

RUNNING HEAD: UNDERSTANDING CHINESE IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

UNDERSTANDING CHINESE-HERITAGE IMMIGRANT FAMILY EDUCATIONAL
EXPERIENCES: TOWARD A THOROUGH CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE COLLEGE-
PREPARATION PROCESS

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UNDERSTANDING CHINESE IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

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Yi-Jung Wu

ABSTRACT

Asian Americans have been characterized as the “model minority” due to their extraordinary academic achievement—achievement that highlights immigrant parents’ strong involvement in their children’s education (Lee & Zhou, 2015). But what exactly is it like in Asian immigrant families in relation to parent-child interactions? This dissertation takes a nuanced approach to studying high-achieving Asian students’ college-preparation experiences with an aim to demystify the educational experience of East-Asian immigrant families. Ten Chinese-heritage immigrant families were recruited, including ten high school seniors and seventeen immigrant parents. Data were collected using ethnographic techniques: semi-structured interviews, participant observations and informal conversations.

This study provides an innovative conceptual model for analysis of the experiences of academically successful Asian American youth. Using an “identity-in-practice” model (Holland, Lachicotte, Jr., Skinner, & Cain, 1998) and considering the production of these identities across multiple timescales (Wortham, 2006) (i.e., K-12 schooling years) and various social spaces (i.e., home, school and community), I documented the linked effects and consequences of the ways in which immigrant parents interacted with children through students’ K-12 education. The findings demonstrate the interdependent linkages between the following elements of this particular cultural system. They are: (a) the American curricular tracking, (b) immigrant parents’ perceptions of the American education system (particularly in math) that shaped their educational involvement, and (c) students’ racialized learning identification and practices at school.

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This dissertation furthers our critiques and analyses of the myth that Asian Americans' high academic achievement is attributable to aspects of "Asian culture" (e.g., "Tiger moms" and their obedient children). Instead, my findings suggest that Asian American students' academic excellence is the outcome of local productions of academic competition across time and contexts. These productions reflect a complex interaction between locally-generated peer pressure among parents in the community, as well as locally-produced students' peer pressure at school. By analyzing the taken-for-granted social practices (e.g., Asians students attend multiple after-school tutoring/enrichment programs) and hidden rules of certain cultural behaviors (e.g., Asians work hard) through the theoretical lens of "identity-in-practice", this dissertation achieves a deeper understanding of the sociocultural patterns of educational achievement of the children of East-Asian immigrant parents.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to
my mother, Tsaiwang Yu-Yen, for her unconditional love.

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

This study investigates the K-12 college-preparation process of ten East-Asian immigrant families (eight from Taiwan and two from China) and their second-generation high school seniors. These students represented four different public suburban high schools and college-application experiences. This examination involves the genesis and evolution of the families' educational experiences and intergenerational interactions and how these developed and changed since their inception (i.e., from students' pre-K to high school). Specifically, I explore how and why high-achieving Asian American students learned and took up a racialized learning identity as a group (i.e., Asians are smart, hard-working, and good at math) and how their parents interacted with them in this production process. In what follows, I first explain why I changed the focus of the inquiry from "the college application process," offered in my original proposal to "the K-12 college preparation process," exploring why Asian students kept working hard, were consistently high-achievers, and collectively applied to the top-tier national universities with a STEM-focused or medical-related major. I then present the purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, and lastly, an overview of the chapters.

Re-statement of the Problem

The original proposal of this dissertation was to explore how East-Asian American suburban public high school seniors on the East Coast navigate their college application processes and how their immigrant parents become involved in this process. Mainly, I focused on the parent-child interactions and negotiation, including how students make their college application list and matriculation decisions. After a series of semi-structured interviews with ten immigrant families and participant observation with three focal families for one year, I made the decision to cease the process of specifying how immigrant parents and their American-born children interact and negotiate their college application process and matriculation decisions; I did this for three reasons.

Firstly, my data shows that most of the student participants were in Honors or Advanced Placement (AP hereafter) classes in all subjects including math, English, history, and science. The overall unweighted Grade Point Averages (GPA hereafter) of each student in this study ranged from 3.6 to 3.9 on

a 4-point scale; SAT scores ranged from 2100-2350 (on the old SAT scale of 2400). Student participants' corresponding class ranks ranged from the top 1% to top 15% out of 400-500 students (with the majority being within the top 10%). The top three common colleges students applied to were Cornell, Illinois University at Champaign, and Carnegie Mellon (i.e., the top-tier national universities); and engineering- or medical-related fields were mostly their major focus. Interestingly, many parent and student participants told me that the application process was a stage of "don't talk, don't share," meaning that they did not talk to other community members (or classmates) about educational subjects such as their college application list, SAT scores, or the content of essays. Without exploring deeper underlying factors associated with the phenomenon of the academic performance of each student and their college-application outcomes being remarkably alike, it would be very easy to take Asian students' high-achieving patterns and their cultural behaviors (e.g., Asians work hard) for granted. Thus, it would be very tempting to adhere to the model minority ideology that highlights Asian culture and immigrant parents' strong involvement in their children's education (Lee & Zhou, 2015).

Secondly, many parent participants, like Kyle Lin's mother¹, Nathan Yang's father, and others, reported that they had to pull their children back instead of pushing them to work hard. According to Kyle Lin's mother,

Those students in Reagan High North work very hard. They compete with each other all the time. Like my son, he is a perfectionist, and he has a really high standard for himself. Every time when he got a bad grade, he was extremely harsh on himself. All I can do is to comfort him and said, 'it's ok...' As a parent, I have to pull him back instead of pushing him.

Nathan Yang's father claimed that "for these adolescents, their parents' opinions are second to their peers....; it's their peer pressure to push them to work hard." When I asked students to talk about their perceived peer pressure, I found that "keeping working hard" was students' individual as well as collective response to dealing with social pressure at school. Furthermore, if a student of Asian descent

¹ All participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

failed to continually work hard or keep up with the high-achieving Asian crowd, they would be labeled “a dumb Asian,” “disgrAsian,” told “you’re white-washed Asian,” or “you’re not Asian.” As a result, without investigating how Asian students’ peer pressure at school was produced—the pressure that shaped students’ identities and motivation— and without exploring how and why the model minority ideology became a cultural resource that depicted Asian students’ racialized learning and schooling experiences, it would be very tempting to adopt the aspects of “Asian culture” (e.g., “Tiger moms” and their obedient children) to explain why most Asian students are high achievers (Hartlep, 2013).

Finally, there was a significant commonality in students’ lists of after-school learning activities, extracurricular activities, and volunteer work via their K-12 schooling years. Specifically, most students shared experiences like attending Kumon (i.e., a local popular academic enrichment program), learning the piano or violin, and tennis lessons since their elementary school years, doing volunteer work in a Chinese weekend school, attending science summer camps, and taking SAT-prep tutoring courses in the same local tutoring center.

While Gloria Kung’s mother labeled many parents in her community “tiger moms,” particularly those who made their children’s after-school life very busy (i.e., from Monday to Sunday), she claimed that she too used to be a “tiger mom”. Mrs. Kung defined “tiger mom” as a parent who pushes their children to learn a lot. Mrs. Kung claimed, “when you see many parents in the community who make their children attend all different kinds of academic enrichment centers or participate in many kinds of extracurricular activities, you would become worried that your child might fall behind those children—if you don’t make your child do the same.” This explains how the locally-generated peer pressure among immigrant parents in the community shapes immigrant parental engagement in their children’s education and their family’s educational practices. As a result, failure to examine how parent peer pressure in the community is produced, which molds parents’ identities, aspirations, and ways of involvement in their children’s education, would be highly likely to attribute Asian students’ academic excellence to their static immigrant family culture.

Overall, there is something deeper and more foundational beneath the phenomena of students' peer pressure in the school context and parents' peer pressure in the community context. Without investigating these two kinds of phenomena more deeply and exploring their relationship to student academic achievement and family educational practices, discussion of why the results of students' college applications look so similar among this high-achieving Asian crowd would be in vain. Further, it would be very alluring to jump to the conclusion that it is the parents' homeland culture that shapes immigrant parents' educational expectations as well as their styles of involvement in their children's academic practices which thus cause their children to achieve academic success at school.

As a result, I began exploring instead what happened around parents and children in their everyday lives (i.e., in their K-12 college preparation process) in terms of social interaction in the context of home, community, and school, which seemed to organize their moments of experiencing peer pressure, social positioning, social identification, and self-(re)authoring. I particularly concentrated on students' K-12 educational experiences and how they prepared for each step of a college application in terms of the parent and student worldviews. I also focused on why students worked so hard to promote their GPA and SAT scores, how they chose their extra-curricular activities and why (for example, why they chose to play the piano and violin), and why they cared so much about their (or their children's) academic success and/or failure.

My decision to dig deeper into the phenomena of parent and student peer pressure involved conducting one more round of interviews—in addition to the three rounds of formal interviews that has already been completed. More than half of the students and their parents responded positively to my request to discuss the preliminary findings. The fourth round of interviews occurred in the summer before students went to college or the summer after they finished their freshman year. I was thus able to discuss with them the particular phenomena of student peer pressure and parent peer pressure. This process of digging deeper allowed me to demystify the phenomenon of students' peer pressures at school and the phenomenon of parents' peer pressure in the community. Thus, I was able to theorize how the two types of social pressure were constructed and how they shaped students' expectations of themselves or immigrant parents'

expectation for their children, as well as how the two kinds of social pressure co-produced a generation of model minority students.

Eventually, it was apparent that the questions of how parents and children negotiated their college admissions, what colleges they applied to, and which college they had become less interesting to me. The work that the community members did around their peer pressure through social positioning and the sequencing of that work—their social/racialized identification and re-authoring—became the phenomena of interest. In this dissertation, I aim to disrupt common assumptions (i.e., parental-cultural transmission being the reason for the production of Asian high-achieving students) by following the tradition of educational anthropology to “make the familiar strange” (Spindler & Spindler, 1982). That is, I made strange the taken-for-grantedness of the supposed phenomenon in which Asians students work so hard and achieve academic excellence by continuing to challenge students, asking them “why do/did you want to work so hard and why do you care if you fail?” It is in this vein that I claim that the cultural production of Asian-American high-achieving students was not a result of their ethnic culture. Instead, it is the interlocking effects of immigrant parents’ racialized perceptions of the American K-12 mathematics curriculum, parents’ unfamiliarity with the American education system, and the institutionalized effects of the secondary tracking system that shape the college-preparation practices among Asian immigrant families. Eventually, the interplay of the aforementioned factors plays a crucial role in contributing to the cultural production of the “smart,” hard-working and high-achieving Asian crowd who are good at math and science.

Purpose of the Study

This dissertation explores the sociocultural production of Asian model minority students through Holland, Lachicotte, Jr., Skinner, and Cain’s (1998) notions of *figured worlds*, *social positioning*, and *re-authoring* that (re)shaped parents’ and children’s identities and educational practices in three interacting institutional contexts: parent-child interactions in the family, student-student interactions at school, and parent-parent interactions in the community. It examined the K-12 college-preparation experiences of ten Chinese-heritage American high school seniors and documented the cultural production and practices

through which they internalized and lived up to the model minority ideology (e.g., Asians are smart, good at math, and get straight A's.) through evoking, improvising, and/or refusing participation in sociocultural practices that position self and others.

Furthermore, this is also a dissertation about how the studied first-generation immigrant parents have raised their second-generation children in the U.S. and why. It considers the learning experiences of East-Asian immigrant parents about the American education system, college admissions system, and how to be a “successful” parent in the United States. Through the social interaction and social positioning among other “Asian moms” (termed by many of the student participants) in the community over time, immigrant parents learned and relearned how to be a “successful” parent, through invoking, improvising, re-authoring and/or refusing participation in the practices of the “Asian mom” or “tiger mom” styles of parental involvement.

Altogether, this study shows two social processes: students’ racialized learning experiences and practices regarding how to be a smart Asian who is good at math and achieves academic excellence, and immigrant parents’ learning experiences and practices regarding how to be a successful parent in the U.S. that resulted in co-producing a new Asian-American model minority generation. Specifically, this research study demonstrates how the studied Asian-American students and their immigrant parents drew on college-application-related criteria (i.e., GPA, SAT, extracurricular activities, volunteer work, and college essays) as cultural resources to position themselves and other community members, which finally led to the cultural production of the model minority crowd. By doing so, I will be able to explain why most of the students in this study were high academic achievers, why many of them applied to similar Ivy League schools or top-tier national universities, and why many of them went to either Ivy League schools or first-tier national universities with a STEM-related or medical-related major.

Finally, this study offers a new explanation for why and how high-achieving Asian-American students take up the model minority identity through exploring middle-class Chinese-heritage immigrant families whose parents are professionals in the STEM-field. These families live in suburban communities where Chinese and Taiwanese immigrant families are the dominant population and their children went to high

schools where Asian-American students are the largest racial group (e.g., Asian students represent 69% of the student population at Reagan High School North). It is important to note that this study provides a new approach to understanding how a generation of middle-class Asian model minority group gets (re)produced. However, this study cannot infer that the explanations for why a group of Asian students from a middle-class background achieve academic excellence apply to Asian students of working-class immigrant families.

Research Questions

In order to examine the college-preparation processes of Asian immigrant families, this study used a snowball sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) of ten high school seniors and seventeen immigrant parents that was guided by the overarching question: What do the K-12 educational experiences and practices (i.e., college-application-criteria related experiences) look like in an East-Asian immigrant family, and how is this experienced by individual students and their immigrant parents?

Three sub-questions further guided the study:

- How do families understand the American K-12 system, the college admissions process, and the educational opportunity context as well as how do their understandings and interpretations shape students' college preparation experiences?
- How do students prepare for their academic performance (including GPA and SAT) and how do students choose their extracurricular and volunteer activities? Furthermore, how do students interact with their immigrant parents in these decision-making processes?
- What is the range of ways that children and parents construct and (re)negotiate their identities, in the family, community, and school contexts?

Significance of the Study

The findings of the dissertation are significant for the field of immigration, race, and education in five major ways. First, by presenting and examining the voices of children of immigrants, I highlight the cultural production of high-achieving Asians, which is a complex phenomenon often neglected in classroom settings. Secondly, using Holland and her colleagues' (1998) notions of *figured worlds*,

positioning identity, and *re-authoring* and Wortham's (2006) *across multiple timescales* to examine Asian students' K-12 educational experiences, I present a theoretical innovation that makes it possible to understand the emergence and maintenance of historically distinct social categories (i.e., smart Asians versus dumb Asians) and a complex phenomenon (Asians work so hard and achieve academic success), which serves as a cultural resource available for students to position each other.

Thirdly, I demonstrate how Asian students and their immigrant parents interact within their cultural worlds, using cultural resources (i.e., the college-application related items) to (re)figure out their positions in relation to others through the processes of social comparison and self-authoring. Additionally, I demonstrate how the students and their immigrant parents understood achieving academic excellence (or children achieving academic success) as a group norm to claim and activate their respective community membership (i.e., student community and parent community). Focusing on student participants' as well as immigrant parent participants' interpretations of students' educational practices, this study shows how student identities and immigrant parent identities are negotiated and re-negotiated across multiple timescales (i.e., K-12 education) and various social spaces that include home, school, and community.

Fourth, this study responds to Holland's (2007) call to capture the construction and reconstruction of categories of racialized identities, and that one needs to pay "more attention to relations of practice that connect the classroom to other spaces both inside and outside the school... We need a wider understanding of the array of processes affecting the classroom" (p. 169). In this case, I expand my attention to other social spaces, including school, home, and community. Most research on Asian-American academic experiences has overlooked the interplay of student (and immigrant parents) agency within the interdependence of home, community, and classroom contexts. This study provides another framework to understand the East-Asian immigrant family college-preparation experiences as something that arises out of the complex social and institutional contexts involving family, school, and community.

Furthermore, this study expands and deepens socio-cultural theories of social practices by examining the interactions of three particular contexts that reciprocally shape the learning and racialized identification of immigrant parents and their American-born children. Specifically, incorporating *across*

multiple timescales (Wortham, 2006) into Holland et al.'s (1998) ideas of *figured worlds*, *social positioning*, and *re-authoring*, this study is able to explore: (a) the emergence and maintenance of distinct social categories that shape students' K-12 schooling years; (b) parents' and children's social identification processes, interacting across the home, community, and school contexts; and (c) the dynamic aspects of a widely-circulating discourse (e.g., "Asians are supposed to be smart") and a persistent phenomenon (i.e., Asian students collectively achieve academic excellence) by attending both to student identity and to linking multiple timescales (e.g., kindergarten-elementary school level, middle school level, and high school level) across family, community, and school contexts. Studying the life experiences of Asian middle-class immigrant families and their students' K-12 high-achieving academic performance in a suburban setting, is rarely the focus of public debates about education. However, studying success sheds light on the sociocultural and economic dynamics that shape persistent racial inequality across the educational system in the U.S. over time.

