8 percent of board members and 12 percent of top executives in the region." (Lee and Zhou 2015:133-134).

Working-class Asian immigrant parents

For the working-class Asian immigrants who do not receive an American education, they are unable to learn from personal experience that developing technical skills is an accessible pathway to upward mobility. However, they gain access to this information from educated middle-class Asian immigrants through co-ethnic networks (Lee and Zhou 2015: 59). Meanwhile, uneducated working-class Asian immigrants personally experience disparate impact and negative treatment developing interpersonal skills in the white American work environment.

Because uneducated working-class Asian immigrants on average have lower English language skills and are less assimilated to white American culture than educated middle-class Asian immigrants, the former immigrant group personally experiences a greater magnitude of disparate impact in developing interpersonal skills in the white American work environment than the latter group. As a result, the success frame that the uneducated working-class Asian immigrant parents implement is even stricter than that of the educated middle-class Asian immigrant parents. It explains why the 1.5 and second generation Asian Americans from uneducated working-class family background on average have even higher academic achievement than those from educated middle-class family backgrounds (Lee and Zhou 2015:44).

Mexican immigrant parents

Mexican immigrant parents believe that for their children, attaining upward mobility through both pathways are inaccessible. Like Asian immigrants, Mexican immigrants experience negative treatment and disparate impact in developing interpersonal skills in the white American social environment because of their foreign cultural background and non-native English skills. Furthermore, Lee and Zhou (2015: Ch.5) show that Mexican American students experience negative treatment in developing technical skills in the academic environment due to hypo-selectivity. In 2010, 5 percent of Mexican immigrants (age 25 and older) in the United States had a college degree, compared to 17 percent of general population in Mexico, and 28 percent of general population in the U.S. (Lee and Zhou 2015:31). Because they are hypo-selected, Americans develop stereotype threat and negative treatment toward Mexican students. Lee and Zhou (2015:121) show that teachers and counselors treat Mexican students differently from Asian students in the same school. While teachers and counselors encourage Asian students to

take AP courses, they are reluctant to provide Mexican students with the same resources (Lee and Zhou 2015:118).

To conclude, Mexican immigrant parents have low expectations for their children to obtain high-income technical and managerial occupations because they experience disadvantage in both the white American academic and social environments. Instead, Mexican immigrant parents encourage their children to start family businesses as a third pathway to upward mobility (Lee and Zhou 2015:97-99).

Parents of hypo-selected Asian immigrant ethnic groups

Lee and Zhou (2015:11) point out that not all Asian ethnic groups in the U.S. have high academic expectations and achievement: "Cambodians, Laotians, and Hmong have higher poverty levels and higher high school dropout rates than the national average and even compared to African Americans and Latinos." These Asian ethnic groups fail to implement the success frame because they find both pathways inaccessible. Because they are hypo-selected and experience high rates of poverty, they lack the financial resources and educational background to create ethnic capital within the co-ethnic community to support their children's education. Hence, even though they experience positive treatment and insignificant disparate impact in the academic environment, they find that developing technical skills is an inaccessible pathway to upward mobility. Additionally, because they experience disparate impact and negative treatment in the social environment due to foreign cultural background and non-native language skills, they believe that developing interpersonal skills is also an inaccessible pathway.

1.5 and 2nd generation Asian American parents

Greenman and Xie (2008: 121) show that compared to 1.5 and 2nd generation Asian Americans, third generation Asian Americans[16] have lower academic achievements. I argue that it is because the later group's parents (the 1.5 and 2nd generation Asian Americans) implement a more relaxed success frame than the former group's parents (first generation Asian immigrants). Compared to Asian immigrants who come from foreign cultural backgrounds and have non-native English skills, 1.5 and 2nd generation Asian Americans are more likely to grow up in the white American cultural environment and learn English as their native language. Therefore, compared to Asian immigrants, 1.5 and 2nd generation Asian Americans experience smaller disparate impact in developing interpersonal skills in the white American social environment. As a result, 1.5 and 2nd generation Asian Americans find that obtaining upward mobility through developing interpersonal skills is more accessible than their parents expected. Parents predict their children's prospect of upward mobility based on their personal experience. Hence, compared to Asian immigrant parents, 1.5 and 2nd generation Asian American parents provide their children smaller pressure to develop technical skills and greater encouragement to develop interpersonal skills. I expect that compared to earlier generations, later generations of Asian Americans students will have lower academic achievements—which gradually converge with those of whites—and a greater chance of obtaining upper-level managerial occupations.

