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## **The Quality of Experience of Asian American Adolescents in Activities Related to Future Goals**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study explored the reason for the high academic achievements of Asian Americans by comparing the quality of experience of Asian and Caucasian American adolescents. The Experience Sampling Method was used to record subjective experiences. Subjects were 34 Asian American and 392 Caucasian American adolescents in the 6th, 8th, 10th and 12th grades. When engaged in “work-like” activities and activities important for their future goals, Asian American students reported more positive experiences relative to Caucasian American adolescents. The examination of parental practices concerning children’s academic activities indicated that Asian American parents structured their children's lives to facilitate academic success, and at the same time, they provided their children with freedom (or support their children’s autonomy) in actual academic activities. The internalization of cultural values was suggested as a possible factor for promoting the educational success of Asian Americans.

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## INTRODUCTION

Coleman *et al.* (1966) suggested that the academic achievement of American students is primarily determined by family background and social context. Since then, many studies have been conducted on ethnic and social class differences of academic achievement and their possible causes. Especially in ethnic minority research, while great concern with the low academic performance of some minority groups has dominated the field, the academic success of Asian American students has also captured a great deal of attention from educators and researchers. One question raised is why Asian Americans perform so well academically even though they have experienced similar prejudice and discrimination encountered by other minority groups (Sue, 1981).

To answer this question, many studies have been conducted up to date. Although some emphasize genetic factors (Lynn, 1977, 1982; Lynn and Dziobon, 1980) and selective immigration (Hirschman and Wong, 1986), a familiar and most widely accepted explanation for the high academic performance of Asian American students involves “cultural advantages” which assume that Asian cultural values and practices promote academic excellence (Sue and Okazaki, 1990). In particular, Asian family values and practices such as the importance of hard work, respect for education, and high expectations for achievement, have been identified by investigators as promoting high educational attainments (Kitano, 1984; Sue and Okazaki, 1990; Vernon, 1982). Moreover, family socialization has been suggested as a major factor for transmitting such values, thus, for Asian American students' academic success (Mordkowitz and Ginsburg, 1987; Schneider *et al.*, 1992; Schneider and Lee, 1990). For example, using structured interviews with Harvard undergraduates and secondary school summer students of Asian heritage, Mordkowitz and Ginsburg (1987) report that emphasis on academic study as the principal obligation of the child, high parental expectations for achievement, parental control of after-school time, and prioritization of education in the family are pervasive

themes. By using in-depth interviews with Japanese American parents and their children, Schneider *et al.* (1992) also suggest the indirect value socialization process in the family as a key to Japanese Americans' educational success. The researchers report, "Japanese-American parents do not explicitly require, monitor, or supervise homework assignments. Similarly, they do not directly place demands on their children to get good grades. Rather, these expectations and values are transmitted indirectly and symbolically" (Schneider *et al.*, 1992, p. 347).

With regard to family socialization, a series of arguments on parenting styles of Asian Americans is controversial, but interesting. Using large and diverse ethnic groups, Dornbusch *et al.* (1987) investigated the relationship between Baumrind's parenting styles (Baumrind, 1971, 1973; Baumrind and Black, 1967) and academic achievement. Across ethnic groups, the authoritarian style (i.e., emphasizing unquestionable obedience to parents) and the permissive style (i.e., reflecting substantial self-control by the child with minimal parental involvement) were negatively related to academic grades, whereas the authoritative style (i.e., reflecting an expectation for mature behavior from the child, clear setting of standards by the parents, and open two-way communications between them) was positively related. Interestingly, however, Asian American students had the highest grades (GPA) among all groups, including African Americans, Caucasians, Hispanics, and others, despite the fact that they came from families characterized as *more* authoritarian and permissive and *less* authoritative. Thus, although Baumrind's parenting styles explain achievement levels within ethnic groups, they fail to provide an account for the between-group differences.

In a response to this incongruent result among ethnic groups, Steinberg *et al.* (1992) suggest, in a follow-up study to Dornbusch *et al.* (1987), that parenting practices are influential for school performance among white and Hispanic adolescents, while peer support for academic achievement is a more powerful predictor of the academic achievement of Asian Americans. Their argument is that Asians' peer support offsets

the negative effects of the authoritarian parenting style dominant in Asian cultures. However, Chao (1994) challenges Steinberg's argument by pointing out that the concepts of Baumrind's parenting styles are not adequate to interpret the difference in academic performance between Asians and Caucasians, "because Baumrind's conceptualizations are specific only to European-American culture" (p. 1113). She argues that although the concept of "authoritarian" somewhat describes the optimal Chinese parenting style, it does not capture the important features of "caring for" and "loving" that underlie the Chinese parenting practice. Thus, although it is not clear yet what the optimal parenting style is for Asian Americans, this series of arguments suggests that there may be different factors and mechanisms in the communication between parents and children from different cultures in promoting high academic performance.

Another theoretical development in the search of explanations for Asian Americans' high academic achievement has been driven by an attempt to bring sociological and historical factors into the picture (Alva, 1993; Sue and Kitano, 1973; Sue and Okazaki, 1990; Suzuki, 1977). Sue and Okazaki (1990), for example, argue that the academic success of Asian Americans is "a product of cultural values (i.e., ethnicity) and status in society (minority group standing)" (p. 917), by suggesting that education is a means to promote upward mobility, especially for Asian Americans in this society. Their concept of *relative functionalism* takes into account a long history of discrimination by labor unions in the United States as a primary factor for Asian Americans to pursue education. According to Sue and Okazaki, Asians' perceived limitations in mobility in noneducational types of endeavors "increase the relative value or function of education as a means of achieving success" (p. 913). Studies by Schneider and her colleagues (Schneider *et al.*, 1992; Schneider and Lee, 1990) also report the determination of Asian American families to overcome occupational discrimination by investing in education. Thus, it appears that Asian Americans who perceive difficulties in upward mobility not only hold their cultural values, but increase the relative importance of such values and

motivate themselves to overcome occupational discrimination and achieve success in the society.