Finally, this study answers Pollock's (2008) call to move "from shallow to deep" by shifting from a shallow, fixed perspective of culture to a more dynamic, context-specific process of cultural production. Investigating the process of cultural production allows this study to document how U.S.-born children of Asian descent and their immigrant parents negotiate a repertoire of social identities that tie to immigrant parents' (mis)understanding of the American K-16 schooling system, the public school curricular tracking system, and the sociohistorical pattern of the model minority stereotype. This dissertation thus furthers our critiques and analyses of the myth that Asian Americans' high academic achievement is attributable to aspects of "Asian culture" (e.g., "Tiger moms" and their obedient children).

Overview of Chapters

This dissertation is organized into the following seven chapters. Chapter two reviews the theoretical tenets from Holland et al.'s (1998) notions of *figured worlds*, *social positioning*, and *re-authoring*, Lemke's (2000) concept of "timescale" and Wortham's (2006) idea of "integration across timescales" (p. 283) that form the basis for this research: "*figured worlds across multiple timescales and various social spaces*." Further, Chapter two surveys the literature on Asian American educational experiences in the

contexts of family, school, and community, analyzed in chapters four, five, and six. Chapter three presents the ethnographic methods used to conduct fieldwork in the homes of the focal families and the communities of Reagan High School North, Reagan High School South, Washington High School, and Madison High School (school names are all pseudonyms) being attended by the ten interviewed high school seniors.

Chapters four, five, and six examine the ways in which Asian American students' learning and racialized identification occurred and evolved in their K-12 educational practices across home, school, and community. These chapters also investigate the ways in which Asian immigrant parents' racialized identification and approaches of understanding the American education system influence parents' educational expectations for their children, parent-child interactions, and family educational practices. Most importantly, these three findings chapters show how a generation of Asian model minority students gets (re)produced through these reciprocal interactions across the multiple contexts of home, school, and community.

In chapter four, I elaborate on the cultural production of "being smart and good at math" across home and school through two social processes: one is the parent-child social positioning in the home context (mainly at the K-8 stage) and the other is the student-student social positioning in the school context (mainly at the high school stage). I explore how students' academic identifications are shaped by immigrant parents' figured worlds of "getting ahead of the U.S. K-5 mathematics curriculum" via parent-child interactions in their math-related educational practices. By analyzing parents' and students' narratives of students' K-12 mathematics learning experience, the findings suggest that the production and maintenance of high-achieving Asian students' figured worlds of "getting ahead (of their peer students)" builds upon the interactional effects of the K-12 mathematics curriculum and immigrant parents' educational involvement. Initially, parents engaged children in numerous after-school mathematics practices (i.e., memorizing the multiplication table and doing extra math practices) as a response to their perception of the "slow-paced" K-5 math curriculum. While parents' intensive training provided children with a solid foundation of basic mathematics skills, which resulted in the co-

development of the Asian students' becoming top of the class and feeling smart because they felt that "elementary school is so easy." Being placed in honors-track math in middle school became a "natural" and "normal" consequence for these Asian students.

However, the challenging high school mathematics curriculum at Honors-level (and above) discouraged immigrant parents from involvement due to their language barriers. Further, the overwhelming Honors- and AP-track mathematics curriculum also generated students' figured worlds of "getting ahead of peers and acting smart." Students' struggles in this process served as a "wake-up call" or "spaces of re-authoring" (e.g., "trying not to look stupid") that translated immigrant parents' figured worlds of "getting ahead of the math curriculum" to students' figured worlds of "getting ahead of their peer students" via students' social positioning (e.g., "trying not to look stupid"). "Not asking questions in class" and "working hard at home and performing well at school" became an inevitable approach that helped consolidate students' figured worlds and transformed their "being smart and good at math" from social position to disposition.

In chapter five, I explain the cultural production of Asians' racialized learning identities (i.e., being a smart Asian who is good at math, hard-working, and high-achieving) in the school contexts through student-student social positioning in the figured worlds of "normal" Asians. My findings suggest: secondary school tracking within the American curriculum served as initial "cultural resources" (e.g., test scores, GPA, and symbolic labels like Honors- or AP-track) that "opened up" students' figured worlds of "normal Asians" and mediated students' racialized identification processes and learning experiences. Specifically, students' social positioning and (re)authoring of their identities were influenced by three institutionalized effects of curricular differentiation: students' imagined academic hierarchy that "school placed us into," Asianized friendship cliques (i.e., students befriended people who went to the same classes with them), and everyday social interaction (via the mechanism of school course schedule). From everyday hangouts, social comparison, to social positioning, students' peer pressure "to be one of the normal Asians" and "you don't want to be a failed Asian" was produced. For an Honor-track (and above) student of Asian descent, the choice of being a member of the high-achieving Asian group at school

indicated an unspoken group rule: a commitment to keeping up with the Asian crowd by constantly working hard in academics.

In chapter six, I explore the cultural (re)production of an Asian model minority generation through the mechanism of “Asian moms’ gossip” (termed by student participants) across the community and home settings. This chapter presents my analysis of Chinese-heritage immigrant parents’ learning processes of how to be a “successful” parent in the U.S. and how to help their children succeed at school over students’ K-12 education through the overlapping figured worlds of Asian moms and the “good” students, intertwined by the mechanism of Asian moms’ gossip. The Asian moms’ gossip contained two core elements that made information about the “good” student model travel across the community and home settings. One was parent-parent interaction/positioning in the community, and the other was parent-child interaction/positioning at home.

By analyzing immigrant parents’ learning processes of how to help their children succeed at school over students’ K-12 education, I demonstrate: (a) how the parent-parent interactions and social positioning in the community resulted in producing peer pressures among parents; and (b) how Asian parents’ learning and social identification shaped their children’s academic performance, producing a smart Asian crowd whose educational practices and academic credentials were similar. Specifically, through demonstrating the mechanism of Asian moms’ gossip, I present how Asian moms collectively formed a singular expectation for their children, “to be like that good student,” through the social interactions with their peer parents. I also describe how parents called on their children to occupy this “good student” position and how their children responded to their parents’ “offer.”

Chapter seven provides theoretical and methodological innovations and contributions as discussions, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and concluding thoughts. Finally, I argue that to document the cultural production of smart Asians who are good at math, hard-working, and high-achievers in academic terms, researchers have to recognize and analyze the actual cultural practices at particular sites involving school, home, and community with two special focuses. One is to concentrate

on social interactions and positioning among parents and students, while the other is the reciprocal effects of community, home, and school.

CHAPTER TWO: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

I propose a theoretical framework for understanding East-Asian American students' K-12 learning experiences and their academic and racialized identification processes. This new conceptual model provides a tool for understanding the cultural (re)production of smart Asians who are good at math, hard-working, and achieve academic excellence. I draw from Holland et al.'s (1998) work on *figured worlds*, *positional identity*, and *spaces of (re)authoring*, as well as Lemke's (2000) and Wortham's (2006) concepts of *timescale* and *integration across timescales* to consider the multiple social contexts (i.e., home, school, and community) and the developmental timescales of students' academic and racialized identification processes.

I argue that theories on Asian American students' achievement and their family educational experiences need to consider the linked effects of multiple contexts (across various social spaces, such as family, school, and community) that involve the institutionalized effects of the K-12 public school curricular tracking system, and the consecutive effects of sequential timescales (i.e., K-elementary, middle, and high school), in order to examine fully why and how Asian students and their families (co)-construct and (co)-produce the sociohistorical patterns of the "model minority" image (i.e., "Asians are high-achievers" and "Asians are good at math" as a crowd). I call this approach *figured worlds across time and space*. Using this new conceptual model allows me to answer the question: how does the socio-historical pattern of the model minority stereotype become localized and "inscribed" upon Asian students? This dissertation addresses this question by examining Asian American students' everyday social positioning in the contexts of family, community, and classroom and how their parents are involved in this process, with particular attention to the resources available in their K-12 schooling years and the college-preparation process.

This chapter outlines the literature that informs the design of this study. First, I begin by surveying the literature on Asian American students' academic achievement and their families' educational experiences and identify the research gap. Then, I explain why *figured worlds across time and space* can be an

alternative theoretical framework to understand the educational or K-12 college-preparation-related experiences and achievement of Asian American students (and their families), particularly East-Asian American students. By reviewing Holland and her colleagues' (1998) concepts of *figured worlds*, *social positioning* and *space of (re)authoring* and Wortham's (2006) and Lemke's (2000) notions of *timescale* and *integration across timescales* (p. 283), I introduce and define the key concepts upon which I draw to analyze the data in later chapters.

Literature Review

Studies of racial and ethnic disparities in K-12 education have indicated that Asian American students frequently outperform students of other groups in their GPA, standardized tests, and math and SAT scores (Sakamoto, Goyette, & Kim, 2009). Further, Asian American students have been characterized as "model minorities" due to their extraordinary academic achievement that highlights the strong involvement of immigrant parents in their children's education (Lee & Zhou, 2015). The literature on Asian American educational achievement and experiences is extensive. Specifically, a great deal of the education and immigration literature on Asian-Americans discusses educational aspirations and academic performance in relation to parental socioeconomic status (Goyette & Xie, 1999; Kao, 2002; Louie, 2004), parental educational expectations (Goyette & Xie, 1999; Kao, 2002), tested academic ability (Goyette & Xie, 1999), home resources (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992), and cultural upbringing factors or structural explanations for the academic excellence of Asian-American students, particularly in K-8 education (Louie, 2001; Min, 2006; Sakamoto et al., 2009; Xie & Goyette, 2003).

With regard to the literature on Asian immigrant families, research has predominantly focused on the role of parenting as an important source of support and control in the formation of children's high educational aspirations (Brown & Iyengar, 2008; Chao, 2000; Louie, 2005; Qin, 2008; Zhou, 1997). Much of the research has served to somewhat demonstrate the complexity of the process and highlight how Asian immigrants draw upon their ethnic culture and immigration experiences to make sociocultural adaptations within the structural conditions of United States society (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Warikoo &

Carter, 2009; Zhou & Kim, 2006), but how exactly do parents and children interact within an Asian immigrant family? And how does the sociohistorical model of students' racialized learning identities – “Asians are supposed to be smart and good at math” (i.e., the model minority ideology) – get forged and later become a habitus?

In the following review of the literature, I discuss three conceptual explanations for the academic excellence of Asian American achievement and attainment: ethnic cultural explanations (e.g., Asian immigrant families rely on their ethnic cultural traits, such as being hardworking, as a means of coping with U.S. society), structural explanations (e.g., Asian immigrant parents' advantageous class background, high level of education and their financial capability), and the cultural-ecological explanation that emphasizes the importance of immigrant parents' past history, ethnic community forces, and immigrant adaptations within the structural conditions of U.S. society (Ogbu, 1987; Zhou & Kim, 2006). For analytical purposes, I organize the literature synthesis into three topics to which this dissertation seeks to contribute greater understanding: identities and Asian American students' school performance; three timescales (kindergarten to elementary school, middle school, and high school) and their sequential effects; and three contexts (home, school, and community) and their linked effects.

Identities and Asian American students' school performance.

Theories of identity production and racialized identifications have been prominent in the discussion of Asian American students' academic learning and their families' educational experiences and participation in schooling. This line of research uncovered the structural and sociocultural factors that perpetuate the racism and inequality embedded within Asian American students' K-12 schooling practices. Research about Asian American learning experiences and achievement at school has extensively examined the sociohistorical patterns of the model minority stereotype in propelling Asian students to excel (Lee, 2009; Louie, 2004). For example, the discourses of “Asians are supposed to get straight A's” and “Asians are supposed to be good at math” have profoundly influenced Asian students' learning practices. However,

little attention has been given to the ways in which the associated sociocultural categories are produced and become localized. That is, questions remain regarding how and with what resources Asian students take up the model minority identity.

Furthermore, the “model minority” ideology suggests that cultural factors contribute to Asian American students’ high-achieving performance (see Harplet, 2013 for literature review). Empirical studies on Asian immigrant family literature have confirmed the role of parenting as an important source of support and control in the formation of their children’s high educational aspiration (Bankston and Zhou, 2002; Chao, 2000; Ng, Lee & Pak, 2007; Pearce, 2006; Qin, 2008). These culturalist explanations suggest that families rely on their ethnic cultural traits as a means of coping with U.S. society and the American education system. More specifically, they have posited that immigrant parents systematically impart their homeland cultural values and attributes, such as dispositions for “hard-work”, to their children, who then absorb these values and beliefs and achieve high scores at school.

However, this culturalist perspective treats culture as static and individuals as passive bearers of fixed cultural values shared within their group (Warikoo & Carter, 2009). In particular, the culturalist thesis ignores the dynamic nature of cultural production and individual self-making and overlooks the complex process of parent-child interactions as well as any forms of adaptation by the parents or resistance from the children in response to the structural barriers of the host society (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Zhou & Kim, 2006). Holland and her colleagues (1998) contended that “identities are lived in and through activity and so must be conceptualized as they develop in social practice” (p. 5). They further emphasized “the development of identities and agency specific to practices and activities are situated in historically contingent, socially enacted, culturally constructed ‘worlds’: recognized fields or frames of social life” (p.7). In this case, examining college-preparation-related practices could allow me to explore various aspects of human agency and a repertoire of identities.

K-12 college-preparation-related practices: Across three timescales (K-elementary, middle, and high school) and their sequential effects.

Scholars of immigration and education have used parental involvement as a specific form of social capital to highlight the role of families and communities in the educational excellence of Asian-American students (Louie, 2004; Zhou & Kim, 2006). The social capital argument emphasizes “the effect of an ethnic group’s...behavior patterns with which the group... develops in the process of immigration adaptation” (Zhou & Kim, 2006, p. 3). This perspective underlines how Asian students’ academic success is shaped not only by immigrant parents’ high educational aspirations encouraging their children to achieve high marks in school, but also how these aspirations translate into ways of supporting the education of their children (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998; Louie, 2006; Kao, 1995; Kao & Rutherford, 2007; Sakamoto et al., 2009; Sun, 1998).

Types of within-family parental involvement mentioned in the literature include Asian immigrant parents nurturing their children’s learning by, for example, investing in educational resources, such as computers, encyclopedia or books, to create a home environment conducive to studying (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998; Kao, 1995; Sun, 1998); providing parental savings for college (Kao, 2002); helping children with their homework; assigning children extra homework for additional practice (Chao, 2000); providing a higher level of supervision (Kao & Rutherford, 2007); or limiting their social time after school (Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2001).

Ethnic community social capital focuses on the significance of co-ethnic networks that allow co-ethnic parents to gain access to ethnic social networks. Possessing access to co-ethnic social networks and resources has helped immigrant parents successfully negotiate the American education system so as to provide educational roadmaps for their children (Lew, 2006; Zhou, 2006). In other words, the entrepreneur-rich Asian immigrant groups have provided strong ethnic social integration and a successful ethnic economy to reinforce the support for the academic excellence of its youth (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998; Hirschman & Wong, 1986; Pearce, 2006). This statement applies particularly to the Chinese immigrant community. The ethnic system of supplementary education as community social capital has enabled Chinese immigrant parents to send their children to private after-school programs, run by and for co-ethnics, offering advanced after-school training (Kao & Thompson, 2003; Zhou, 2006). These kinds of

programs and ethnic networks also facilitate access to shared information about K-12 schooling and strategies for college preparation (Zhou, 2006).

Although social capital proponents recognize the role of parents and their community in promoting Asian American students' educational performance, this argument has several limitations. First, the social capital perspective treats Asian American culture and identities as unchanging, ignoring the meaning-making process of why parents and students agree to follow family or community patterns. It fails to document how a repertoire of identities could be formed in practice. The perspective also omits the socially-situated nature of educational activities/practices, specifically, what has been produced and shared socially and culturally through the mundane everyday practices of the Asian American students and their parents? What meanings and interaction have been shaped by these social practices in the Asian immigrant community?

Lastly, in much of the research on within-family parental involvement or ethnic community social capital, student participants were between 6-15 years old; during K-8 schooling years (e.g., elementary or middle school years). Previous research has failed to trace whether and how students continued to perform at the top of their class after they advanced to higher grades. Specifically, why and how did Asian American students' high-achieving patterns continue when they advanced to higher levels of schooling?

An alternative approach to the study of student academic trajectories, incorporating analyses of "time", can provide insights into the aforementioned question. In this study, I treat students' K-12 educational experiences (based on three timescales: K-elementary, middle, and high schools) related to the preparation of college application-related items (e.g., GPA, SAT, extracurricular activities in particular) as sites of struggles and a process through which identities are negotiated, institutionalized, and internalized during everyday educational practices. A focus on social practices related to the preparation for the college application allows for an examination of several questions regarding the construction of students' academic trajectories on different timescales. For example, do patterns of parental involvement or family educational experiences help foster students' school performance, test scores, and finally GPA?

How do different factors influence parents' and students' decisions to take after-school enrichment classes (e.g., SAT prep school)?