[16] Third generation Asian Americans refer to the children of 1.5 and second generation Asian Americans.

Policy advice

Lee and Zhou (2015: 187-188) show that because Asian Americans students have higher academic achievement than other racial groups, elite academic institutions, such as Ivy League universities, set higher admission requirements for Asian Americans than other racial groups. In the previous section, I demonstrated that for Asian Americans, developing technical skills in the academic environment is their only accessible pathway to upward mobility. Raising the admission requirement in elite academic institutions will decrease the accessibility of their only pathway and enlarge the structural disadvantage that Asian Americans experience compared to white Americans in pursuing upward mobility.

I argue that a better solution is to transform the upper-middle class academic and work institutions in the United States from a white American cultural environment to a culture-neutral environment. I define a culture-neutral environment as an environment that does not cause disparate impact to groups from different cultural backgrounds. In a culture-neutral environment, Asian immigrants will experience smaller disparate impact in attaining upward mobility by developing interpersonal skills. As a result, Asian immigrant parents will become more willing to encourage their children to balance time between studying and socializing. Hence, the average academic achievement of Asian American students is likely to decrease and converge with that of white Americans students.

Furthermore, in a cultural neutral environment, Mexican Americans and African Americans will experience smaller disparate impact in developing both technical skills in the academic environment and interpersonal skills in the social environment. As a result, they will have a greater likelihood of attaining upward mobility through either pathway. If the United States is

really committed to racial equity, I believe that creating a culture-neutral environment in upper-middle class institutions is the direction we must strive toward.

Conclusions

In *Asian American Achievement Paradox*, Lee and Zhou (2015) introduce the concept of the success frame, which refers to high academic expectations that parents implement on their children. Lee and Zhou find that Asian immigrant parents from both educated middle-class and uneducated working-class backgrounds implement the same success frame, while white American parents and Mexican immigrant parents from both educated middle-class and uneducated working-class backgrounds do not implement the success frame.

In this paper, I introduce a structural explanation for this phenomenon. I argue that in the American job mobility structure, developing technical skills in the white American academic environment and developing interpersonal skills in the white American social environment are the two pathways to upward mobility. On the one hand, Asian immigrant parents find that the former pathway is accessible because they experience positive treatment due to hyper-selectivity and insignificant disparate impact in the white American academic environment (especially in the STEM fields). On the other hand, Asian immigrant parents believe that the latter pathway is inaccessible because they experience disparate impact and negative treatment in the white American social environment due to their foreign cultural background and non-native English skills. To maximize their children's likelihood of obtaining upward mobility, Asian immigrant parents form and implement the success frame to encourage their children to develop technical skills and discourage them from developing interpersonal skills. Consequently, Asian Americans

have higher academic achievement than white Americans, but are less likely to obtain upper-managerial occupations.

In contrast, because white American parents internalize white American cultural norms, they experience neither negative treatment nor disparate impact in both the white American academic and social environments. Therefore, they find both pathways to upward mobility accessible for their children. White American parents expect their children to balance their time and energy between developing academic skills and developing interpersonal skills, rather than implement the success frame, which prioritizes studying over socializing.

Mexican immigrant parents experience negative treatment in the white American academic environment due to their hypo-selectivity, as well as disparate impact and negative treatment in the white American social environment due to their foreign language and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, Mexican immigrant parents fail to implement the success frame because they find both pathways to upward mobility inaccessible.

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