The current study will take a different approach by examining the *phenomenology of adolescents' everyday life experience*. As we have seen, most previous research has focused on the relationships between cultural values or practices and academic achievements or on historical and social factors as a reason for academic success. However, there has been few systematic studies of how Asian American adolescents feel when they are engaged in activities, which are highly valued in their cultures, and which might bring them to success in this society. The authors believe that the examination of the quality of experience in their ongoing activities in daily lives might provide a new insight for understanding academic success. For this purpose, the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) was used in this study. This method allows repeated measurement of the subject's everyday activities, thoughts, and accompanying psychological states in natural settings (Csikszentmihalyi and Larson, 1987; Csikszentmihalyi *et al.*, 1977; Larson and Csikszentmihalyi, 1983).

This approach is further supported by Dieter Baacke's concept of "Lifeworld" (Baacke, 1979, 1983), which was introduced in a book about socialization processes of Dutch youth by Van der Linden (1991). The concept, developed from socialization theory, social ecology, and interactionalism, and based on Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, suggests that people create their own lifeworlds by their subjective interpretation of the present social reality. "Within the boundaries of one's own lifeworld a person practices his or her 'everyday theory' about the surrounding world, acts accordingly, and reacts to whatever he or she encounters" (Van der Linden, 1991, p. 17). Subjective experience is the central focus of Baacke's lifeworld approach to his study of adolescence.

Using the phenomenological approach, this study explored a more fundamental explanation for the high academic achievement of Asian American adolescents. That is,

if it is true that Asian values, such as hard work, respect for education, and high expectations for achievement, are the significant factors for high attainments as has been claimed by previous research, it may be argued that Asian Americans' high academic achievements are the products of internalization of cultural values. In their theory of internalization, Deci and Ryan (1985) argue that people with an advanced level of internalized regulations have a more positive experience. Although activities motivated by internalized values are not based on intrinsic motivation, they are “self-determined” and thus they are intrinsically rewarding for the actors (Deci and Ryan, 1985). In addition, theories of internalization (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Grusec and Goodnow, 1994) have suggested that for internalization to occur, the socializing agents must provide children with clear structure or information to follow (i.e., provision of structure), as well as support for autonomy (i.e., provision of autonomy support).

On the basis of these theoretical backgrounds, we examined two major questions in the current study. First, we examined what kind of subjective experiences Asian American adolescents had when engaged in activities which might lead them to future success. In order to do so, two kinds of situations were selected for the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) analyses. The first were situations where adolescents were engaged in “work-like” activities and the other were situations where adolescents were engaged in activities highly important to their future goals. Then, we compared the quality of experience of Asian American adolescents with that of Caucasian American adolescents when they were in these two situations. Here we predicted that if Asian American adolescents had internalized cultural values, such as hard work and high expectations for achievements, they might have more positive experience in “work-like” activities and activities which were related to their future goals. Second, we examined how parental practices would differ between these two culturally different groups in terms of academic concerns. We predicted that in order to promote their children’s internalization of cultural values relevant to education and future success, Asian

American parents might provide their children with more clear structure and guidance for academic success, as well as more autonomy in actual academic activities, as compared to Caucasian American parents.

## METHODS

### Sample

A total of 1,109 students in the 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th grades participated in a five-year longitudinal study of career development being conducted by The University of Chicago and the National Opinion Research Center's Ogburn-Stouffer Center (Bidwell *et al.*, 1992). The students were selected from 33 public schools around the nation chosen to reflect the full range of socioeconomic environments, from upper class suburbs to below poverty-line urban neighborhoods. Students were, in turn, randomly chosen with the aim of obtaining representative samples of their respective schools in terms of gender, race and ethnicity, and scholastic ability level, and assigned to completing the full-scale instrument battery, which included the ESM, NELS questionnaire (a modified version of the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988: NELS:88), a Friend Sociometric Form (FRIENDS), and the Career Orientation Scale (COS), which measures children's knowledge of work and their career aspirations. This group of students is called the "focal student."

For the purpose of this study, 34 Asian students *whose first language is not English (an Asian Language)* and 392 Caucasian students *whose first language is English* were further selected out of the focal sample with the aim of obtaining two culturally different groups of adolescents. Thus, the final focal sample of this study is a total of 426 Asian and Caucasian American adolescents. Although 28 out of the 34 Asian students mostly speak English now in their daily lives and no instrument to measure their



levels of acculturation to American culture and the length of being in the USA was administered, considering their first languages, those Asian students are presumably First and Second generations. In addition, the authors believe that their first socialization phase in an Asian language sufficiently exposed them to their native culture to the extent that they may still preserve their cultural identities. Among those 34 Asian American adolescents, Pacific Islanders (Samoan, Guaminian, etc.), West Asians (Iranian, Afghan, Turkish, etc.), and Middle Easterners (Iraqi, Israeli, Lebanese, etc.) were not included. The Asian students in this sample include 14 Chinese, 3 Filipino, 2 Japanese, 5 Korean, 7 Southeast Asian (Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian/Kampuchean, Thai, etc.), 2 South Asian (Asian Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lanka, etc.), and 1 student whose parents are Chinese and Vietnamese.

The characteristics of the Asian and Caucasian groups are shown in Table I. In terms of gender and family composition, these two groups are similarly represented. However, in this sample Asian American adolescents are overrepresented in the 12th grade and underrepresented in the 6th grade, as compared to Caucasian American adolescents. In terms of the Social Class of Community (SCC), which is the census characteristics of the neighborhood in which the adolescents live (Bureau of the Census, 1993), Asian American adolescents are more likely to come from upper middle class communities, and less likely to come from working class and upper class communities, as compared to their Caucasian American counterparts. Hence, in all statistical analyses age (grade) and SCC will be controlled for when the two groups are compared by using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with regression approach.

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Insert Table I about here

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In addition to the focal students, another group of students was selected for the

five-year longitudinal study of career development. Labeled as “cohort” students, they were selected through the same procedure as the focal students described above, and were assigned to filling out NELLS, FRIENDS, and COS questionnaires, but not the ESM.