Considering these family and community social patterns and practices allows for an examination of mediating links within the sociohistorical context, (individual and group) action, and (individual or group) sense-makings. Further, it enables me to emphasize parents' and children's interpretations about their participation and social interactions in the patterned social practices in the family, community or at school. Finally, exploring students' K-12 educational practices across three sequential timescales allows me to document any linked long-term effects on the development of family involvement, as well as students' educational and identity trajectories.

Three contexts (home, school and community) and their linked effects.

For analytical purposes, I separate the three contexts: home, school, and community. "Through institutions (school, churches...), we are able to learn the appropriate social practices as 'common sense' in order to affirm the ideas, values and beliefs that are defined as the 'common good'" (Shannon, 2014, p.6). By analyzing what social practices become salient in the social situations within each institution, I concentrate on the social spaces where social interaction, social positioning, and student (and parent) social and academic identification occur. Such social spaces are where parents and children interact (such as in the home, in the car), where immigrant parents gather together (such as Chinese weekend school or Asian parents' parties), and where students interact (such as at school).

Furthermore, I aim to focus on the linked effects of the interplay between the three institutional contexts on student learning, parent learning and social identification. How are students' and parents' social positioning of self and others constructed and linked across these interactive contexts of family, school, and community? Most of the research to date has illustrated the ways in which the parental cultural transmission model and community act as vehicles that shape the development of their children's high academic aspiration, achievement patterns and notions of self in contexts of family and community. However, much of the research on Asian American educational experiences has failed to examine how

the dynamics of social positioning shapes students' trajectories of identity across these spaces.

Additionally, few studies have examined the interplay and the continuous interaction between home, school, and community within which student interactions, social positioning, and learning activities occur in the everyday and how the linked effects shape students' learning, achievement, and identity trajectories. If we are to understand the systematic nature of academic stratification, social mobility, and social reproduction (i.e., Why do Asian Americans tend to achieve a higher degree of academic and socioeconomic success than other racial groups in the U.S.?), it is important to examine the intersections between home, school, community, and everyday spaces, as well as their interlinked processes and effects. In particular, we must look at the informal social spaces within which social positioning and learning activities occur.

Theoretical Framework: Why Figured Worlds across Multiple Timescales and Various Social Spaces?

As Holland and her colleagues (1998) reminded us, "the discourses and categories dominant in a society...are 'inscribed' upon people, both interpersonally and institutionally, and...within them. Selves are socially constructed through the mediation of powerful discourses and their artifacts" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 26). In the case of Asian American students, they construct social identities and selves in relation to the sociohistorical pattern of the model minority stereotype. Students use the widely-circulating Asian stereotype in the form of the locally-produced racialized categories (such as "failed Asians," "smart Asians," "DisgrAsian," "Asians are supposed to get straight A's," and "Asians are supposed to be good at math") to position themselves. But those locally-generated racial terms are "imposed upon [Asian students], through recurrent institutional treatments and within interaction, to the point that they become self-administered," (Holland et al., 1998, p. 62) and form a habitus. Below I present the theoretical framework as well as the definitions and explanations of the key concepts (i.e., *figured worlds*, *social positioning*, *self-authoring*, and *artifacts*) used to describe and analyze Asian students' learning and racialized identification processes – with the intention of understanding how the sociohistorical pattern of

the model minority ideology gets localized and transformed into Asian students' habitus.

Holland et al. (1998) used the notion of figured worlds to refer to socially constructed and culturally produced "realm[s] of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (p. 52). Figured worlds rely on "people's abilities to form and be formed in (the) collectively realized 'as if' realms" (p. 49) and create contexts of meanings. Individual members *position* themselves and others as they participate in interactions with other participants in their figured worlds and engage in "figuring out" who they are in relation to others.

Holland and her colleagues (1998) argued that *social positioning* occurs every time people interact and make claims to social status, "The dialect we speak, the degree of formality we adopt in our speech...are treated as indicators of claims to and identification with social categories and positions of privilege and relative to those with whom we are interacting" (p. 127). Specifically, through serious involvement on a daily basis and individual "*self-(re)authoring*" (e.g., the self's internal dialogues and tensions that enable an individual to make sense of who he or she is or renegotiate who he or she is) over time, people can re-conceptualize or revise who they are as individuals or as members of a group.

Furthermore, Holland et al. (1998) consider the space of authoring as "where social languages meet, generically and accentually, semantically and indexically, freighted with the valence of power, position, and privilege" (p. 191). A positioning perspective illuminates the social interactional processes; the ways in which Asian students and their immigrant parents comprehend their positions in relation to others in the community, at school, and at home. Equally important, the notion of self-(re)authoring is needed to document the complexities of the process: how Asian students and their parents understand their social places, make meaning of the phenomenon, develop their notions of authorship via struggles. "Through this figuring and/or refiguring, individuals also come to understand their ability to craft their future participation, or agency, in and across figured worlds" (Urrieta, 2007, p. 120). By the end, the figured world "itself is reproduced, forming and reforming in the practices of its participants" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 53).

In this study, I emphasize the tensions, conflicts, differences, and struggles that students and parents confront as they participate in educational practices related to their family college-preparation experiences. By so doing, I am able to observe how contentious practices shaped students' and parents' self-understandings in a complex way. Meanwhile, I am able to document how students (and parents) learn and relearn to use the cultural resources available to them to position themselves in relation to others, to produce meanings and differences from their experiences, and to refigure who he or she is and/or should be.

Here, it is important to note that figured worlds cannot exist without *artifacts* or cultural resources, which people utilize in their discourse as they participate in their cultural activities. In the current study, the artifacts include college-preparation-related practices (e.g., GPA, SAT, extracurricular activities, volunteer work and college essays). As Holland and Lave (2009) explained, people use sociocultural artifacts for multiple purposes such as mediating their feelings, generating solutions to problems, or defining who they are. A member who is new to the group and unfamiliar with group norms learns how to use the cultural symbols or artifacts from interaction with experienced members in order to make sense of oneself and guide his or her behavior and responses, and thus enters their collective figured world and becomes one member of the group. In other words, artifacts are employed to “open up” figured worlds. As Holland et al. (1998) describe, “[artifacts] are the means by which selves are socially constructed as well as figured worlds are evoked, collectively developed, individually learned, and made socially and personally powerful” (p. 61).

In this case of exploring Asian American educational experiences and identity (re)construction, I treat college application items as artifacts that Asian students and their immigrant parents use to “open up” their figured worlds. Particularly, I focus on the SAT-related and GPA-related discourses, such as test scores, GPA, and labels related to ability-based curriculum tracking (e.g., Honors-track, AP-track, Level One, Level Two...etc.). Social labels such as “smart Asians” or “failed Asians” are relevant artifacts that students use in discourse to position themselves in relation to others around them. These artifacts become important tools that Asian students and their immigrant parents use to mediate their figured worlds and

construct a system of interpretations that connects one's individual meaning-making and self-authoring or –reauthoring to one's past experiences (i.e., the history-in-person) and collaboratively produces the social norms, positions, and practices of one's group (Holland et al., 1998; Robinson, 2007).

By highlighting the effect of “one's past experience” on “one's sense-making in the present” through the mediation of cultural artifacts afforded by a collective past, Holland et al. (1998) conceptualized a figured world as “a space and time established imaginatively- that one can come to sense after a process of experiencing, acting of its rules” (p. 53). Wortham (2006) took up this stance and further elaborated the notion of time by drawing on Lemke's (2000) concept of *timescale* and *integration across timescales* (p. 283). A timescale is a period of time within which a developmental process occurs. In order to analyze how a longer-term identity emerges, Lemke (2000 and 2008) claimed that we needed to explore the ways in which “identity-in-moment,” as well as corresponding momentary actions within situated groups on their own timescale, occur and add up to a longer-term identity formation over different time periods.

Wortham (2006) applied Lemke's conceptualization of *time* to examine the processes of social identification in figured worlds. He argued that scholars attending to the construction of figured worlds needed to look into longer processes of social identification across different time spans. In so doing, it became possible to understand the emergence and maintenance of historically distinct social categories and how individuals and groups in each particular time frame and space were “combining, inflecting, modifying and creating a variety of categories shaped over disparate timescales (e.g., sociohistorical, interactional, local...)” (Holland, 2007, p. 168). Furthermore, examining “across timescales” will enable us to discern how different time periods, as well as phenomena that occur on much shorter or on much longer time periods, relate to and interact with one another (Lemke, 2008).

Incorporating the innovative theoretical lens of *figured worlds across multiple timescales and various social spaces*, I am able to consider how figured worlds are constructed through interactions related to the following five components of Asian immigrant families' K-12 schooling experiences. They are (a) immigrant parents' perceptions of the U.S. math curriculum, (b) immigrant parents' scarce understanding of the American K-16 education system, (c) American K-12 academic curriculum grouping system, (d)

processes of student academic learning and racialized identification, as well as (e) processes of immigrant parents' learning and social identification across time and space. I can conceptualize student K-12 educational experiences as a multi-timescale dynamic process that integrates three subsequent timescales (i.e., kindergarten- elementary school level, middle school level, and high school level) involving the consecutive effects of the academic tracking system. Meanwhile, I am able to document the linked effects of multiple institutions (home, school, and community) across numerous timescales.

By doing so, I will not only be able to record how the cultural production and maintenance (or revision) of "being smart Asians who are good at math, hard-working and high-achievers" occurs along the course of students' sequential schooling years, but also to examine how the American K-12 mathematics curriculum, tracking system, and its related institutionalized effects (such as challenging high school curriculum in AP-courses) serve as institutionalized artifacts that mediate student racialized identification processes and learning experiences at school. Further, I am able to document the detailed process of how Asian student identities are constructed through social interactions and are influenced by structural factors on each timescale.

More importantly, by attending to student (and parent) identity trajectories across multiple timescales and various institutions, I can begin to explore across-timescale relations (Wortham, 2006; also see Holland, 2010; Lemke, 2000; Lemke, 2008) and across-context effects. In other words, I will be able to document and explain the dynamic aspects of a publicly-circulating discourse (e.g., "Asians are supposed to be smart and good at math") and a persistent phenomenon (e.g., "Asians work hard" or "Asian students collectively achieve high scores") that parents and students interpret in local school settings and adapt as figured worlds, including: (a) Asian students' figured worlds of "normal Asians" at school, (b) Asian immigrant families' figured worlds of "getting ahead" in the home setting, and (c) Asian immigrant parents' figured worlds of "Asian moms and the good students" in the community setting. Meanwhile, I will be able to see empirically how the linked effects of each subsequent schooling stage within the K-12 school tracking system influence the ways in which Asian students interact with local actors (e.g., Asian students, non-Asian students, local community members, Asian parents and their children, and family

members) in the spaces of family, school, and community. Moreover, I can record the ways in which Asian students make sense, create, and modify a variety of social categories that are shaped by multiple timescales and social spaces. As Lemke (2000) argues,

The formation of identity, or even fundamental change in attitudes or habits of reasoning, cannot take place on short timescales. Even if short-term events contribute toward such changes, it is only the fact that they are not soon erased, do not quickly fade—that subsequent events do not reverse the change—that makes it count. It is the longer-term process, including the effects of subsequent events, that determines for us the reality of basic human social development. (p. 282)

Finally, my argument here is: the consideration of identity production during Asian students' college-preparation-related practices can demonstrate how students' and parents' identities are contested and negotiated through the interplay of structure and agency as well as through the tensions between agency and structure of practice. Meanwhile, we need to acknowledge the linked and spreading effects of the interplay of the three institutions (i.e., home, school, and community) on Asian students' racialized academic learning. Equally important are the informal social spaces within which social positioning and learning activities occur. It is crucial to explore how the development or trajectories of Asian student identities and agency specific to their K-12 college-preparation-related practices are situated in multiple figured worlds (such as those of “getting ahead,” “normal Asians”, and “standing out from the Asian crowd”), because, without examining how the identity formation process dictates behaviors, it is difficult to fully understand why Asian students work so hard and achieve academic excellence at a collective level.

Taken together, the concepts of figured worlds, social positioning, and self-(re)authoring across multiple timescales and various social spaces offer a set of possibilities to understand the complex historical and sociocultural worlds of Asian American students and their immigrant parents within which they are required to make meaning from their experiences while interacting with the American K-12 schooling system as well as local community members. Given these perspectives, research exploring the

relationship between identity, the institutionalized effects of the K-12 curricular tracking, and learning across multiple social contexts can provide insights into how Asian students learn to become members of the Asian model minority generation.

In the following chapters of the dissertation, I present three models of figured worlds developed by the student and parent participants over three distinct, sequential timescales. They are “getting ahead” within the Asian immigrant family context, Asian students being “normal Asians” in the school context, and “Asian moms and the good students” within the community context. I demonstrate how these intermeshing figured worlds are produced and become sustained and how they are applied to individuals in specific ways: through the interactive effects of curriculum tracking, intergenerational interactions in the family context, students’ social interactions in the school context, and immigrant parents’ and students’ social interaction in community settings.

Lastly, along this racialized and academic identification process, I describe how the sociohistorical pattern of the model minority stereotype becomes localized, serving as an ultimate artifact available for Asian American students to position each other within their perceived academic hierarchy, thus propelling them to work hard or harder. At the end, by focusing on the student decision-making process via self-(re)authoring or self-(re)negotiation, I demonstrate how students (re)figure out their social positions in relation to others in ways that help sustain their own competitiveness and that drive them to achieve academic excellence. In conclusion, this dissertation intends to explain how the long term sociohistorical model minority stereotype gets locally re-produced and widely circulated, as well as how a generation of the Asian model minority student is produced.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

Interpretive studies assume that people create and associate their own subjective and intersubjective meanings as they interact with the world around them. Interpretive researchers thus attempt to understand phenomena through accessing the meanings participants assign to them... In direct contrast to the “descriptive” studies..., interpretive studies reject the possibility of an “objective” or “factual” account of events and situations, seeking instead a relativistic, albeit shared, understanding of phenomena. (Orlikowski & Baroudi 1991, p. 5)

This ethnographic study of how and why high-achieving Asian American students learn and take up a racialized learning identity as a group (i.e., Asians are smart, hard-working, and good at math) through the framework of figured worlds, social positioning, and (re)authoring across space and time, can be categorized as *interpretive* (Erickson, 1986). Erickson (1986) described an interpretive study as a study that had its “central research interest in human meaning in social life and in its elucidation and exposition by the researcher” (p. 119). He considered the task of interpretive research as “to discover the specific ways in which local and nonlocal forms of social organization and culture relate to the activities of specific persons in making choices and conducting social actions together” (p. 129).

Furthermore, Erickson (1986) contended that the “task of analyst is to uncover the different layers of universality and particularity that are confronted in the specific case at hand – what is broadly universal, what generalizes to other situations, what is unique to the given instance” (p. 130). By employing the interpretive research methodology, I was able to problematize the taken-for-granted as well as to describe, analyze and interpret the features of sociocultural practices, cultural products, and educational experiences in parent-child, parent-parent, and child-child (i.e., student-student) interactional processes (Creswell, 2007; Geertz, 1973). In particular, this ethnographic research is concerned with understanding the collective local meaning systems that are embedded in participants’ everyday college-preparation-related practices, social norms, development, and social identification process. The interpretive paradigm allowed this study to uncover the “invisibility of everyday life” (Erickson, 1986, p.121) and to achieve the

goal of making “the familiar strange and interesting again” (p. 121).

Data for this study were drawn from a 15-month ethnographic study examining the college-preparation experiences of ten East Asian immigrant families. Data were collected through ethnographic techniques: semi-structured interviews, participant observations, field notes, informal conversations, and the collection of material artifacts (e.g., GPA, SAT scores, high school course-taking trajectories, daily school schedules, lists of extracurricular activities, after-school schedules, and students’ college lists and matriculation decisions). Employing an ethnographic and life history interview methodology, this study specifically focuses on participants’ social identification and identity production in three intermeshing figured worlds for local students and immigrant parents over the K-12 schooling years. These are: “getting ahead” in the family context, “normal Asians” in the school context, and “Asian moms and good students” in the community context. The aim of this study is to provide a thick description (Geertz, 1973) and to capture a range of activities that student and parent participants engaged in, how they made choices and why, and how they produced local meanings to interpret their experiences. These methods are discussed below. First, I provide an overview of the participants and the research contexts. Then, I present details about the methods employed for data collection, followed by the analytical procedures, my research role, and the validity of the findings.

Participants and Contexts of the Investigation

Snowball sampling selection.

Ten East-Asian immigrant families (high school seniors of the class of 2013 and their immigrant parents) were recruited using a snowball sampling method (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). I began by probing a friend (Kyle Lin’s mother in this study), who was one of the participants in the pilot study, for referrals (Weiss, 1994). I presented five criteria, as follows. Firstly, one of the parents in a family should be a first generation adult immigrant to the U.S. and the student participant should either have immigrated to the U.S. as a kid (1.5 generation) or been born in the U.S. (second generation). Secondly, the student

participant should be enrolled in college-preparation programs and be a high school senior in the fall of 2012. Thirdly, the student participant should have attended a Chinese language school. Fourthly, I wished to find a blend of boys and girls. Lastly, all participants should be able to speak freely with the researcher.

Mrs. Lin and Kyle, the second child of the family, agreed to join this project. Mrs. Lin was a key member of her community and a local Chinese school where she also taught a group of second-generation students Mandarin. Initially, Mrs. Lin and Kyle contacted Mrs. Lin's students' parents and Kyle's friends at his American school, respectively, to see if the families would be interested in participating in this research. Next, using a list of these potential contacts from Mrs. Lin, I contacted all families via email, since all of them had access to computers, to send documents such as consent forms and a brief overview of this project for their review. One week later, I called each family to discuss with them the possibility, risks, and benefits of joining this project.

The researcher's identity as an international student from Taiwan was crucial to these participant families in their decision to join this study. Firstly, my role as an international student reminded many participant parents of their prior experiences of studying in the U.S. and their struggles as foreigners whose native language was not English. Also, for the second-generation students, my being Taiwanese connected to their ethnic identity and thus they wanted to help people from Taiwan. Secondly, the goal of this study – to make the voices of Taiwanese (including Chinese) immigrant parents and Asian American students heard – played a crucial role in soliciting the assistance of the parents and students who were overwhelmed in their senior year due to the college applications.

Family context: post-1965 professional-based immigration.

Ten East Asian immigrant families (two families whose parents were from China, and the rest whose parents were from Taiwan) participated in this study. The twenty-seven participants included ten high school seniors (five girls and five boys) and seventeen immigrant parents (ten mothers and seven fathers). The students were second-generation children of immigrants: nine of them were born and grew up in the U.S., and one was born in Taiwan and immigrated with their parents to the U.S. at the age of two. The

parents were first-generation immigrants: all of them were born and grew up in East Asia. Most of them received a bachelor's or an associate degree in their homeland (only one parent came to the U.S. for high school and undergraduate education). In each household, at least one parent came to the U.S. for graduate studies in the 1990s and had a master's degree in a STEM field (i.e., science, technology, engineering and mathematics). They subsequently found jobs (e.g., computer-related work) and decided to settle down in the U.S., under the provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (i.e., professional- or skill-based immigration). Most of the parents had become U.S. citizens through naturalization.

School context: Reagan High School North.

Reagan High School North (RHS North, pseudonym), where seven students of this study attended, is a four-year comprehensive public suburban high school from the northern end of Apple Township on the northeast coast of the United States. There were approximately 2,200 students and Asian American students occupied more than 65% of the student body (according to *U.S. News*). Within this Asian category, Chinese, Taiwanese, and Indian were the major three sub-ethnic groups. This school was ranked in the top 150 of "America's 500 Best High Schools" (according to *U.S. News*) and was one of the top 30 high schools of the state (out of 340 schools statewide). Since the majority of students in the study attended this school, I chose RHS North as the main school context for description and analysis.

The remaining three students attended Reagan High School South (RHS South), Washington High School, and Madison High School respectively (pseudonyms used). These three were also four-year comprehensive public suburban high schools. The student body in each school ranged from 1,550 to 2,000, and Asian American students occupied 32%, 51%, and 35% of the student body, respectively. Nevertheless, Chinese, Taiwanese, and Indian were the three major sub-ethnic groups. All of the three schools were selected as "Top Public High Schools" in the state.

Community context: The Taiwanese-led Chinese school.

Eight of the participant families lived in the same suburban county, Apple Township, which has one of

the highest percentages of East-Asians in the population in the coastal Northeast. Among these eight families, two families had parents from China (the Yang family and the Ding family), and the other six were from Taiwan (the Shui, Lin, Kung, Chou, Wei, and Ma families). The children in the two Chinese families attended a Chinese-led Chinese school (i.e., sponsored by the Chinese government with teachers who were Chinese nationals and had attended Chinese-teaching certification programs in China). These two students (Nathan Yang and Rita Ding) quit their Chinese school after entering middle school.

In the case of the other six Taiwanese immigrant families who lived in Apple Township, all the children attended Taiwanese-led Chinese schools (i.e., sponsored by the Taiwanese government: most of the teachers in these schools were local immigrant parents who volunteered their time and helped keep the school running). Many of the children attended the Taiwanese-led Chinese school continuously from pre-K to 10th grade, meaning that they graduated and received a certificate. The children of the remaining two Taiwanese immigrant families who did not live in Apple Township (the Pan family and the Ho family) attended this Taiwanese-led Chinese school as well. These two families lived about 1.5 hours away by car. Their parents decided to send their children to this Taiwanese-led Chinese school in Apple Township due to its emphasis on “character education,” which aimed “to bring out the instinctive kindness and compassion in every child.” Since most participants attended this Taiwanese-led Chinese school, I chose it as the main community context for description and analysis.

Methods of Generating Data

The dataset.

The data collection period spanned 1.5 years, from summer 2012 to summer 2013, and included three rounds of interviews (i.e., interview students and each of their immigrant parents), participant observations with three focal families, constant informal phone conversations with parents, informal conversations after shadowing the focal families, and the collection of college-application relevant materials. I also conducted some follow-up interviews after students went to college in summer 2014. As

I am a native Mandarin speaker, the data collected from immigrant parents was in Mandarin and the data from the children was in English. Table 1 describes the type, source, and quantity of the data.

Table 1: Data Sources

<i>Type of data</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Quantity</i>
Formal Interviews	Students	3-4 interviews (1.5-2 hours each time) *10 students
	Parents	3-4 interviews (1.5-2 hours each time) *17 parents
Participant Observations	Three focal families	10-15 home visits (3-4 hours each time)
Informal Phone Conversations	Mainly from parents	Numerous (via phone calls or after I attended events with participants)
Shadowing Days	Three focal families	10 times in total (attending students-related events in the community)
Artifact Collection	GPA and SAT scores	10 items
	College list	10 items
	After-school activities	10 items

<i>Type of data</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Quantity</i>
	High school course-taking trajectories	10 items
	Local Chinese newspapers and online magazines on school ranking	

Interviewing.

I conducted three rounds of semi-structured interviews with students and their parents respectively. The three-round interviews were guided by semi-structured protocols (Galletta, 2013). The interview questions had two goals: firstly, I aimed to understand parents' and students' life history stories regarding their respective perceptions of their family's K-12 educational practices related to college-application steps (i.e., GPA, SAT score, extracurricular activities, volunteer work, and essays). Secondly, I aimed to understand their interpretations of participating in these practices and illuminate their sense of identity and agency.

The first round of student interviews occurred in summer and fall, 2012. The interview questions focused on gaining a general understanding of students' college-preparation experiences, such as their plans for the future, dream schools, and how their parents influenced their aspirations. The second round of interviewing occurred in the first three months of 2013 and the questions centered on students' college-lists, high school course-taking trajectories, after-school schedules, and their extracurricular activities over K-12. For each artifact, I not only asked what choices they made, but also why and how they made such choices. In the third round of interviews, conducted from April to July 2013, the questions concentrated on family college-matriculation decisions and the reasoning behind them. All three rounds of student interview protocols are attached in Appendix A.

The first round of parent interviews occurred in summer or fall, 2012. The questions focused on

gaining an overall understanding of their immigration stories, expectations for their children, how they became involved in their children's education, and why. The second round of interviews fell into the same period as the student interviewing, and the interview questions concentrated on parents' educational experiences in their homeland, and their reasons for coming to the U.S. and settling down in the current local community. The third round of interviews occurred in spring or early summer, 2013 and the questions centered on the family college matriculation-decision and their retirement plan. All three rounds of parent interview protocols are attached in Appendix B.

It is important to note that I also had two more informal interviews with eight student participants and some of their parents to discuss my preliminary findings in summer 2013 and spring or summer, 2014. In late summer 2013 (before students departed for college), I wrote to all participants and asked if they were interested in the preliminary findings and if they would like to discuss them with me. Eight students (and their parents) replied. The conversations revolved around two key themes that emerged in the field: parent peer pressure and student peer pressure. I took this opportunity to explore more deeply the related educational practices in the discourse of parent or student peer pressure: memorizing the multiplication tables, the mathematics curriculum tracking, "failed Asians," "tiger moms," and "Asian moms' gossip." These two rounds of interviews and discussions were crucial to unpicking the mystery of how a generation of the Asian model minority group was produced or reproduced in a Taiwanese or Chinese immigrant community.

Participant observation.

I observed three focal families (the Lin, Chou, and Ho families) in the school year, and visited them and had lunch or dinner with them once every two weeks. During the second half of the school year, I observed once a month due to the students' busy schedules. For example, students had a school field trip, a national-level science contest, senior prom, and a graduation commencement.

During each observation, I took fieldnotes – a running catalog of parent-child talk and interaction – usually in the kitchen, living room or dining room. I also audio-recorded the conversation at the dining

table. After leaving the research site, I immediately added detailed descriptions and my reflections on the visit into the fieldnotes. The notes were focused on the following aspects: updates regarding students' progress in, and after, the college application process, and parent-child conversation on the topics under discussion (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). I often shared with my participants interesting findings in the field and then asked for their comments. For instance, I found many students applied to Cornell University. I asked participants, "Why is this school so popular?" and parents and students then offered their perspective. All of this type of data was cataloged in chronological order in my observation sub-file under each family file.

Informal phone conversations.

I had many informal conversations with participating parents while student participants were extremely busy and unavailable. In particular, the beginning stages of this study were very frustrating because during the fall 2012 semester the high school seniors were overwhelmed by SAT preparation and college applications. I felt that I was competing with students for their precious time. My strategy was to contact parent participants first to understand how student participants were proceeding in the application process.

Hence, the informal phone conversations usually occurred when I was about to schedule a new interview appointment. I called parent participants to ask how the student participants were doing and what the appropriate time was for a follow-up interview. Through the phone conversations with parents, I was able to get updated information about the students and their family college application practices. I received two rounds of information through phone conversations with parents, one at the end of the first half of the academic year (i.e., fall 2012) when the college application deadline was approaching, and the other was during March and April 2013 when students were anxiously awaiting college admission results.

Shadowing.

Whenever I received an invitation from one of the three focal families to their children-related

activities, I would accompany them to the activity. Activities that I attended included a college fair, school cafe night, financial aid workshops, engineering open house, a prior prom, two high school graduation commencements, a local Chinese school visit, and several Asian parents' parties or social gatherings. My observations focused on the social interactions and conversations that my participants had with people they encountered. In addition, I would have informal conversations with the focal parents in the car before and after the event and would attempt to get a sense of everyday parent-parent social interactions in the community context.

Artifact collection.

I collected students' information about their college application materials: self-reported GPA, self-perceived class rank, self-reported SAT scores, extracurricular activities, volunteer work, and how they approached college application essays. Also, I gathered students' college application lists, lists of students' daily school schedules and after-school activities, and their high school course-taking trajectories that included mathematics, English, science, and history subjects. A collection of these written documents allowed me to discuss with student and parent participants why and how they made choices about, for example, extracurricular activities and college lists. Further, it enabled me to connect these dots and thus deepened my understanding of students' educational development and course-taking trajectories during data analysis.

The local Chinese newspapers and online magazines (e.g. *U.S. News*) were also sources of material. The local Chinese papers repeatedly promoted the "Going-to-Harvard" model and circulated many kinds of college-application-related workshops that offered "how-to" advice, for example, "how to make your child go to Harvard"? Online magazines reported public high school rankings statewide and nationwide and provided data on school districts, individual schools, and student data on ethnicity, test scores and more. These data helped me to get a sense of the demographic factors for the local communities and districts as well as the dominant discourse about education in the community.

Data Analysis

Below, I detail how I analyzed the dataset in a chronological manner and show the steps that led to the three chapters of the dissertation on findings.

Stage one: Informal and deductive analysis.

Data analysis in this study was ongoing and iterative, inductive and deductive, and was conducted alongside data collection. It began in my very first few interviews with parents and children in the field. Data analysis in the field consisted of writing up rich fieldnotes from the observation of participants and the transcription of tape-recorded interviews. The data analysis further included researcher comments in which I recorded my earlier ideas about making connections between the recurring topics that emerged as significant across families, parents, and students, and their consequences. This process of analysis allowed common themes to emerge across families, across parents, and across students. It also provided direction for the subsequent rounds of interviews as well as refinement of the research questions.

Stage two: Powerful common themes across families that resulted in shifting the focus from the college application process to the K-12 college preparation process.

From the various sources of data, in-depth portraits were composed for each of the ten families under study – detailing each family’s immigration life story and K-12 educational experience. Each family profile included rich descriptions of (a) parents’ immigration background, (b) immigrant parent's perceptions of the American K-16 education system, (c) how they engaged in their children’s education, (d) and students’ interpretations of their K-12 educational development, educational practices, and family matriculation-decisions.

Using an interpretive frame, the data were first analyzed by using matrices to organize the interview questions and responses by parent participants and by student participants. The descriptive questions from the three rounds of interviews with parents and students respectively and the year-long participant

observations with the three focal families were coded according to salient patterns and themes (LeCompte and Preissle, 1994). The significant themes included student peer pressure, “I hate tiger mom,” parent peer pressure, working hard, “don’t ask questions in class,” “failed Asians,” the multiplication table, “Asian moms’ gossip,” the negotiation of identity, and the disappearing middle class.

Next, the data were analyzed for themes connected to college application materials, college lists and matriculation decisions. By making frequent comparisons across families, parents, and students, I developed sub-themes that captured similar examples or contrasting cases. Through this process I found it astonishing to see many remarkably consistent similarities across cases. For example, all of the students had high GPAs (i.e., from 3.6 to 4.0), relatively high SAT scores (from 2200 to 2360) and scored within the top 10% of the class. Also, students had many overlapping after-school curricular activities such as taking piano, violin, and tennis lessons for years, attending SAT tutoring and attending summer science camps. The top three common colleges students applied to were Cornell, Illinois University at Champaign, and Carnegie Mellon; and their major focus was either engineering-related or medical-related programs.

Interestingly, I found that parents in this study built their educational aspirations and ways of engaging in their children’s education based on the information and experiences they learned from other parents whose children were portrayed as “successful” in the community. That is, they hoped their children would follow the “good student” model celebrated by the majority of members of the community. All of these remarkably common themes across families suggested a pressing need for me to analyze more deeply the collective social practices in the ethnic Chinese community and family educational practices over students’ K-12 schooling years, instead of focusing on the family college-matriculation decisions.

Stage three: Data transcription, going back to the field, and identifying the interlocking contexts of home, school, and community where social positioning and intergenerational learning activities occur.

About three semesters were taken up with data transcription and analysis since I had more than 200

hours of interview data. During the data transcription period, I composed analytic memos on themes that were recurring as significant across families, parents, or students. In spring and summer 2014, I went back to the field as students finished their freshman year at college. I discussed with them three powerful themes across all cases: student peer pressure and competitiveness, parent peer pressure and Asian moms' gossip, and memorizing the multiplication table and math competence. In the discussions, I frequently challenged my student participants in a manner of "making the familiar strange."

For example, I asked, "why did you want to work so hard?" "why did you care if you failed?" The discourse of "you can't be a failed Asian," and the secondary curricular tracking system appeared. Additionally, I confronted my student participants by saying "why did you work hard and then you could get good grades? Many students worked very hard, but it just did not show on their transcript." The discourse of students' competencies in mathematics thus emerged (i.e., parents made them memorize the multiplication tables and do endless math worksheets over the years). With parents' solid training in math when students were young, Asian students were able to get good grades and feel smart during elementary school. They then got tracked to the Honors-level math courses in middle school and after. Finally, I asked why there was a high consistency in everyone's K-12 after-school activities and how everyone knew so clearly about how students in other families performed. It was a phenomenon of "everyone knows everyone's business in the community." The mechanism of Asian moms' gossip, therefore, came to the surface.

This process of discussing the preliminary findings with participants was extremely important for this research development. It led me to begin exploring the college-preparation experiences among these immigrant families in a more complex way and with deeper analysis. Specifically, I started sorting through all the possible combinations of factors that created the sociocultural context in which Taiwanese and Chinese immigrant families resided and to which they responded. These discussions allowed me to identify three compelling core themes that undergirded Asian students' academic achievement and their family educational practices across all families throughout K-12 education.

Firstly, the K-12 math curricular design in American schools shaped immigrant parents' ways of

engagement in students' math learning experiences; focusing on the memorization of multiplication tables. Secondly, the curricular tracking system dictated students' ways of learning how to be a "normal" Asian at school. Finally, Asian moms' gossip served to provide immigrant parents with abundant resources, such as learning how to be an Asian parent in the United States as well as how to help their children succeed at an American school. All in all, these core themes allowed me to develop a systematic understanding of how a generation of Asian students produced the "model minority" collective identity and circulated the model minority discourse over their compulsory education.

Stage four: Multiple units of analysis and deductive analysis.