The cohort sample included 3,604 students from different ethnic background, including African, Asian, Caucasian, Hispanic, and Native Americans. From these students, we selected 142 Asian Americans whose first language is not English and 1,451 Caucasian Americans whose first language is English for the final cohort sample of this study.

The completion rate for the ESM was 71% among the entire focal students of the five-year longitudinal study of career development. With respect to the other instruments, the entire focal students tended to have slightly lower rates than the entire cohort sample. However, the lowest completion rate was 77% among the entire focal students for FRIENDS. The overall completion rates among both samples for the three instruments, COS, NELLS, and FRIENDS, was 87%. The final focal and cohort samples of Asian and Caucasian American students in this study were those who completed all instruments they were assigned.

### **Procedure**

The subjects met in small groups with a member of the research team for the Experience Sampling Method orientation. They were given pre-programmed wristwatches that would randomly signal over a week and instructed to fill out an ESF (Experience Sampling Form) each time the watch signaled. At the meeting, students were provided with the ESF booklets and asked to fill out a sample ESF to make sure that the procedures were understood. They were also given three other questionnaires, NELLS, COS, and FRIENDS, and asked to complete these questionnaires during the upcoming week. At the end of the week, a debriefing meeting was held, and the wristwatches, ESFs, and all other questionnaires were returned. In addition, students were interviewed

soon after the debriefing session. Each student met one-on-one with a team member for an in-depth interview that lasted approximately 40 minutes and that focused on family, friends, and future goals.

### Measures

The main research tool of this study was the ESM. Students carried a preprogrammed signaling wristwatch, which would signal them 8 times daily for a weekly total of 56 signals, and filled out the ESFs whenever they were signaled. The wristwatches were programmed to beep students at a random time during every two hour block from 7:30 AM to 10:30 PM daily, with the restriction that no two signals would be less than 30 minutes apart.

In order to obtain a consistent and reliable ESM data base, incomplete responses and those ESFs that were filled out more than 15 minutes after the signal were discarded and only students who completed *at least* 15 ESFs were included in the data base. For the present study, 426 students completed a total of 14,274 ESFs (1,113 for the Asian and 13,161 for the Caucasian sample), which amounts to a response rate of about 60 % (8 signals a day for 7 days x 426 students): 58 % for Asians and 60 % for Caucasians. Missing responses were due to forgetting the watch or ESF at home, watch malfunction, or inability of the student to fill out the form in certain situations.

### *Quality of Experience*

The quality of experience was examined with five experiential items on the ESF - happiness, enjoyment, feeling good about yourself, activeness, and self-consciousness - which represent some of the most important dimensions of the quality of experience (Csikszentmihalyi and Larson, 1984). Two experiential variables - happiness and

activeness - were measured by 7-point semantic differential items: happy-sad and active-passive. The other variables - enjoyment (“Did you enjoy what you were doing?”), feeling good about yourself (“Did you feel good about yourself?”), unself-consciousness (“How self-conscious were you?” recoded so that a high score implies not at all self-conscious) - were measured by a 10-point scale ranging from *not at all* to *very much*.

For the following analyses, raw scores were standardized around individual means to eliminate individual response biases, and the resulting  $z$  scores for each experiential variable were aggregated within each person and used to measure the quality of experience in various activities and situations.

### *Students' Perceptions of Activities*

In order to define “work-like” activities and activities highly important to future goals, two questions on the ESF were used. Students’ perceptions of work-, play-, both- and neither-like activities were measured by the question inquiring if the main activity they were doing seemed “more like work,” “more like play,” “like both,” or “like neither.” Perceived importance of activities to future goals was measured by the question, “How important was it (the main activity) in relation to your future goals?” Responses were given on a 10-point rating scale ranging from *not at all* to *very much*. These responses were also standardized by an individual mean score, and then classified in terms of whether importance to future goals was high or low (*above or below the mean*). Thus, the situations of “high future importance” included responses where students’ perceived importance of activities for their future goals was higher than their weekly average (above “zero” on the standardized score) and the situations of “low future importance” included responses where students’ perceived importance of activities for their future goals was lower than their weekly average (below “zero” on the standardized score).

*Parental Practices Concerning Academic Matter*

In order to measure parental practices concerning academic matter, three questions were selected from NELS.

1. *Who makes the decision* was measured by the question, “In your family, who makes most of the decisions on each of the following topics?” Two items relevant to this analysis were selected out of the 7 original items. These are questions about who makes the decisions on “what classes student takes in school” and on “whether student should go to college.” Answers were given on 5-point scales (1 = *I decide by myself*, 2 = *I decide after discussing it with my parents*, 3 = *we decide together after discussing*, 4 = *my parents decide after discussing it with me*, 5 = *my parents decide themselves*).
2. *Parental involvement in academic activities* was measured by the question, “How often do your parents do the following?” This question is composed of 6 items that ask how often, for instance, parents check on whether the student has done his/her homework or how often parents help the student with his/her homework. Answers were given on 4-point scales (0 = *never*, 3 = *often*).
3. *Frequency of discussion with parents* was measured by the question, “Since the beginning of the school year, how often have you discussed the following with either or both of your parents or guardians?” Six items relevant to this analysis were selected out of 7 original items. The selected items ask how often students have discussed, for instance, selecting courses or programs at school, things studied in class, or their grades. Answers were given on 3-point scales (1 = *not at all*, 2 = *once or twice*, 3 = *three or more times*).

## RESULTS

### The Quality of Experience

Before examining the quality of experience, what activities adolescents were engaged in when they perceived the activities at hand as “work-like,” “play-like,” “both-like,” and “neither-like” was examined. Asian American and Caucasian American adolescents were engaged in the same types of activities in each situation. Both groups had similar perceptions of work-like, play-like, both-like, and neither-like activities. Moreover, when they responded that the main activities they were engaged in were more like work, more than 60% of the time both groups were studying, including anything related to class room activities, such as listening to the teacher and taking notes, homework, and independent studies on school subjects (Asian 63.9% and Caucasian 66.0%), followed by working, such as doing paid work, volunteer work, and housework (chores and errands), for both groups (Asian 10.6% and Caucasian 11.1%).