Finally, I analyzed these themes according to how they fit into the amended theoretical framework: "figured worlds," "social positioning," and "re-authoring" across time (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school) and space (i.e., home, school, and community). I modified the conceptual frameworks from *diaspora* (i.e., in my initial proposal in 2011) to *figured worlds* to make sure that the theoretical propositions fit the data (Emerson et al., 2011). At this stage, I treated students' college-application related materials (i.e., GPA, SAT, extracurricular activities, volunteer work, and essays) as sociocultural resources that parents and students used in their everyday social positioning. That is, through examining the college preparation process via multiple rounds of interactional positional activities over the K-12 schooling years, I obtained a clearer view of how immigrant parents and children learned to use these resources and how the artifacts developed in everyday discourse. I focused on how parent and student participants made sense of these cultural artifacts and used them to make meaning of their memberships through everyday social positioning practices, which later shaped their positional identities and educational practices.

To demonstrate the trajectories of how students participated in taking up their learning and racialized identities over their K-12 education, I used multiple intertwined units of analysis to understand Asian students' everyday learning and educational development. The umbrella unit of analysis is cultural practices (i.e., the math-related educational practices, "you don't want to be a dumb Asian," and Asian

moms' gossip). I treated cultural practices as locally produced activities that connected human agency and sociocultural structures (Nasir and Hand, 2006). Examining the locally produced cultural practices at a collective level is a way to understand the sociohistorical context that a group of individuals was situated in and responded to. Below are the multiple levels of analysis that I identified for analyzing the cultural practices which Asian students and their immigrant parents produced in the local community as a response to their college preparation process.

- A focus on the college-application materials (e.g., GPA, Honors and AP courses, SAT score, extracurricular activities, volunteer work, and essays): examining narratives of these college application materials as cultural resources that mediated participants' social interaction and identification (Holland et al., 1998) allowed me to investigate how one used these resources to make sense of oneself and to interact with others. For example, "why did you want to work so hard to achieve high scores?"
- A focus on social interactions and positioning: narratives of social-comparison-related and positioning practices allowed me to look for parent-student interaction, student-student interaction, and parent-parent interaction patterns. For example, "your son's performance is so much better than my son's."
- A focus on struggle-related discourses (Skinner, Valsiner, & Holland, 2001) that showed how individuals re-made their sense of self (i.e., re-authoring) as a response to his or her sociocultural world, and why. Looking for struggle-related discourse provided a space for seeing change and multiple aspects of agency.
- A focus on social spaces (i.e., family, school, and community) and timescales (i.e., elementary, middle and high school): mapping out time (e.g., "when did you start memorizing the multiplication table?"), space (e.g., where did this social practice occur) and people (e.g., with whom), as well as connecting each timescale, enabled this study to trace backward how individuals drew upon cultural resources, and developed and (re)constructed cultural meanings

that underlay their everyday discourse and educational practices over time.

- A focus on cultural practices: the discourse of cultural practices allowed me to document individuals' accounts of the interpretation of their membership and participation in the related cultural practices.

As Hugh (1992) suggested, "until we examine the mechanisms of cultural and social reproduction via a close interactional analysis of social practices, we will be left with only a highly suggestive structural view of the relations between social origins, schooling, and subsequent achievement (p.4)." These stages of analysis led me to develop a conceptual framework for describing the sophistication and complexity in Asian American students' overachieving patterns and their Asian immigrant families' college preparation experiences. This conceptual framework indicated an interplay of the broader sociocultural constraints (structure) and how individuals (agency) responded to their perceived social structures in the interlinked social contexts across time and space.

Further, using these multiple units of analysis resulted in my division of Asian students' learning experiences and social identification processes into three social contexts (or spaces) over K-12 education: home (parent-child interaction), school (student-student interaction), and community (parent-parent interaction). The parent-child interaction in the home setting is explored in chapter four, the student-student interaction in the school setting is discussed in chapter five, and the parent-parent interaction in the community setting is investigated in chapter six. These chapters also draw upon illustrative examples and relevant data from the parent and student interviews, participant observations, and informal conversations.

Researcher Role

The researcher is an international student from Taiwan, with a master's degree and a teaching certificate in social science. I have one year of public middle school (student) teaching experience and four years of work experience in the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education in Taiwan.

When I came to the U.S. for doctoral studies, I occupied “the space between” (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009), instead of being a complete outsider or a complete insider. In my role as a researcher I moved toward one end of this spectrum or the other, depending on the context of a specific interview question.

My insider status became obvious when I used snowball sampling to recruit research participants. Inheriting similar Confucian cultural backgrounds, shared educational experiences in Taiwan, and similar educational trajectories (i.e., from Taiwan to the U.S. for graduate studies) allowed me easily to build rapport and trust with my parent participants. I thus had a relative advantage in the process of obtaining information from them. However, my outsider status showed in at least two significant ways: first, the first-generation parents had resided in the U.S. for more than 20 years and had many lived experiences of interacting with U.S. society while I was staying in this country as a sojourner and had limited experiences of being an immigrant in a new society. Secondly, my non-parent status also limited my view of some of the issues with which parents were dealing.

I acted more like an outsider to my adolescent participants because of my deficit in understanding American youth culture. Also, although I was an international graduate student, which gave me some knowledge of student life in the U.S., I did not have experience of U.S. K-12 education. The factors mentioned above presented me as a linguistic and American cultural stranger. Furthermore, the student participants perceived me as a friend of their parents and many of them (especially girl students) tended to call me “Aunt,” a traditional Chinese way of greeting to show respect to parents’ female friends. I saw that as a generational distance between my student participants and me. This distance might impede their willingness to share with me their perceptions.

I presented myself as an insider researcher in three ways: first, I asked my student participants to call me by my name “Shelley” directly, which was an “un-Chinese” style. My intention of doing so was to show the equal relationship between them and me, with a hope that they could express themselves freely and openly to me. Also, being a Taiwanese connected to the second-generation students’ ethnic identity helped me to be treated as an insider and to establish rapport and trust with them. My ethnicity particularly made my student participants feel safe to talk about their perceptions of their Asian parents

and other Asian parents in the community without being judged. As one student participant claimed, if I were a researcher from another racial or ethnic background, she would have hesitated to talk about what she thought about her Asian parents with me.

Moreover, my learning and academic training in a U.S. graduate school over multiple years allowed me to better understand the issues around immigration, race, and education facing the second-generation Asian children of immigrants. In particular, immigrant parents had few ideas about their children's social pressures that stemmed from the model minority discourse and stereotype at school and in American society. My student participants thus treated me as a trustworthy researcher who listened to them, treated them as equal, and would not judge them.

For example, I was able to discuss with student participants about the model minority discourse (e.g., "Asians are supposed to be smart.") and the related social structural issues (e.g., the curricular tracking and the model minority stereotype). Students could freely talk about their perceived social pressures due to the model minority stereotype at school (e.g., "You can't be a dumb Asian"). They felt that they were being understood. Interestingly, at the end of the interviews, many parent participants expressed to me that they were surprised that their children had told me many things that they would not tell their parents. In one mother participant's words, "I am surprised that my son told you, a stranger, so many things that he would not tell me or explain to me." Whenever this mother had arguments with her son, she continued, "my son always ended it up with saying 'because you are an Asian mom' and he stopped saying anything. I was like 'what's wrong with Asian mom?'"

All in all, at the beginning stages of my data collection, it was very frustrating for me to interview student participants for two reasons. Firstly, I struggled to clearly articulate my questions in English because of my language barrier, and secondly, I had K-16 education in Taiwan, not in the United States. My limited understanding of the American K-12 education system (e.g., the high school course-taking trajectories) resulted in more confusion. At the beginning of this research, I was completely an outsider researcher. However, rather than seeing it as a weakness, I perceived my struggle as an opportunity to learn from the student participants as if I was about to live in the same social context with them.

Accordingly, I asked a lot of *what*, *why* and *how* questions.

For instance, I discussed student peer pressure with one student, and I asked “You mentioned that you and friends hung out every day at school. But why and how did it become a peer pressure and competition? What’s the connection here? I don’t understand.” I also asked them to articulate further or explain explicitly about their experiences, interpretations, or issues of choice in the discussion, which also included the locally produced jargons (e.g. DisgrAsian or ‘failed Asian’). For example, what I often said to them was “what you said seemed very important. But I don’t know what questions to ask. Can you say more about it?” This process for me was a way that my student participants *taught* me how to understand their K-12 educational experiences and practices. It was this learning process that enabled me to obtain a systematic understanding of their educational experiences and family educational practices across time and space.

Validity

I had attempted to analyze my data with a reflexive eye, being cautious of my research bias. Johnson (1997) defined *interpretive validity* as “the degree of accuracy in [understanding and] presenting... [research participants’] inner worlds (p. 285).” In order to achieve this, I used several validation strategies suggested by Creswell (2007).

To begin with, I used *external audits* (i.e., external consultants who had no connections to this study) to guide and assess my research process, rounds of interview protocols and preliminary findings of each round of interviews. I did not have experience of the U.S. K-12 education and college application process, thus, whenever I finished one round of interviews, I looked for themes across cases and then discussed the preliminary findings with my committee chair, committee members, and my American fellow graduate students at a regularly held graduate seminar. This process also helped me to develop interview questions for the following round. For example, my advisor suggested I collect students’ high-school course trajectories and after-school activities, and then ask the students to explain them to me. Collecting these artifacts seemed indirect to my study of focus during that round of interviewing, but later they became

invaluable data for theorizing students' math identification process in Chapter 4.

I also consulted my external auditors over the course of my data collection and analysis. Their sharing of their experiences of growing up in American families, receiving education in the U.S., and undergoing the college application process helped me recognize significantly different cultural assumptions or practices indicated by my preliminary findings. For instance, while I presented the data related to students' college lists to members at the graduate seminar, one fellow student raised a question: "many of the students applied to the same schools such as Illinois-Champaign and Cornell. Why?" Through many of my fellow students' explanations based on their own college application experiences, I realized that this patterned college list was salient and necessary to explore more deeply.

Furthermore, I rested my study on my research participants to establish interpretive credibility. That is, I used *member checking* mainly in two ways. Firstly, I used a quote that I found worth exploring from a participant in one interview as a question to the participant in my next interview. For example, one student expressed his relationship with his parents as "my parents and I live in two different worlds, and there is only a small bridge connecting us." I then presented this quote to other students. I asked whether their experiences were similar or different to this, and in what ways. In another example, after hearing more than once about "failed Asians" (discussed in Chapter 5) from the student participants, I realized that this term was crucial to their everyday life at school. I thus decided to ask all student participants questions about this racial term. This discussion series served to unearth my theorization on Asian students' racialized identification process.

Secondly, I presented my overall research findings from the literature on the educational experiences of Asian American students to participants and asked for their opinions. For instance, I told my participants that, "a large body of the literature indicated that Asian American students are passive and they did whatever their immigrant parents tell them to do. Hence, parents want them to work hard, so they work hard." I asked for their comments by saying "did it apply to your family"? Parents commented that it only worked (i.e., children were obedient and followed parents' instruction) when children were young.

Interestingly, it was through this process that parents revealed that they tended to follow what other

Asian parents did in the community to promote their children's academic success when children were young. However, in this process of learning from other families, they also witnessed many negative cases that occurred in other families as children grew (i.e., parents were strict and pushy, and thus children disowned their families after going to college). Many parents in this study then adapted their tone and started talking about how they adjusted their parenting style with an aim to maintain a good parent-child relationship. In this line of discussion, these parents further expressed how they re-defined what it meant to be a "successful" parent and a "successful" child.

Lastly, *data triangulation* took place throughout this study: at stages of data collection, data analysis, and writing-up. For example, there were ten students representing four suburban public high schools. During data collection, I noticed that the model minority discourse emerged as a recurrent theme that indicated a compelling component shaping students' racialized identities and educational practices, expressed by many students at Reagan High School North. I triangulated this finding across other students who attended other schools to see if this theme was common to all students across these four schools.

Additionally, during iterative data analysis in the writing process, I shared my primary findings and conclusions with parent and student participants and asked for their verification, insight, clarifications or comments on any issues raised. For instance, in summer 2013 and 2014, I went back to the field and discussed the three powerful cultural practices across families: student peer pressure and competitiveness, parent peer pressure and Asian moms' gossip, memorizing the multiplication table and math competence. This step of data triangulation with local members allowed me to trace backward students' educational development starting with their pre-K stage (at Chinese school). Furthermore, it enabled me to document the effects and consequences of certain cultural practices of choice in their family across time and social settings. Finally, this process enabled me to divide my findings based on the institutionalized spaces and social contexts: home, school, and community.

In the following three chapters, I introduce the cultural (re)production of smart Asians who are good at math, hard-working, and achieve academic excellence, in three intermeshing social contexts across K-12

education. That is, I propose a conceptual model to show how a generation of Asian model minority students is produced across the home, school and community contexts over K-12 schooling years. I first present how students took up the “smartness” identity across the home and school settings in chapter four – through the figured worlds of getting ahead in the family context. Secondly, I demonstrate how students internalized the racialized Asian identity (i.e., “Asians are supposed to be smart and good at math”) in the school context in chapter five – via figured worlds of normal Asians. Finally, I show how immigrant parents learning to be an Asian parent in the U.S. context served to promote students’ high-achievement pattern at a collective level across the community and home settings in chapter six – in the overlapping figured worlds of Asian moms and the “good students.”

Chapter Four: The Figured World of Getting Ahead: The Cultural Production of Being Smart and Good at Math Across Home and School Contexts

Sophia Chou's mom: The American school starts to teach the multiplication tables to 3rd or 4th graders. School teachers do not ask them to memorize the whole chart. They're not like us [e.g., Chinese immigrant parents]. We ask our children to memorize the whole chart starting from two two four [i.e., $2*2=4$] ... to nine nine eighty-one [i.e., $9*9=81$]. Some people master the charts even up to $20*20$... Basically, as a Chinese, rote-learning the multiplication tables is a must. The Americans do not do that.

Shelley: What's the point of making the child master the multiplication tables?

Sophia Chou's mom: I guess, everyone [i.e., Chinese immigrant parents] wants their children to get ahead. Americans don't memorize the charts. They just reason and understand them [e.g., how does $4*5$ become 20]. They're not like us, engraving the whole charts into our brains.

Shelley: How does it [memorizing the charts] help and in what ways?

Sophia Chou's mom: Like in a math test which has twenty questions, for a student who has mastered the charts, he or she can figure out answers soon after reading the questions. [After answering all the questions], he [or she] can spend the time he [or she] saved on double checking the answers [to increase the accuracy rate]... But for a student who does not memorize the chart, he [or she] gets the answers through reasoning. When time is out, he [or she] might just proceed to question number 18. Two questions are left unanswered. And among those answers, he [or she] might make two careless mistakes... So, I think the timing is important...Like the SAT, it has a time limit...

It is worth mentioning that the discourse on multiplication tables, parental involvement in early childhood education, and after-school math-related practices emerged due to two sets of questions I kept

challenging my student participants with in the field. Firstly, “Why are you good at math?”, and secondly, since all students possessed the achievement ideology: “you work hard, and you will get good grades,” I confronted them by saying “there are many people who work really hard but they just do not or cannot get good grades. Why does it work in your case?” Once I had the students’ perspectives of why they were good at math, I then turned to my parent participants, asking “why did you ask your child to memorize the multiplication tables and make them do numerous math-related practices at home,” and the discourse of the U.S. math curriculum thus emerged, bringing this chapter into existence.

This chapter highlights students’ learning identification processes and parent-child interactions from parents’ lived worlds of “getting ahead of the U.S. math curriculum” to students’ figured worlds of “getting ahead of peer students” – by examining family math-related educational experiences throughout students’ K-12 schooling years. I elaborate on how Asian American students “thickened” their academic identities over time through their K-12 math learning experiences. That is, I show the cultural production of being smart and good at math – Asian students’ academic identification processes across the home and school settings.

In the following discussion, I first present the immigrant parent perspective and explain: (a) how the U.S. K-5 math curriculum served as a cultural resource that triggered parents’ figured worlds of “getting ahead of the U.S. elementary math curriculum,” (b) what family educational practices immigrant parents instigated as a response to their view that the U.S. K-5 math curriculum was “slow-paced,” and (c) how parents made their children participate in their figured worlds and positioned their children via their family math-related educational practices and forms of negotiations.

Secondly, I present the student perspective on the effects of the K-12 math curriculum design. I show why and how students’ participation in their parents’ figured worlds and the social position offered by their parents of “being good at math” translated into that offered by the elementary-level schooling and grading system of being “top”, “good”, or “smart” students. Then, I demonstrate why and how the challenging secondary (high school in particular) math curriculum discouraged immigrant parents from involvement (due to their language barriers). Further, I discuss why and how students learned the

symbolic meanings of tracking in math courses: “the math curriculum is more precise in terms of determining where you were intellectually...,” (as Alex Shui claimed); and math became the arena for students to compete for who was smart or smarter.

Thirdly, I illustrate how Asian students’ struggles of dealing with the challenging high school math curriculum in Honors- and AP-track programs served as opportunities for re-authoring: to be the top and smart student (or not) and “trying not to look stupid.” This self-re-authoring process generated and consolidated students’ figured worlds of “getting ahead of peer students.” It further transformed “being smart and good at math” from a social position to a disposition for Asian students, who hence took up the learning identities: to be smart and good at math.

Immigrant Parents’ Figured Worlds of Getting Ahead of the “Slow-Paced” American K-5 Math Curriculum

The American elementary mathematics curriculum: The artifact that evoked immigrant parents’ figured worlds of getting ahead.

The involvement of Asian immigrant parents in their children’s early education was inextricably tied up with their perceptions of the American math elementary curriculum in comparison to their past educational experiences with the K-12 math curriculum in Taiwan or China. The American elementary math curriculum served as a cultural resource or an “artifact” (Holland *et al.*, 1998) that opened up immigrant parents’ figured worlds of getting ahead of the American elementary math curriculum – an imagined world that dictated immigrant parents’ ways of involvement in their children’s mathematical education. For example, while I investigated why Asian students were good at math and sciences in this community, many parents indicated that the key lay in their family mathematical practices at early childhood. Common practices included rote-learning the multiplication tables (up to twelve times twelve) and doing numerous after-school mathematical worksheets.

To understand it better, I asked these parent participants why, and since when, they started the math-related practices. Below is a response from Kyle Lin’s father.

Shelley: Kyle mentioned that you started teaching him the multiplication tables at his age of four and asked him to memorize them.

Mr. Lin: Not that early! I remember it [teaching Kyle the multiplication tables] was when Kyle was a first grader. They were learning addition at school, but it's too simple. So, I made some push, making him learn faster.

Shelley: What do you mean by "too simple"? Can you give me an example?

Mr. Lin: The American way of teaching addition [to first graders] is " $1+2=?$ " The American school taught this to first grader? [Mr. Lin raised his voice] We taught Kyle this at his age of four or five already.

Mr. Lin's comment explained why Kyle felt bored when he was taught addition in first grade. Mr. Lin said without hesitation, "because we taught him [addition] already." As Kyle had learned and mastered addition and subtraction at home in advance, he felt bored at school. Due to Kyle's boredom with what he was learning at school, Mr. Lin thus taught Kyle more advanced math – the multiplication tables – which the school would not be teaching until third or fourth grade.

The Lin family started teaching Kyle basic math concepts at the age of four or five, using their everyday life experiences. "Use your hands to count one to ten. Use your fingers and toes to count to twenty." "You ate one apple. And then you ate another one. How many apples did you eat in total?" Mr. Lin stated:

The Chinese parents usually give their children basic math concepts one or two years ahead of the school [math curriculum] ... [In our case], we gave our kids basic math concepts one or two years ahead, at the age of four or five...What's the difference between giving them [the basic math concepts] sometime earlier and later? The children will learn them anyway. The earlier they start to learn, the more they will learn. We [i.e., as parents] have the mindset of "get our children

prepared in advance.” I don’t know why the Americans do not have that kind of mindset. Maybe they do, and we don’t know.

Mrs. Lin recalled that when Kyle was at elementary school, he complained that other students who did not understand addition already were “stupid.” Mrs. Lin explained why she and Mr. Lin thought the U.S. math curriculum was “slow-paced” in terms of teaching. “Because school teachers had to pay more attention to students who learned relatively slow.” As a result, Kyle felt bored in the class. Thus, the Lin couple felt the need to teach Kyle more advanced math. As Mrs. Lin explained:

There were huge ability differences among students in Kyle’s class. For some students, they learned and understood immediately. But for some students, they just didn’t get it. Teachers had to pay more attention to those students who didn’t get it... So, for those students who had mastered the concepts, they felt the curriculum was slow-paced.

Sophia Chou’s mom expressed a similar understanding of the U.S. math teaching, but she started her narrative of “the slow-paced American math teaching” with the kindergarten level, getting to know numbers:

The first day of [public] kindergarten, the school teacher taught students the number: 1, the second day, the teacher taught 2...Come on! There were 183 school days, and you spent the whole school year teaching numbers not to 1,000? ...And then when students entered first grade, the school teacher spent one month to review what students learned in kindergarten: 1-100. After that, the teachers began to teach addition, subtraction, two-digit addition, two-digit subtraction...Very slow.

In a one-hour conversation, Mrs. Chou expressed several times that “she cannot accept the slow-paced math learning” in kindergarten. I asked her in what ways that she could not accept the teaching pace. She further explained:

We Chinese could barely accept it [the pace of teaching math]. We don't accept it... For Americans, what do you want a five-year-old kid to learn? The American parents might accept that their children spend a whole school year to learn numbers 1-100 [only]... They can accept it but I can't.

Mrs. Chou's judgment of the American approach to math teaching and learning came from the comparison to her understanding of Chinese parents' teaching math to their children. She asserted, when a kid grew to one or two years old, he or she started to learn and understand numbers. "Chinese parents would teach them to know numbers up to 1,000... The American way... is just too slow... too slow to a point that I couldn't tolerate it."

Instead of viewing the American elementary math teaching and learning as "slow-paced," Alex Shui's mother focused on the "slow," "time-consuming," or "ineffective" approaches to solving math problems. In the conversation with me about memorizing the multiplication charts, Mrs. Shui was surprised at the questions I asked. She further asked me, "Didn't you memorize the multiplication tables when in elementary school?" Mrs. Shui knew that I finished K-16 education in Taiwan as she did. And her act of challenging me suggested that Mrs. Shui's idea of teaching and asking her son to master the multiplication tables was in comparison to her learning experience in Taiwan:

I knew that the Americans do not memorize the multiplication tables – the whole charts. So, I used the Taiwanese way [of learning math] to teach Alex when he was at the age of five.

Mrs. Shui gave an example of how she explained to Alex why she wanted Alex to memorize the whole charts:

Taking two times eight [2×8], for example, you have to add two eight times in order to get the value 16. If you just memorize that two multiplies eight equals to sixteen, you don't have to slowly add up the numbers. You can get the value faster.

Mrs. Shui emphasized that she taught the concept of multiplication to Alex while explaining its relationship to addition and subtraction, for example, the idea that the value of two add two add two was equal to the value of two multiplied by three. “You showed the child the process and gave him the idea that instead of adding one value so many times, it’s faster if you just memorize it,” Mrs. Shui concluded.

Similar narratives regarding the “time-consuming” and “ineffective” American approaches of math problem-solving skills showed in many other parent participants, including Stella Ma’s mother, Sophia Chou’s mother and Kyle Lin’s mother. For example, Mrs. Ma claimed, “Regarding doing math, I hope my children can do it faster. Because I feel the way the Americans do the math is not efficient.” And Mrs. Lin stated, “That [memorizing the multiplication tables] is how we learned math in the past...So, I taught my kids the same way. I don’t understand the way the American teachers taught...It’s weird, not effective.”

However, what did these parents mean by the “ineffective” approaches of solving math problems? Mrs. Chou, who had math as her major in college in Taiwan, gave an example and explained the difference between the American approach and the Taiwanese approach to solving math problems:

For example, a question like $X+2=5$. The American way of showing the problem-solving procedure is $X+2-2=5-2$; $X+0=3$; so, $X=3$.” The Taiwanese way is we are taught that the positive symbol (i.e., $+2$) will become negative (i.e., -2) when you move the value from one side to the other side of the symbol “=” So, we mentally move ‘ $+2$ ’ to the right side of the “=” symbol, and we know that ‘ $+2$ ’ turned to ‘ -2 .’ So, we get the answer, $X=3$, immediately [without going through the reasoning procedure “ $X+2-2=5-2$ ”].

Mrs. Chou accredited the American approach to teaching math, showing the reasoning procedure as the right way to teach math. Mrs. Chou commented, “we omit the procedure...what we learned is a shortcut [memorizing that “ $+2$ ” will become “ -2 ” after moving the value to the other side of “=”] ... In fact, we don’t understand how we got the answer $X=3$.”

In summary, viewing the American K-5 elementary math curriculum as “slow-paced” opened up Chinese immigrant parents’ figured world of “getting ahead of the U.S. math curriculum.” What these immigrant parents emphasized was that the way of learning basic math was “mental arithmetic” focused. Facing the learning differences between the American and Taiwanese approaches to solving math problems, immigrant parents preferred a “quick” and “efficient” approach to getting math answers. That is,

The way Americans teach math is not like what we do in Taiwan. We might use three steps to get the answer [by using the Chinese way]. But if you use the American approach, it might take seven steps. “Fast or slow” [solving the math problem fast or slow in a test] is what we Chinese care about. I want to get the answer as fast as possible. (Sophia Cho’s mom)

Making children memorize the multiplication tables and doing numerous extra math worksheets after school and during summer or winter breaks became parents’ major responses to their understanding of how the American school approached math teaching and learning. The ultimate goal of immigrant parents having children memorize and engrave the whole charts into their brains and do endless after-school math practices was to increase their children’s ability to answer math questions fast and correctly by mental calculation on a test, like the SAT.

Everyday family math-related practices: Immigrant parents’ ways of positioning children to be good at math.

Chinese immigrant parents entered their imaginary worlds of “getting ahead” via their understanding of the U.S. K-5 math curriculum as “slow-paced” teaching and learning. I found three significant family educational practices which immigrant parents initiated to involve their children in their figured worlds: memorizing the multiplication tables, quizzing children, and doing endless after-school extra math homework. These types of family math-related practices were immigrant parents’ primary methods of offering a learning position to their children – to be good at math.

As Alex Shui recalled, his father taught him and asked him to memorize the multiplication tables in the car every day on their way to school (i.e., kindergarten).

I think it was every day we went to school, on the way to school. When I was in kindergarten, I went to a private Catholic school next town, and it was about fifteen minutes' drive to school. So, every day in the car, my dad would have me recite it. And I guess I did it [memorizing the multiplication table] pretty quickly and we had it done in the car. My dad broke it [the multiplication table] down, and he taught me one line and [after I memorized it], then he taught me another line. So, by the time we got to twelve times twelve, it was the sixth month or so.

Asking children to recite the times tables back to parents was not the only way of making children participate in parents' figured worlds. "Quizzing children" in their everyday life was another common approach. Taking Alex's experience again, his father also quizzed him whenever they were together, for instance, when they were watching TV together at home. Alex recalled:

When we're back home, my parents would quiz me... like it would be (that) we're sitting on the couch watching TV, all of sudden, my dad would suddenly burst out: 'what's five times six?' I was like 'um... um... Thirty.

Making children do numerous extra math worksheets was the third approach commonly found in these Chinese immigrant parents' early educational involvement. Sophia's mom explained why she made her daughters repeatedly do math worksheets.

Sophia's mom: I think, the Americans do not emphasize the importance of mental calculation in solving math problems. I got irritated once when I saw my daughter used her fingers to do the math... You can use your fingers to solve math problems when you are a kindergartener. But when you get to 3rd grade, and you still use your fingers? (Sophia's mother's voice rose)... [By learning

the mental calculation], you will have the ability to know the answer immediately after you read the question. So, I stopped her from using fingers to do the math.

Shelley: So, you forced her to stop using her fingers to do the math?

Sophia's mom: I didn't force her. But I gave her worksheets. For example, in a worksheet relating to one-digit addition questions or in a worksheet with two-digit addition questions, the answers to the questions were all the same. There were blanks that she had to fill in. Like, [in one-digit addition questions] $1+?=9$, $2+?=9$, $3+?=9$... There were one hundred questions on that sheet, and I made her do the same sheet over three times...Eventually, she would remember the answers.

Mrs. Chou emphasized that her approach was a Chinese style of learning math (i.e., mental-calculation focused). She argued "It is just too slow [if you use the American way]. By doing so [learning the Chinese way of doing the math], you can save time for double-checking your answers [when you take a test]." The probability of getting correct answers would then increase and, hence, one could get a high score on a test.

Similar to Mrs. Chou, Alex Shui's mother claimed that her secret of making Alex solve math problems faster and get correct answers was because she made Alex do a lot of extra math practices – especially during the summer, winter, or spring breaks:

When the school winter or summer break came, I went online and found some math worksheets...for Alex to do. I made a rule of how many worksheets he had to complete every day...[However], Alex did not do exactly what I told him to do. For example, if I asked him to complete five worksheets a day, he would finish two and hid the rest unfinished three somewhere like the back of the sofa in the living room. So, every day, he hid two or three worksheets in the back of the sofa.

Regarding the extra math assignments for Alex, Mrs. Shui claimed that she was not clear about how many worksheets she gave Alex in total. In other words, she did not know how many worksheets Alex

should complete. Mrs. Shui explained that she did not monitor Alex on a daily basis. She usually collected the worksheets and graded them on a weekly basis. Then, the question came: how did Mrs. Shui find out that Alex hid the worksheets in the back of the sofa? The answer was that some weeks later, when Mrs. Shui vacuumed the whole house and moved the furniture around, she found Alex's secret, the unused worksheets, and he was scolded.

Similar to Alex's math-learning experience at home, Stella Ma's experience of learning basic math and rote-learning the multiplication tables occurred not only in the car, which most students reported as a math-learning space, but also in the basement of their house:

I remember in kindergarten. It started when my brother and I were really young. We used to be so embarrassed. Oh, my God. While all of my friends were playing balls outside, my dad would bring us to the basement. And there's a giant whiteboard. He bought the giant white board, and he started to teach us math before we're in kindergarten. We learned basic math...and each of us had a notebook. He gave us homework in our notebook, and we had to do it... I remember that my dad never let us go out sometimes. He went like "you can't go out unless you finish these math problems." ...Sometimes, because we didn't do the homework he gave us, he punished us by making us sit in front of the wall where a multiplication table was hung. He made us memorize it. Once we're done, we had to go to him and say it really fast, like "two two four. two three six."

Mr. Ma's approach of positioning Stella and her brother "to be good at math" was to gather his children in the basement and teach them basic math, making them memorize multiplication facts. The basement became a particular math-learning space for the Ma family with a giant white board, and a large multiplication tables poster hung on the wall.

In short, there were three major math-related practices in Chinese immigrant families to develop strong mental math skills: (a) parents' teaching children the times tables, (b) parents' quizzing children and making children rote-learn the multiplication tables, and (c) parents' making children work on endless math-related worksheets. However, this does not suggest that the Asian children were obedient and did

whatever their parents ask them to do. For example, in Alex's case, he refused to do all of the worksheets by hiding some of them in the back of the sofa. Parents had to "bribe," "threaten," or "negotiate" with their children in this process, which I will articulate more in the next section.

Bargaining chips: Parents' forms of making children participate in their figured worlds and take up the social position "to be good at math."

"Bargaining chip" is a term used by Victor Pan to describe parents' ways of "bribing" or "disciplining" their children to do math-related practices, schoolwork, or to get good grades at school. In other words, parents used bargaining chips as a way of offering children the learning position and making children participate in their figured worlds of getting ahead. As Holland et al. (1998) observed, "a child may be admonished in a way that includes mention of social position. For example, a mother may tell her daughter that girls don't do x" (p. 139). In this study, children learned their positional identities via their parents' methods of disciplining or training, for example, "We, Chinese, all memorize the multiplication tables," or "recite the 5-multiplication chart back to me". However, "punishment," "admonishment," or "scolding" did not always work in making children participate in their parents' figured worlds and accept the social positions offered.

As Stella Ma recalled, she became scared when she heard her father say "let's go to the basement." She would begin "crying really loud" as a way to refuse her father's offering. In the end, Mrs. Ma took over and used a "bargaining chip" so that Stella would continue to participate in her parents' figured worlds and practice the multiplication tables. For example, as Mrs. Ma recalled her strategy, "let's play games (e.g., what is the value of 3×2 ?). If your answer is correct, then we can go out and have ice cream!"

It was common that parents rewarded children with sweets as a way of making their children participate in their figured worlds and do the math practices. Ella Wei remembered that when she was young, they used to have tons of colorful charts of times tables at her home. Ella described her experience:

My mom would sit me down at the kitchen table. “All right. Let’s have some fun with our time tables” (Ella mimicked her mother). She would use candies to ask me “if I give you two sets of three candies, how many will you have?” And I would be like “add them all together.” My mom would say “ok. You can have them.” I remember that. And we did pictures and moving around the food. Food works in our family.

I remember that the papers [e.g., math books] were brown. It was so old. But um I remember that in every piece of the Kumon [a private after-school math enrichment program] paper that we do, it had a little [math] problems. And I would do them, and my parents would check them just to see if I got them right. If I were right, I would get a lollipop or something. Again, the incentive was food.

The following are other examples of parents using bargaining chips:

“If you do not finish your homework, then you can’t watch TV.” (Gloria Kung’s mom)

“You can’t go to your friend’s birthday party if you don’t finish these worksheets.” (Victor Pan’s mom)

“If you do well at school, you can do anything you want.” (Alex Shui’s mom)

“If you do not get good grades, you can’t watch TV.” (Gloria Kung recalled what her mom said)

“Before [when Alex was at elementary school] my parents bribed me to get good grades, they would give twenty dollars for the grade...” (Alex Shui)

In summary, Chinese immigrant parents’ perception of the American K-5 math teaching and learning as “slow-paced” evoked their lived worlds of getting ahead of the American elementary math curriculum. Immigrant parents engaged their children in participating in their figured worlds by making children do numerous math-related practices and rote-learning multiplication facts. These children were not obedient

and did not always follow their parents' instruction, and so parents resorted to using bargaining chips as incentives for their children to accept the social position, "to be good at math", they were offering.