We also examined what activities adolescents were engaged in when they perceived the importance of the activities for their future goals as high and low. Again, both groups mentioned quite similar types of activities in each situation. Moreover, when they responded that the main activities they were engaged in were important to their future goals (i.e. future importance is high), 43% of the time both Asian American and Caucasian American adolescents were studying (Asian 42.8% and Caucasian 43.0%), and over 15% of the time they were engaged in maintenance activities, such as eating, grooming, or personal care (Asian 16.2% and Caucasian 15.3%).

#### *Ethnic Differences in the Quality of Experience in Work-Like Activities*

A series of ANCOVAs controlling for the effects of age and SCC was performed

to examine whether the quality of experience of Asian American adolescents differed from that of Caucasian American adolescents in work-like activities. Figure 1 shows the two groups' average  $z$  scores on the five dimensions of experience. The value "zero" for the average  $z$  score for each experiential variable indicates the weekly average of the dimension of experience. Thus, for example, if the variable "happy" is positive when doing work-like activities, it means that the students feel happier when engaged in work-like activities than they feel on average during the week. The results show that although both groups seemed to have a somewhat negative experience when engaged in work-like activities, Asian American adolescents were significantly happier, enjoyed more, and felt better about themselves in the situation; happiness,  $F(1,411) = 9.24, p < .01$ ; enjoyment,  $F(1,419) = 16.15, p < .001$ ; feeling good about themselves,  $F(1,413) = 8.31, p < .01$ . Activeness and unself-consciousness for these two groups were not significantly different. But Asian American adolescents were more active and less self-conscious than their weekly average, while Caucasian American adolescents were less active and more self-conscious than their weekly average when they were engaged in work-like activities.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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ANCOVAs were also performed to examine whether the quality of experience differed in activities perceived as play-like, both-like, and neither-like, still controlling for the effects of age and SCC. There was no significant difference between the two groups in the quality of experience when they were engaged in play-like, both-like, or neither-like activities, except for only two marginal differences in the level of enjoyment. When engaged in play-like and neither-like activities, Asian American adolescents reported lower level of enjoyment than Caucasian American adolescents did; play-like activities,  $F(1,413) = 3.15, p < .10$  (marginal significance); neither-like activities,  $F(1,406) = 3.56, p$

< .10 (marginal significance). Thus, Asian American adolescents have much more positive experiences than Caucasian American adolescents only in work-like activities.

However, intraindividual  $z$  scores are not independent of each other. That is, if only two types of activities are being considered, for example, and if a subgroup of adolescents has a mean score that is deviating in one direction from zero in one activity, the mean score for the subgroup in the other type of activity must also be deviating from zero in the opposite direction. However, we had four categories of activities (work-, play-, both-, and neither-like activities) and only about 30% of the time both Asian American and Caucasian American adolescents perceived the activities at hand as work-like, and the other 70% of the time they perceived the main activities they were engaged in as either play-like, both-like, or neither-like activities. Thus, lack of independence in  $z$  scores cannot explain the difference in the experience of work between Asian American and Caucasian American adolescents.

*Comparison of the Quality of Experience in Situations Where the Importance to Their Future Goals is High and Low*

In order to examine the quality of experience of Asian American and Caucasian American adolescents in situations where the perceived importance to their future goals was high (higher than the weekly average) and low (lower than the weekly average), an ANCOVA with future importance (high vs. low) and ethnicity (Asian vs. Caucasian) as factors was conducted on each experiential variable while controlling for the effects of age and SCC. Figure 2 shows the two groups' average  $z$  scores on the five dimensions of experience in the two situations. The results indicate that when perceived future importance was low, Asian American adolescents were less happy, less enjoying, less feeling good about themselves, less active, and more self-conscious than their weekly average, while when their perception of future importance was high, Asian American



adolescents were happier, more enjoying, feeling better about themselves, more active, and less self-conscious than their weekly average. Moreover, the level of Asian American adolescents' experience changed dramatically from negative to positive as their perception of future importance changed from low to high.

The Caucasian American adolescents' quality of experience in the same situations is quite different. When their perception of future importance was low, they were happier, more enjoying, and less self-conscious, but less feeling good about themselves and less active than their weekly average. When their perception of future importance was high, they were feeling better about themselves and more active, but they were less happy, less enjoying, and more self-conscious than their weekly average. While the levels of happiness, enjoyment, and unself-consciousness of Asian American adolescents went up as their perception of future importance changed from low to high, Caucasian American adolescents' levels of those dimensions of experience went down, and this pattern caused interaction effects between the two factors of future importance (high vs. low) and ethnicity (Asian vs. Caucasian) on happiness;  $F(1,830) = 9.02, p < .01$ ; enjoyment,  $F(1,840) = 8.02, p < .01$ , and on unself-consciousness,  $F(1,736) = 4.81, p < .05$ . The levels of feeling good about themselves and activeness of both groups went up as their perception of future importance changed from low to high. However, Asian Americans' dramatic change of experience also caused interaction effects on these dimensions of experience; feeling good about themselves,  $F(1,828) = 4.07, p < .05$ ; and activeness,  $F(1,827) = 2.77, p < .10$  (marginal significance).

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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In summary, when they were engaged in work-like activities and activities highly important to future goals, Asian American adolescents had more positive experience than

Caucasian American adolescents.

### **Parental Practices Concerning Children's Academic Activities**

Table II shows who makes decisions on two topics related to academic matters in Asian American and Caucasian American families. An ANCOVA controlling for the effect of SCC with ethnicity and grade as factors was performed for each item. Scores are based on a 5-point rating scale, and a higher score indicates that parents are more likely to make the decision on that topic. According to the results, Asian American parents are more likely to decide whether their children should go to college, as compared to Caucasian American parents;  $F(1,400) = 3.31, p < .10$  (marginal significance). However, in terms of what classes their children will take, Asian American parents seem to allow their children more freedom in deciding, as compared to Caucasian American parents;  $F(1, 403) = 9.30, p < .01$ .

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Insert Table II about here

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The next examination of parental practices is concerned with how parents are involved in their children's daily lives (Table III). Analyses of covariance controlling for the effect of SCC with ethnicity and grade as factors were conducted on several kinds of parental involvement in children's lives. The results indicate that Asian American parents check on whether their children have done their homework less often and help their children with their homework less often than Caucasian American parents; checking homework,  $F(1,414) = 2.79, p < .10$  (marginal significance); helping with homework,  $F(1,414) = 13.01, p < .001$ . However, Asian American parents limit time for TV/video games more often, but they assign household chores less often than Caucasian parents;

limiting time for TV/video games,  $F(1,414) = 3.13, p < .10$  (marginal significance); assignment of household chores,  $F(1,413) = 4.51, p < .05$ . Main effects for grade were also found for checking homework;  $F(3,414) = 9.86, p < .001$ ; helping with homework,  $F(3,414) = 8.12, p < .001$ ; and for limiting time for TV/video games,  $F(3,414) = 6.15, p < .001$ . There was no difference between the two cultural groups in the parental practices of giving privileges for good grades and limiting privileges for poor grades. In sum, it seems that Asian American parents organize their children's lives for their academic success by limiting time for TV/video games and assigning household chores less often, but they do not control actual academic activities too much; they do not check homework and do not help with homework often, as compared to Caucasian American parents.

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Insert Table III about here

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The last examination of parental practices concerning children's academic activities is based on how often adolescents say that they have discussed things related to academic matters with their parents (Table IV). A series of ANCOVAs controlling for the effect of SCC with ethnicity and grade as factors was performed for various topics students discuss with their parents. The last three items were answered only by 10th and 12th graders. Asian American adolescents seem to discuss selecting school courses less often, discuss things studied in class less often, discuss school activities less often, and discuss grades less often with their parents, as compared with Caucasian American adolescents; selecting courses,  $F(1,412) = 3.22, p < .10$  (marginal significance); things studied in class,  $F(1,414) = 6.35, p < .05$ ; school activities,  $F(1,414) = 2.82, p < .10$  (marginal significance); grades,  $F(1,198) = 11.73, p < .001$ . However, Asian American students discuss ACT/SAT plans and preparation with their parents more often than

Caucasian American students;  $F(1,198) = 5.17, p < .05$ . Thus, it seems that Asian American parents are more likely to provide their children with guidance for academic success, such as discussing ACT/SAT plans and preparation, but they do not get overly involved in actual academic activities. There were also grade effects on selecting school courses;  $F(3,412) = 5.36, p < .001$ , and on grades;  $F(1,198) = 3.47, p < .10$  (marginal significance).

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Insert Table IV about here

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In addition, we included the cohort sample in the analyses and compared a total of 176 Asian Americans (34 focal and 142 cohort students) and a total of 1843 Caucasian Americans (392 focal and 1,451 cohort students) on the same parental practice measures by using ANCOVAs with regression approach, controlling for the effects of grade, SCC, and family composition. Although the difference between these two groups on how often parents check on whether their children did their homework did not come out significant, otherwise the results were strongly consistent with those of analyses with the focal sample. Asian American parents were more likely to decide whether their children should go to college,  $F(1,1953) = 19.19, p < .001$ , to discuss ACT/SAT plans and preparation with their children,  $F(1,1281) = 6.86, p < .01$ , and to limit time for TV/video games,  $F(1,2003) = 15.69, p < .001$ , but less likely to assign household chores,  $F(1,1998) = 5.85, p < .05$ , compared to Caucasian American parents. Asian American parents were less likely to decide what classes their children should take,  $F(1,1984) = 6.35, p < .05$ , helped their children with homework less often,  $F(1,2002) = 23.59, p < .001$ , discuss things studied in class less often,  $F(1,2004) = 31.23, p < .001$ , discuss school activities less often,  $F(1,2002) = 24.05, p < .001$ , and discuss even grades less often  $F(1,1293) = 45.42, p < .001$ , as compared to Caucasian American parents.

## DISCUSSION

Before reviewing the details of the findings, it is necessary to consider in what ways the limitations of this study must induce caution in the interpretation of its results. The main concern is that we are generalizing about Asian American adolescents, about Asian values, and about Asian family socialization practices from a very small sample of Asian American teenagers. Even though we controlled for the effect of social class of community in all statistical analyses, it is possible that Asian American families are representative of the higher strata of Asian society. Thus their values may represent the ideal of Asian attitudes towards work ethics and future orientation, rather than the average. Consequently, the differences found between Asian Americans and Caucasian Americans may in part be due to a comparison between a self-selected elite who was enterprising enough to emigrate to a new culture, and an average cross-section of the American population.

Nevertheless, the findings suggest that there are meaningful differences in values, experiences, and family socialization process between the two cultural groups. First of all, Asian American adolescents reported relatively positive experiences when they were engaged in activities highly valued in their cultures. When engaged in activities perceived to be more like work, they were significantly happier, reported enjoying themselves more, and felt better about themselves than their Caucasian American counterparts. However, there was no significant difference between the two groups in the quality of experience when engaged in play-like, both-like, or neither-like activities, except for a few marginal differences in enjoyment in play-like and neither like activities. Further, in situations where the importance for future goals was high, Asian American adolescents had a more positive experience than Caucasian American adolescents. When perceived future importance was high, they were happier, enjoying more, feeling

better about themselves, more active, and less self-conscious than their weekly average, while Caucasian American adolescents were less happy, less enjoying, and more self-conscious than their weekly average in the same situations. Moreover, the level of Asian Americans' experience dramatically improved as their perception of future importance changed from low to high. According to these analyses of subjective experiences when involved in work-like activities and activities important to future goals, it seems that Asian American adolescents value hard work and high achievement more strongly. In other words, Asian American adolescents seem to have internalized such cultural values. As mentioned before, in their theory of internalization, Deci and Ryan (1985) argue that people with an advanced level of internalized regulations that are operative by personal importance and values coherent to the sense of the self engage in such activities more willingly and have a more positive experience. Thus, Deci and Ryan's description of internalized motives appears to apply to the experience of our Asian American adolescents in situations that are relevant to their future. Cultural values of hard work and high expectations of achievements that are emphasized through parental socialization (Mordkowitz and Ginsburg, 1987; Sue and Okazaki, 1990; Schneider *et al.*, 1992; Schneider and Lee, 1990; Stevenson and Stigler, 1992; Vernon, 1982) seem to have been internalized by Asian American adolescents quite well.