Students' Perception of the K-12 Math Curriculum: From "Slow-Paced" K-5 to "Fast-Paced"

Secondary Teaching and Learning in Honors Math Courses

Now I think of that, what we learned in elementary school was totally terrible. It's so slow paced sometimes. I guess that's probably why some kids just don't jump to fifth grade because their elementary schools are so bad... I think a lot of kids fall behind at that point because they are not prepared. And that has a lot to do with how they learn in elementary school (Victor Pan).

Chinese immigrant parents' early involvement in their children's math learning led to the development of students' academic identity of "smartness" at school. Being well-prepared by their parents, these students got good grades at school. They felt that "elementary school is so easy," and "it's just normal for us to be ahead of other people," as Kyle Lin claimed. More specifically, the elementary education and the grading system made the association of Chinese immigrant parents' proposed social position (i.e., to be good at math.) with their American-born children's entitlements (e.g., feeling smart at school) and helped create social categories such as "smart student," "good student," or "top student." In other words, the schooling system called on these Asian students to occupy the positions such as "top students" and "smart students," compared to those students whose parents did not prepare them for being good at math and getting ahead of the school math curriculum. Being placed in Honors-track math in middle school became a "natural" and "normal" consequence for most of the students in this study. As Kyle Lin recalled:

For my experience, I thought it was normal to get into Honors classes. I didn't have to try hard to get into Honors classes. The teachers put me into the Honors classes because if we were put in level one classes, then it just really didn't make sense. So, it's just normal for us to be ahead of other people... Um, like Asian kids, they just normally excel more and then they get put in the same classes together, and they get ahead... For me, it just happens that I just have been in the upper part of the class.

In this section, I first demonstrate how Asian students' math learning experience at home became a cultural resource for them to interpret their K-5 math learning experience at school. That is to say, in participating in their parents' figured worlds of getting ahead, students also viewed the American math teaching and learning as slow-paced. Many student participants further argued that students would be left a year or two behind in math learning at American secondary education if they did not have a solid basic math training (at home or elsewhere).

Secondly, I describe why, and how, the challenging high school math curriculum in Honors programs discouraged immigrant parents from being involved and led many parents to withdraw their participation in the figured worlds of getting ahead of the U.S. math curriculum.

Lastly, I present how Asian students' perception of the challenging high school math curriculum in Honors programs as "fast-paced" served to produce their figured worlds of getting ahead of their peer students.

"Elementary school math is so easy because we all knew it already."

When I was in elementary school, I was pretty bad at math... But after I learned the multiplication tables, I did pretty great. And all of sudden, I knew what happened, and I started getting one hundred on the tests. I didn't know why but yah...(Then), in sixth grade, I took Algebra I course [one level higher than the Honors track: Honors students take pre-algebra in 6th grade] (Victor Pan).

Yah, it [e.g., the elementary school] did a lot of playing [games in math class] ...and yah, the public curriculum is pretty slow...I didn't encounter anything new until like fifth or sixth grade. (Alex Shui)

Many students in this study, like Victor Pan and Alex Shui, claimed that it was mastering the multiplication facts and working on numerous math-related practices that made their "elementary school so easy." Moreover, through the schooling process, students learned to associate their math performance and grades to cultural persona such as "top student" and "smart student." They learned to construct their

senses of self (i.e., feeling smart; being at the top of the class) in relation to others (i.e., “some other kids just couldn’t get it.”). Thus, “feeling smart” and “feeling others are stupid” became two sides of the same coin in these students’ math learning experiences at elementary school. As in Kyle Lin’s case:

I remember other kids [in elementary school] are stupid...When I was in first grade, I had learned a lot of stuff like addition...So, it bored me, and some other kids just couldn’t get it. So elementary school is pretty boring for me.

Asian students further acquired the ability to use their family math-related practices at home to interpret their math learning experiences at school (i.e., the “slow-paced” teaching and learning). For example, Victor Pan commented his math learning experience at elementary school was “terrible.” He considered the math teaching at his elementary school to be “slow-paced” because teachers spent a lot of time making math entertaining (i.e., use games to teach math).

Victor: Honestly, playing a game...it takes a lot more time to... set up the game. And make the kids play versus doing addition, you add this to that, and this is what will come out...Now you guys [i.e., school teachers] do some practice like slow paced. Because you just have to go through the additional steps just to make the kids entertained. I mean maybe that’s because kids would learn better. Because maybe in America, if people don’t teach that way, kids don’t pick it up. They don’t want to pick it up because they don’t find it entertaining at all... But... personally my opinion, I don’t care whether we’re playing games or not. I remember a particular game like [a game about addition] ... five kids go over there. Four kids go over there [i.e., the other side]. And these five kids move over there [i.e., where the four kids are]. So, how many kids do we have now? “It’s like five plus four” ... I probably think that’s just stupid. I don’t know.”

Shelley: So, the point of the game was to learn what was $4+5$?

Victor: Yah. They just used kids as numbers like each kid is one unit, right? You add five units into four units, and then you get nine units. But the time you waste to have five kids to move here and there and moving around. I don't think doing any additions [like]...25 kids moving there on top of 130 kids [is possible] ...Think about the time and labor into that...

Victor considered the elementary-level math teaching as “slow-paced” because school teachers had to make math learning entertaining as an incentive for students to learn. He argued that learning math through games at school failed to prepare students for secondary-level math education, “That’s probably why some kids don’t jump to fifth grade because their elementary schools are so bad.” Victor continued:

Now I think of that, what we learned in elementary school was totally terrible. It’s so slow paced sometimes... Anything below elementary school does not have any consequence, like how terribly you do at elementary school. Everything doesn’t have a record, and nobody cares about it. And then 5th and 6th grade are like, how well you perform starts to impact on how you will get placed. So, if you perform well in 6th grade, you go to pre-Algebra I Honors, and then you go to Geometry Honors. If you don’t perform well, you go to pre-Algebra part I and part II. And then, you fall behind like a year.

Victor’s comment suggested that what students learned and how students learned at elementary school did not have a consequence; referring to the tracking system. However, when students moved on to middle and high school, they would be tracked into different levels of math curriculum based on grades. And students who did not have a solid training in math during elementary school fell behind immediately once they moved on to middle school. For example, in Victor’s case, students who performed well were placed in pre-Algebra I Honors and later Geometry Honors. By contrast, students who did not perform well were placed one level lower in pre-Algebra part I and later part II. So, in Victor’s middle school, there was a curriculum gap of a year between the high-track and the low-track math programs in his middle school.

Most of the students in this study who participated in their parents' imagined worlds of getting ahead of the American K-5 curriculum were well-equipped with basic math skills. Consequently, they could move on to higher levels (i.e., Honors-track) of secondary school math. For example, Victor Pan's math sequence of course-taking was unique. He took Algebra I in Grade 6, Algebra II in Grade 7, and Geometry in Grade 8 at middle school. After entering high school, he took pre-Calculus in Grade 9, Calculus AB in Grade 10 and Calculus BC in Grade 11. Victor then took a math course in a top-tier private university when he was a 12th grader and he even helped his high school revise the math curriculum. Victor's trajectory of math course-taking was far more advanced than the rest of the students in this study.

Kyle Lin explained why he thought many Asian students were placed into Honors programs as follows:

If you memorize the multiplication tables, you are pretty much at the fourth-grade level or fifth grade level. You can almost get everything... Actually, even now, some kids they don't actually have the whole concept down...if the parents are willing to make their Asian kids study at a young age, then they actually have a step ahead. If they have a step ahead, they could start to understand other things.

As I asked, "What do you mean by other things?" Kyle continued, "Then, you can move on to pre-Algebra and Algebra and stuff like that...The multiplication tables are the basics. And if you don't have that basics down, then you won't be able to move on."

Kyle explained that students took Algebra I in middle school, Algebra II in high school, and then students moved on to pre-Calculus and Calculus. Kyle's remark indicated that the effect of mastering the times tables not only helped students achieve highly and become a top student at elementary school, it also helped students land in Honors programs at secondary school. Without a solid math training at home, Kyle suggested, students would not be "a step ahead," like most of the Asian students were.

In summary, Asian parents' figured worlds of getting ahead of the K-5 math curriculum led parents to engage their children in memorizing the multiplication facts and doing endless math worksheets. Such parental involvement in students' math learning resulted in Asian students getting good grades at elementary school. Through K-5 schooling, Asian students learned to associate their high-achieving status in math to the cultural persona of "top student" and "smart student." Being well-equipped with basic math skills, Asian students were then placed in Honors-track math as they moved onto middle school.

The challenging secondary math curriculum in Honors programs: Discouraging immigrant parents' participation in their figured worlds of getting ahead.

Mr. Ding: The [K-12] math education in the U.S. is really..., It [the curriculum design] is at least two years behind the Chinese education in math.

Shelley: you mean, what a 12th grader in the U.S. Honors math programs learns is the content of math that a 10th grader learns in China?

Mr. Ding: Yes. The only difference is the math here is written in English. We [immigrant parents] need to read and try to understand what the math problem is by figuring out the math language. After we figure out what the problem means, then we can solve the problem pretty fast... So, it's not the problem of whether we can solve the math problem or not. It's just it takes a while for us to read and understand the math language. When it comes to helping my kid with her math homework, that's the problem my wife and I encountered. The [math] problem itself is actually pretty simple to solve.

Shelley: So, you mean, when it comes to dealing with high school math problems here in the U.S....for immigrant parents, it actually tests your English level of understanding the math language, not your math ability level?

Mr. Ding: Exactly.

Chinese immigrant parents' involvement in their children's math learning was direct and strong at the elementary level of schooling. However, when their children moved on to middle school, and particularly to high school, parents found it challenging and discouraging to help their children with their school math assignments. Parents realized that they could no longer teach their children math or help their children with math because of the language barrier. Such a realization not only served to discourage parents' direct engagement and guidance in their children's math learning process, but also undermined their role in maintaining their figured worlds of getting ahead and demanding their children's participation. Furthermore, positioning their parents as "solving the math problem too slow," Asian students became aware that they needed to rely on themselves from now on if they were to continue to learn advanced math.

The Algebra II Honors course was commonly found to be challenging by students in this study. Many immigrant parents, including Alex Shui's father, Kyle Lin's father, Ella Wei's father, and Sophia Chou's mother, felt confident in helping their children with Algebra II if the problems were stated in Mandarin. However, it became very challenging for them when the math problem was written in English. Stella Ma, for example, felt that her father was smart and good at math and so sometimes asked him for math help. However, she found that she had to explain the math problem to her father in Mandarin first before he could provide the help she needed. Stella explained:

My dad is really good at math...He's really, really smart. The problem is when it comes to reading the problems. He knew how to do all the numbers. But he couldn't understand the math language. When you have to apply them in English words, he couldn't understand...Yah, it's most likely that they don't have the [English] ability to teach you what you're learning. In elementary or middle school, they probably can get by with helping you. When it comes to high school and beyond...It's not the parents teaching you.

Stella Ma was not the only student who found it frustrating that she could no longer rely on her parents to teach her math. Many other students in this study had similar experiences. Sophia Chou recalled her experience of asking her mom for help in her Algebra 2 homework:

My mom, she was a math major in college, but she doesn't know all the English terms for the math. So, it takes a really long time for me trying to get her to help me. So, I just gave up on that.

In terms of "getting her to help me," Sophia referred to how she first had to translate and explain the math problem to her mother, then Mrs. Chou needed to refresh her memory by reviewing the related math terms and definitions online. To obtain Mrs. Chou's answer to Sophia's question, the whole process took Sophia about half an hour or more. Sophia found it easier if she just asked a friend who was better than her at Algebra II for help. Since then, Sophia gave up on asking her mother for math help.

For Sophia's mother, she remembered that Sophia suffered a lot during the time she took Algebra II. Even though Mrs. Chou stepped in and helped Sophia, she did not and could not teach her much because her knowledge about Algebra II was a "long time ago." Needless to say, Mrs. Chou was not familiar with the math terms in English and she had to go online to regain her lost knowledge about Algebra II. Being positioned as "solving the math problem too slow" by her daughter, Mrs. Chou decided to withdraw her involvement in Sophia's math-learning process. After that, Mrs. Chou asked Sophia to do her math homework on her own. As she exclaimed during the interview:

Come on! It [the time I learned Algebra 2] has been a while... Who would remember that clearly... I have to review the definitions first. But they're in English. So, I need to translate them into Chinese first...I need to understand what it means in Mandarin before I can do the problem...So, basically, they [Sophia and her sister] have to be on their own.

Unlike Mrs. Chou, who was positioned by her daughter as "solving the math problems too slow," Mrs. Wei was positioned by her daughter Ella as "what you taught was wrong". In the process of helping Ella do her homework, Mrs. Wei often interpreted the math problem in the wrong way and thus got wrong

answers. Because it happened so many times, Ella eventually lost trust in her mother's math capability.

Mrs. Wei explained,

You [immigrant parents] no longer can take care of your children's homework. First, it's the English problem. How could you help? Her homework was in English even if you are pretty good at math...The presentation of our math problems [the math problem at Taiwan high school level] are not in a description format. Many of their [math problems at the U.S. high school level] are presented as a paragraph of description. If you interpret it wrong... [Then, you got the answer wrong.]

Because it happened for many times, then she [Ella] said "All you said and taught was all wrong." I thus told her "Fine. You go figure it out on your own"... Thanks to the internet, and that Ella's friends would help each other... So, that's the way she survived [her high school].

When the Asian students found their parents could no longer help them with their math learning, they realized that they needed to be on their own. "Going online," "asking friends who are good at math for help," and/or "having after-school tutoring class" became the three common approaches taken when they encountered problems in math. Their parents became the last resort for help and Asian students thus withdrew their participation from their parents' figured worlds of getting ahead of the U.S. math curriculum.

Meanwhile, for immigrant parents, realizing that they could no longer help their children with math due to their language barriers weakened their direct involvement and guidance in their children's math learning during high school. Requesting their children to study on their own, go online, or ask friends for help became common in these families. In other words, immigrant parents no longer became involved in their children's math learning directly. For some families, sending children to after-school tutoring centers became an approach to continue the parents' figured worlds of getting ahead of the American math

curriculum. For the rest, parents gradually withdrew their participation in their imaginary world of getting ahead.

In short, the challenging secondary math curriculum in Honors programs led to three results. Firstly, it discouraged the direct involvement of immigrant parents in their children's math-learning experiences due to their language barriers, and thus parents withdrew their participation in their figured worlds. Secondly, Asian students stopped their participation in their parents' figured worlds of getting ahead, because of their understanding that their parents could no longer help them with their math schoolwork. Thirdly, in positioning their parents as "solving the math problem too slow," Asian students became aware that they needed to rely on themselves from now on if they wanted to continue performing as the "top student" of the class in the way they did at elementary and/or middle school level.

The challenging secondary math curriculum: "In Honors, they would try to teach you fast."

It's kind of well-understood if you are a full semester behind in math, you're probably not able to make that up and move back to the Honors class again. So, I feel that it was sort of understood based on what the teacher was saying about the class differences in terms of the materials and the speed or the material's being moved. (Alex Shui)

In contrast to the "slow-paced" elementary math teaching, students felt that the secondary math curriculum in Honors programs was challenging. It was challenging in terms of the teaching speed (i.e., "fast-paced"), and the material moved fast compared to regular-level math programs. Alex Shui recalled that in his eighth grade, there was a distinct difference in math teaching and learning:

Because in level one, they would teach you the math that they're supposed to teach you. While in Honors, they would try to teach you fast and that would be an entire year ahead by the time you finish your eighth grade... so that you can jump into the Honors programs for high school. So, the difference [of math curriculum] between Level One and Honors would be an entire year.

The curriculum gap in math between Level One and Honors programs was described by Alex as “really, really big”. In addition to regular-track (i.e., Level One) and Honors-track programs in math, Alex’s school (Reagan High North) offered a double-up math program for students who excelled in math; taking two math courses in ninth grade, in this case Geometry Honors and Algebra II Honors.

More specifically, for students who took the Level One track, their sequence of math curriculum was: Algebra I (in Grade 9), Algebra II (in Grade 10), Trigonometry (in Grade 11), and Calculus (in Grade 12). For students who took the Honors-track, the sequence of math curriculum was: Geometry (in Grade 9), Algebra II (in Grade 10), pre-Calculus (in Grade 11), and AP Calculus AB (in Grade 12). For students who took the double-up track, the sequence of math curriculum was: Geometry and Algebra II (in Grade 9), pre-Calculus (in Grade 10), AP Calculus AB (in Grade 11) and AP Calculus BC (in Grade 12). AP Calculus BC was equivalent to the first year of a college level calculus course. In other words, the math curriculum gap between Level One students and double-up students was three to four semesters. Alex further used his experience of taking Algebra II to explain the curriculum gap:

I know that because...if you look at the curriculum, it’s really different from the Honors...Like um, for instance in Algebra II, Level One is “strict Algebra II,” Level Two I don’t know. For Honors, we finished everything about Algebra II by the third marking period and we learned a new topic called ‘Trigonometry’ by the fourth marking period. That kind of shows that the math moves quickly enough that it’s pretty much one quarter apart by the end of the sophomore year and it differentiates Level One and Honors.