When we turned to family socialization and examined whether there were differences in parental practices concerning children's academic activities, very interesting patterns emerged. Asian American parents seem to structure their children's lives for academic success more than Caucasian American parents. Asian American parents were more likely to decide whether their children should go to college, to discuss ACT/SAT plans and preparation with their children, and to limit time for TV/video games, but less likely to assign household chores. Thus, it seems that Asian American parents organize and structure their children's lives to facilitate academic success, and this result replicates the findings of previous research (Kao, 1995; Mordkowitz and

Ginsburg, 1987; Stevenson and Stigler, 1992).

When we look at the involvement in actual academic activities, we may get a quite different impression from the “authoritarian” image of Asian American parents. That is, Asian American parents were less likely to be involved in their children’s actual academic activities. They were less likely to decide what classes their children should take, and to check less often on whether their children did their homework. They helped their children with homework less often, and discussed things studied in class, school activities, and even grades less often. A study by Kao (1995) that uses the NELS:88 also reports the same pattern of parental involvement for a national sample of Asian and Caucasian Americans (see also Sue and Okazaki, 1990). Thus, our Asian American parents, as well as Asian American parents of the students in the NELS:88 national sample, seem to provide their children with more freedom in actual academic activities.

Theories of internalization (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Grusec and Goodnow, 1994) have suggested that for internalization to occur, the socializing agents must provide children with support for autonomy, as well as clear structure or information to follow. Thus, practices of Asian American parents in this study seem to have such qualities to promote the process of internalization. Asian American parents structure their children’s lives to facilitate academic success (provision of structure), and at the same time, they provide their children with freedom (or support their children’s autonomy) in actual academic activities (autonomy support).

However, although these Asian Americans’ parental practices seem to fit the theories of internalization, they may not be the most effective means for Caucasian Americans to promote internalization of their educational values. The concept of the “authoritative” parenting style, which has been shown to be the optimal form for Caucasian Americans, assumes democratic open two-way communications between parents and children. It seems that Caucasian American parents and children collaborate together to build the children’s future. On the other hand, Asian American parenting

practices are more like a combination of “authoritarian” and “permissive” styles. *Asian American parents structure their children's lives for academic success more or less one-sidedly. Then, they leave their children alone to achieve their goals by themselves.*

These parenting practices of Asian Americans are well documented by Schneider *et al.* (1992) as “a tacit understanding - between the parents and the child about the value of education, putting forth one’s great effort, and bringing the family honor through successful academic performance” (Schneider *et al.*, 1992, p. 343). As an example of this “tacit understanding,” the researchers introduce an interesting quotation from an interview with a Japanese mother. “I don't have to say anything about bad grades. My kids have high expectations of their own. If they don't do well, they're mad at themselves” (p. 344). Thus, the mother relies on her children’s internalized norms of performance rather than directly controlling academic activities. She seems to *provide more psychological space for her children to work out the difficulties in academic activities by themselves.* However, we must note that it appears that this psychological space is provided to Asian American adolescents by their parents within rigidly and clearly structured lives for their academic success.

Although the current study showed interesting patterns of Asian Americans' parental practices that may promote children’s internalization of cultural values related to academic success, it is obvious that further research should be conducted on the relationship between family socialization practices and internalization of values and on its mechanism, both for Asian and Caucasian Americans. In any case, our research provide a new insight into why Asian American students perform well in schools. The examination of the quality of experience when engaged in “work-like” activities and activities highly important for the future goals seems to suggest that Asian American adolescents have internalized cultural values of hard work and high expectations of achievement. Moreover, whether or not Asian Americans indeed increase the relative importance of values relevant to future success and motivate themselves to overcome



occupational difficulties, as relative functionalism suggests, they are not reluctantly working or studying hard for their future goals. They have relatively positive experiences when engaged in activities related to their future (see also Asakawa, 1995). Although we still cannot draw a decisive conclusion that internalization of cultural values is a reason for the high academic achievement of Asian Americans, it is clear that subjective experience is an important factor to foster children's favorable attitudes toward activities which are related to their future goals.

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**Table I.** *Characteristics of Asian and Caucasian Groups*

Variable	Asian (n = 34)	Caucasian (n = 392)	Chi-Square	<i>p</i> Value <i>df</i>
Gender (%)				
Male	50	45	0.33	ns (.57) <i>df</i> = 1
Female	50	55		
Age (%)				
6th	12	26	11.50	<i>p</i> < .01 <i>df</i> = 3
8th	21	27		
10th	26	29		
12th	41	18		
Family composition (%)				
Both mother and father <sup>a</sup>	71	71	0.005	ns (.94) <i>df</i> = 1
Other	29	29		
Social Class of Community (%) <sup>b</sup>				
Lower class	2.9	1.3	29.49	<i>p</i> < .001 <i>df</i> = 4
Working class	2.9	23.5		
Middle class	20.6	30.9		
Upper-middle class	67.6	25.8		
Upper class	5.9	18.6		

<sup>a</sup>Families that consist of mothers and fathers who are not divorced, separated, or remarried.

<sup>b</sup>Social class of community is the census characteristics of the neighborhood in which adolescents live. This information is obtained from the 1990 census.

Figure Caption

**Figure 1.** Quality of experience while doing "work-like" activities.

Figure Caption

**Figure 2.** Quality of experience related to importance to future goals.

**Table II.** Decision Making on Students' Lives (Who Makes Most of the Decisions on the Following Topics?)<sup>a</sup>

Grade	6th	8th	10th	12th	Total	ANCOVA
I should go to college						
Asian	2.75	2.29	3.00	2.59	2.66	A ( $p < .10$ )
Caucasian	2.43	2.25	2.12	1.89	2.19	
What classes I will take						
Asian	1.25	1.86	1.56	1.23	1.45	A $p < .01$
Caucasian	2.43	1.88	2.07	1.70	2.04	

<sup>a</sup>Reported  $p$  levels are the results of 2 x 4 ANCOVAs, controlling for the effect of social class of community, with Ethnicity (A) and Grade(B) as factors. Scores are based on a 5-point scale: 1 = *I decide by myself*, 2 = *I decide after discussing it with my parents*, 3 = *we decide together after discussing*, 4 = *my parents decide after discussing it with me*, 5 = *my parents decide themselves*.



**Table III.** Parental Control (How Often Parents Do the Following)<sup>a</sup>

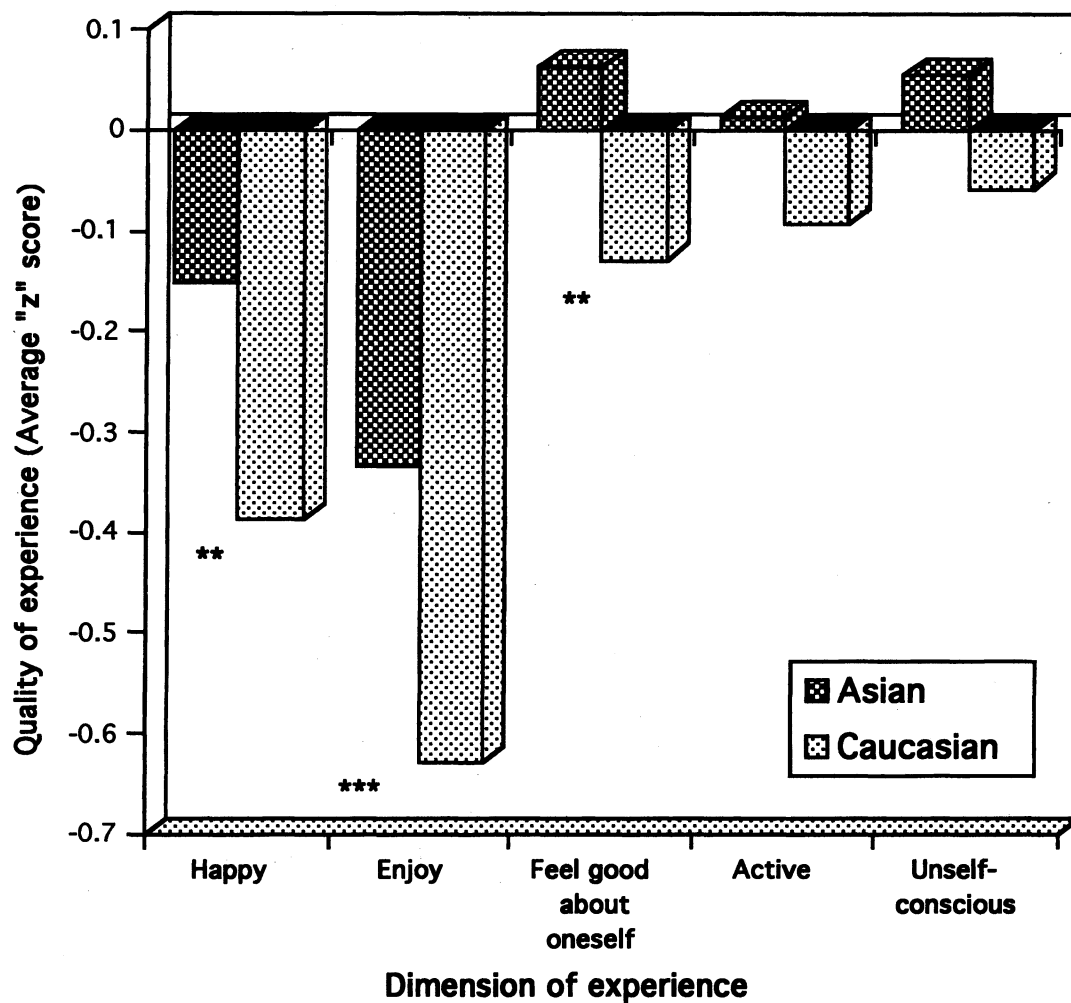
Grade	6th	8th	10th	12th	Total	ANCOVA
Check on whether you have done homework						
Asian	1.50	1.71	1.67	0.29	1.09	A ( $p < .10$ )
Caucasian	2.29	1.85	1.46	1.03	1.70	B $p < .001$
Help you with homework						
Asian	0.75	1.71	0.67	0.29	0.74	A $p < .001$
Caucasian	2.11	1.63	1.44	0.93	1.57	B $p < .001$
Limit TV/video game time						
Asian	2.25	1.57	1.22	0.79	1.24	A ( $p < .10$ )
Caucasian	1.52	1.19	1.01	0.45	1.09	B $p < .001$
Assign household chores						
Asian	1.75	2.14	1.78	1.71	1.82	
Caucasian	2.20	2.23	2.37	2.21	2.26	A $p < .05$
Give privileges for good grades						
Asian	1.75	1.43	1.56	0.93	1.29	
Caucasian	1.69	1.67	1.36	1.21	1.50	ns
Limit privileges for poor grades						
Asian	0.25	0.86	1.67	0.43	0.82	
Caucasian	0.81	1.20	1.16	0.69	0.99	B $p < .01$

<sup>a</sup>Reported  $p$  levels are the results of 2 x 4 ANCOVAs, controlling for the effect of social class of community, with Ethnicity (A) and Grade(B) as factors. Scores are based on a 4-point scale: 0 = *Never*, 1 = *Rarely*, 2 = *Sometimes*, 3 = *Often*.

**Table IV.** Discussion with Parents (How Often Students Have Discussed the Following with Parents)<sup>a</sup>

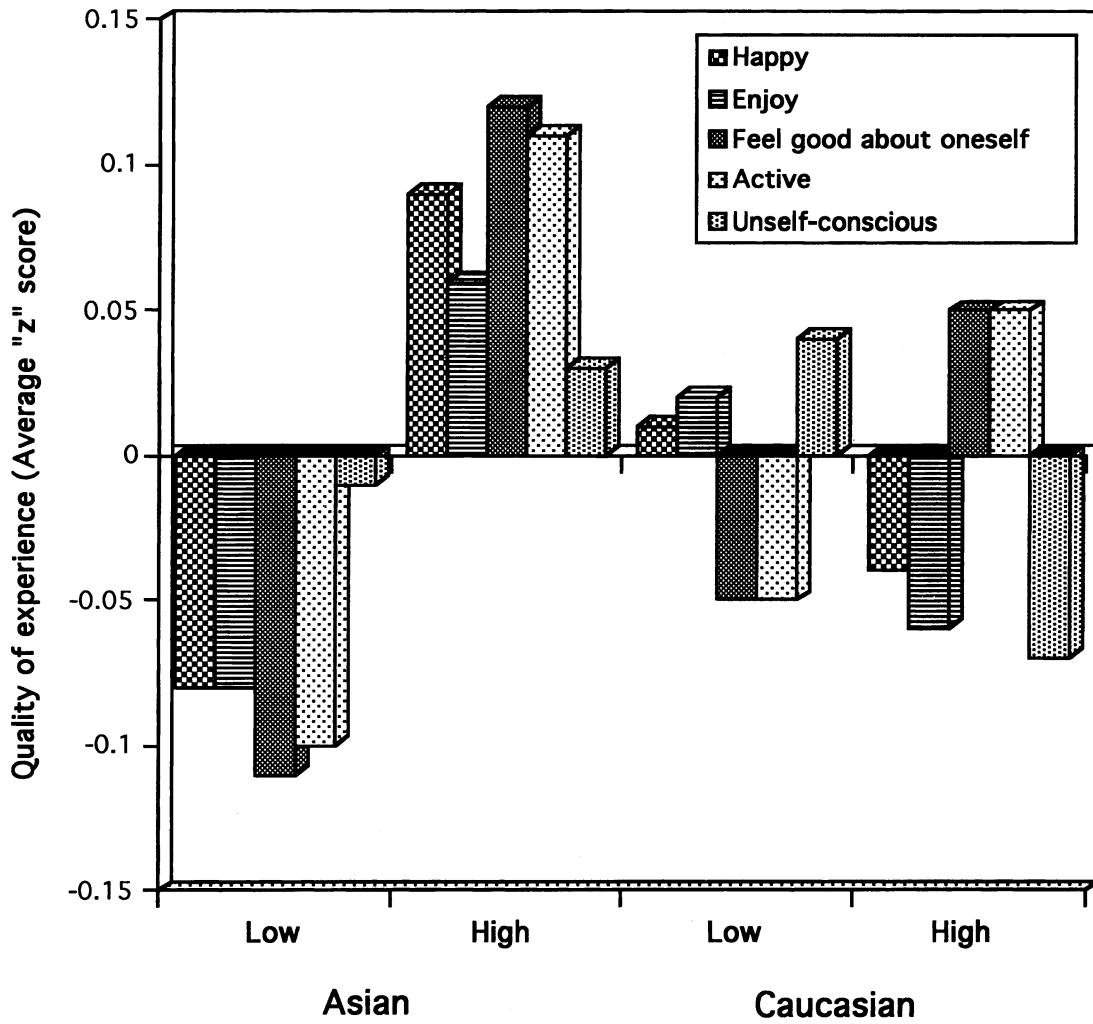
Grade	6th	8th	10th	12th	Total	ANCOVA
Selecting school courses						
Asian	1.75	2.29	2.44	1.71	2.03	A ( $p < .10$ )
Caucasian	2.01	2.36	2.53	2.17	2.28	B ( $p < .001$ )
Things studied in class						
Asian	2.75	2.14	2.44	2.15	2.30	
Caucasian	2.70	2.61	2.63	2.64	2.65	A $p < .05$
School activities interesting to you						
Asian	2.50	2.57	2.44	2.00	2.29	
Caucasian	2.54	2.54	2.55	2.57	2.55	A ( $p < .10$ )
Grades						
Asian			2.56	2.21	2.35	A $p < .001$
Caucasian			2.81	2.72	2.78	B ( $p < .10$ )
ACT/SAT plans and preparation						
Asian			2.56	2.07	2.26	
Caucasian			1.90	1.84	1.88	A $p < .05$
Going to college						
Asian			2.78	2.71	2.74	
Caucasian			2.63	2.91	2.74	

<sup>a</sup>Reported  $p$  levels are the results of 2 x 4 ANCOVAs, controlling for the effect of social class of community, with Ethnicity (A) and Grade(B) as factors. Scores are based on a 3-point scale: 1 = *Not at all*, 2 = *Once or twice*, 3 = *Three or more times*.



Difference between groups: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Fig. 1. Quality of experience while doing work-like activities.



Note: ANCOVA with  
 A: Future importance (High vs. Low)  
 B: Ethnicity (Asian vs. Caucasian) as factors.

Happy	A x B, p<.01
Enjoy	A x B, p<.01
Feel good about oneself	A x B, p<.05; A, p<.001
Active	A x B, marginal significance; A, p<.001
Unself-conscious	A x B, p<.05

Fig. 2. Quality of experience related to importance to future goals.