In this study, there were six other students attending Reagan High North. Among these, seven students, one (Ella Wei) was in Level One math, three (Sophia Chou, Rita Ding, and Gloria Kung) were in Honors math, and three (Kyle Lin, Alex Shui, and Nathan Yang) were in the double-up math track. Alex’s comment on the “fast-paced” math teaching in Honors showed that for Kyle, Nathan, and Alex who took double-up math courses in 9th grade, they learned Geometry and Algebra II in three marking periods (i.e. three-quarters of a year) and Trigonometry in one marking period (i.e. a quarter of a year). That is, by the

time Alex, Kyle, and Nathan learned pre-Calculus (Honors) in 10th grade, they were one year ahead of Sophia, Rita, and Gloria (who took the Honors-track) who did not learn pre-Calculus Honors until 11th grade. Further, Alex, Kyle, and Nathan were two years ahead of Ella who did not learn Calculus until 12th grade.

Interestingly, according to Alex, teachers at his high school would explicitly tell students about the curriculum gap between the double-up math and Level-One/regular math programs. As Alex recalled:

[Teachers said] By the end of this course, it will be one semester ahead of the lower level in terms of the math class. By the end of your second-year class, you will be a full year ahead in math compared to Level One students. By your third year, you will be learning totally different math that Level One students will never be able to touch on. So... teachers will be very vocal and tell you that as an Honors student..., you will be learning significantly more rigorous math or significantly more difficult academic topics compared to some of your other peer students in your classes.

Alex Shui always took the highest-level math at his secondary school. During high school, Alex felt pressured to take the “double-up” math track because many of his friends took that route. The discourse of the pressure “not to fall back one level lower” had been recurring in Alex’s explanation for why he always took the highest-level math courses. He claimed that he started to feel pressured to stay in the Honors programs since he was in eighth grade:

By the time you hit eighth grade, if you are not in the Honors, you will be one level lower for the rest of the years...It’s a point where you *can’t* get across anymore, and you’re pretty stuck where you are... If you want to stay in the Honors tracking, you can’t afford to fall back to Level One at any point. Because if you fall back, you will never be able to catch up to the Honors...When high school comes, you will be placed either in Honors programs, you could go into double Honors

[programs}, which are like very, very top students, and you could even be dropped down to level one.

Alex felt pressured and thus decided to take double-up math programs in his freshman year of high school, not only because of learning about the curricular gap, but also because of peer pressure:

In eighth grade, there's a lot more pressures to excel especially in math because math is the only subject to double up to take two math classes in the same year to kind of move ahead in math...You know, a lot of my friends started to be more competitive with their grades. They talked about how they want to get into the double math so they can take multivariable calculus in their senior year. That's kind of pressure you know, "Oh, I don't want to be seen as an underachiever." So, I want to also double up the math.

It's kind of what I think for people who go into high school, for those who double up will...be set apart as top students of that grade. It's not really about what you want to do in life. It's just kind of like you can say that you are one of the top 2% students of the class.

Alex's excerpt showed that these curricular-tracking-related symbolic artifacts served as indices of students' social positioning in the Honors programs, and became more and more specified over time. Such institutionalized artifacts, produced and legitimated by the school curricular tracking, had developed from a broad sense of track levels (i.e., levels of classes, curricular gap, and moving ahead in math) to an increasingly specified sense of students' demonstrated academic achievement (i.e., grades and test scores). Specifically, students' use of artifacts for social positioning has evolved from the level of math taken (e.g., Level One, Honors, and double-up programs) to their test score within a math class.

Alex's notion of "you don't want to be seen as an underachiever..." suggested that the high-level math courses became an arena for Honors-track Asian students to compete for who was smart or smarter. Why? Because "the math curriculum is more precise in terms of determining where you were intellectually..."

as Alex asserted. That is, students had learned to associate levels of intelligence or smartness with the symbolic meanings of institutionalized math program tracking and test scores for social positioning.

In short, the “fast-paced” and challenging secondary math curriculum in Honors programs “taught” students two things. First, once an Honors-level student fell behind and dropped to the Level One track, it would be challenging for the student to catch up to the Honors track again due to the fast-paced nature of the secondary math curriculum in Honors programs. Students thus realized that there was a need to work hard to stay in the Honors-track if they wished not to be left behind. Secondly, from the symbolic meanings assigned by the curricular tracking, students learned that the higher the level of math class a student took (or was tracked to), the “smarter” the student was. Thus, Asian students started competing for being labeled as “smart” or “smarter” by taking the highest level of math programs. Working hard to keep up with the Honors-track math curriculum and struggling with competing for who was smart(er) in hard courses like Algebra II, and beyond, became an inevitable consequence for these high-achieving Asian students, thus shaping their high school experiences.

Struggle and Re-Authoring in Intensive Honors Math Courses: Asian Students’ Figured Worlds of Getting Ahead of Their Peers and Acting Smart

Shelley: you mean people tend to act that they are naturally smart?

Alex Shui: based on their grades they have, yes...To gauge how smart or how intelligent a person is...They [high schoolers] only gauge this person gets A’s in math, and that person gets C’s, so the person who gets A’s is smarter than the person who gets C’s.

The fast-paced high school Honors- and AP-track math curriculum led to two sources of struggle for these high-achieving Asian students. One was that they needed to work hard to stay in the Honors track because they knew that once they fell behind to Level One it would be challenging to get back to the Honors track again. The other was that students found their past positional advantages, such as being smart and good at math, were undermined because school grouped all the “smart” students together in the Honors programs. Surrounded by people who might be as smart as, or smarter than, themselves, Asian

students found it no longer easy to get ahead of the class or be the top students within their Honors-track classes.

Struggles within these contradictory discourses meant maintaining being top students (or not) and being better than their peers (or not). Students' struggles in keeping up with the high-track math curriculum (such as Algebra II, Trigonometry, pre-Calculus, Calculus AB, and Calculus BC) became an imagined world that Asian students needed to "answer," which offered them a space of self-re-authoring to reimagine or renegotiate what he or she should be like as a student. In other words, because these Asian students struggled in hard courses, such as Algebra II and beyond, they came to face the dilemma of whether they should regain their past position, or not. They needed to respond to their world: whether they wanted to resume their "lost" or "decaying" status: being smart or not; being good at math or not; to be better than their friends or not. No matter how students had responded to their struggles in the overwhelming and fast pace of high-track math courses, they had created and entered their figured worlds of getting ahead of their peer students. Such a renegotiation of self-identity shaped these Asian students' educational practices in their high school life – particularly for the top-tier students.

So, how did these Asian students solve their problems when they encountered learning difficulties in these intensive and fast-paced advanced math courses? Interestingly, many top-tier students in this study claimed that they despised those who received after-school tutoring and thus got good grades. The reason for belittling those who had private tutors was that it meant that "they are still dependent on parents, not on their own," as Kyle Lin explained, or "they are not naturally smart," as Alex Shui commented. Meanwhile, those who received regular after-school tutoring would be shy to let their friends know. They kept it "as a secret."

As most of the top-tier students in this study reported, the common approaches that they would take were: at first, they would study on their own and try to solve problems by themselves. "If we can't figure things out on our own, then we're failures as students," claimed Kyle Lin. Online resources, such as online classes at Stanford University or MIT or clips of YouTube videos, were major sources of support students found to study on their own or "to teach themselves". Secondly, if students could not figure

something out by themselves, “asking friends for help,” and “forming a group study” would be the second approach. Interestingly, although he had asked friends for math help, Alex Shui argued that there was a pressure to not admit to not knowing something in front of friends. Alex explained:

Like personally I don't have problems asking my friends occasionally for questions. But I just can't tell them “oh, I don't understand this thing.” Like I can ask them for a little thing like “how do you solve this problem” or “what is the equation for this end” or “how do you divide it something like that.” But I can't say “I don't know how to do things in general,” or “I don't know how to solve the math problems” anything like that... so I think Reagan High North students, we can ask little questions, but we can't admit that we don't understand something.

What Alex Shui did not express explicitly was that “admitting that he doesn't know and thus needs his friends' help” would be positioned by his peer students as being below those who understood the material. Or his peer friends would consider him as less smart than others. The same perception of “do not show that you don't understand in public” also influenced Asian students' learning behaviors at school. That is, “don't ask questions in class”, because no one asked questions in class. As Alex shared, “We didn't want to let other people know that we didn't understand...We don't want to make it appear that we are having trouble, even if we are.”

Gradually, students' peer pressure came into play in these high-achieving Asian students' worlds. Instead of competing for who was smarter or the smartest, Alex claimed that the pressure was more about “trying not to look stupid.” As he explained:

Once you reach like a higher level of classes, you basically are with the same group of students who are very smart. And then, even from that point, you're in classes with them, they never ask questions. And they try not to appear that they don't understand anything. Some of them probably do generally understand everything. But the pressure is there to try not to look stupid.

I wouldn't say that it's a competition that people compete to be on the top. But it definitely a competitive environment in that everyone doesn't want to be like a guy who's failing on all the tests or whatever. So, there's kind of pressure to motivate you to work hard. You don't need to be the best. It's not the kind of competition. It's a competition that you don't want to be the worst.

"Trying not to look stupid" and "acting naturally smart" were two sides of the same coin. Within the members who took high-level courses in math, their response to consolidate their figured worlds of getting ahead of their peer students was to not show their peers that they were having trouble, because none of the students looked like they were having trouble. "Acting naturally smart" and "getting well-prepared when people come to ask for math help" became a common social phenomenon among the top-tier Asian students at the school. The prevailing behaviors related to "acting naturally smart" included "not asking questions in class, getting ready to help other peer students to solve their math problems at school, and working harder at home to back up their smartness."

Interestingly, many students in this study said that those who spent an extra three or four hours studying at home, and thus went to bed very late, would pretend nothing had happened when at school. These students, such as Ella Wei, however, caught many of their peer friends falling asleep in class due to a lack of sleep. Ella Wei was placed in Level One math and intended to be friends with Asian students whom she deemed as smarter than her, so that she could ask them for math help. Based on her observation, Ella Wei explained, as an outsider of the "acting smart" group:

It's because they don't want you [to] go home and like "oh my God, that kid studied up to chapter 11. Now I want to study up to chapter 15, so I will be ahead of him." You know? They want others to be left behind. You always want to be the person who's on top. You never want other kids to be on top...Sometimes when you are on top, you don't want to give your spot away. Like no one gets to the top and then literally step down from the crown for another person to come up...No one wants to step down from the crown.

This process of renegotiation of the multiple contradictory discourses by Asian students is termed *orchestrating* by Holland et al. (1998), meaning that it is an internal process in which individuals are confronted by multiple inner voices in conflict (i.e., a self-contest process) in an attempt to redefine oneself in response to one's cultural world. This self-contest process, in turn, created the space for re-authoring by Asian students to create the figured worlds of getting ahead of their peer students. The result of such orchestration, self-renegotiation, and re-authoring became what Holland et al., (1998) term as "making worlds: ...new figured worlds...come about" (p. 272).

Through this re-authorship, Asian students' new figured worlds came into being; getting ahead of their peers. "Trying not to look stupid" and "acting smart", as well as "working hard for extra hours at home" and "pretending not to work hard at school", became prevailing approaches for Asian students to answer their imagined worlds. By doing so, they could avoid being positioned as "not naturally smart" or "less smart than others." As Holland and Lave (2009) argue, "local practice comes about in the encounters between people as they address and respond to each other while enacting cultural activities under conditions of...cultural-historical conjuncture" (p. 3). Consequently, such locally-produced and collective sociocultural practices served to consolidate Asian students' figured worlds of getting ahead of their peer students, and this transformed Asian students' learning identities of "being smart and good at math" from a social position to the disposition of a group.

Conclusion

Asian students' learning identities of "being smart and good at math" were tied up with their immigrant parents' early involvement in their math-learning experiences as well as the K-12 math curricular tracking. The K-5 math curriculum served as a cultural resource that opened up immigrant parents' figured worlds of "getting ahead of the American elementary math curriculum." Treating the K-5 math curriculum as "slow-paced," Chinese immigrant parents engaged their children in numerous math-related practices (i.e., memorizing the multiplication table and doing extra math practices and quizzes).

Immigrant parents' strong involvement in their children's K-5 math learning resulted in students achieving good grades at school, which subsequently triggered the co-development of Asian students'

being top of the class and feeling smart in comparison to other students, who performed less well.

Students learned to associate their math performance with the symbolic meanings of the school grading system. Being placed in Honors-track math in middle school became a “natural” and “normal” consequence for these Asian students.

The challenging high school high-track math curriculum discouraged immigrant parents from their long-term involvement in their children’s math-learning process due to their language barriers. Students also withdrew their participation from their parents’ figured worlds because their parents no could longer help them with math. Moreover, the overwhelming and fast pace of the high school curriculum and tracking led to struggles for the students, which generated their figured worlds of “getting ahead of peers and acting smart” – especially when students found themselves situated among a group of smart peers in their Honors-track classes, making their past positional advantages “shaky.”

In other words, the “fast-paced” secondary math curriculum and tracking triggered the co-development of Asian students’ lived worlds (e.g., getting ahead of their peers.) and the renegotiation of their academic identities (i.e., “to continue to be good at math” or not). Struggling in hard courses, such as Algebra II and beyond, created a space of re-authoring which produced a desire to maintain being smart (or not) and better than their peers (or not). “Not asking questions in class,” “getting ready to solve math problems when friends come to ask for help,” and “working hard at home to back up their smartness” became universal practices among these Honors-track students, as a claim for continuing their past positions of “being top and smart.” Such collective social practices helped consolidate Asian students’ figured worlds of “getting ahead of peer students,” transforming their social identities of “being smart and good at math” from a social position to a group disposition.

Chapter Five: The Figured Worlds of "Normal" Asians: The Racialized Identification of "Don't Be a Dumb Asian"

Those students in Reagan High North work very hard. They compete with each other all the time. Like my son, he is a perfectionist, and he has a really high standard for himself. Every time when he gets a bad grade, he is extremely harsh on himself. All I could do is to comfort him and say 'it's ok ...' As a parent, I have to pull him back instead of pushing him. (Kyle Lin's mother)

The theme of student peer pressure and competitiveness (i.e., to keep up with other students or outperform them) among high-achieving Asian students became immediately apparent when I conducted my first-round of interviews with my ten student participants and their parents. Many parent participants, like Nathan Yang's father, Stella Ma's mother, and Kyle Lin's mother reported that they had to pull their children back instead of pushing them to work hard. Particularly, Nathan Yang's father claimed that "for these adolescents, their parents' opinions are second to their peers...; it's their peer pressure to push them to work hard." The question was why did and how did "keep working hard" become a powerful and persistent phenomenon within this high-achieving student cohort?

This chapter shows how secondary curricular tracking produced artifacts (e.g., test scores, GPAs, and symbolic labels like Honors- and AP-track, particularly in math courses) that opened up students' figured worlds of normal Asians, and therefore mediated students' racialized identification processes and learning experiences. I identify three interactional institutionalized effects of curricular differentiation that co-evoked students' figured worlds and shaped their social positioning practices. They are (a) students' imagined academic hierarchy that their schools placed them in, (b) Asianized friendship cliques (i.e., students befriended people who went to the same classes with them), and (c) everyday social interactions (via the mechanism of school course schedule), which translated students' everyday hangout and social comparisons (Festinger, 1954) into social positioning. These three institutionalized effects of curricular tracking created the phenomenon (i.e., social context) of student peer pressure that Asian students lived in and responded to. Through everyday hangout and social positioning, students individually (and collectively) "figured out" the social norm (i.e., the rule, "put more effort and time into academic work

and be a high achiever” or “you can’t be a failed Asian”) that governed their figured worlds and orchestrated everyone to keep working hard in order to meet or exceed their peers’ academic marks.

Within this social context of student peer pressure, I then focus on students in the top ten percent of the class. This was a line that separated “A Asians” from “B Asians” based on their grades. I explore how they arrived at positional identities such as “smart Asians” or “normal Asians.” By examining their racialized discourse on their perceived peer pressure and competition elements (i.e., “you don’t want to be a dumb Asian” and “You don’t want to lose to people”), I show why ‘keep working hard’ became a collective behavior and persistent phenomenon within the whole Asian Honors- and AP-track cohort, which transformed students’ social positions into those of disposition or habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). Finally, in response to students’ imaginary world, the peer pressure of living up to the model minority stereotype, I explore students’ discursive positioning, that is “positioning by the cultural artifacts of discourse” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 137), to understand how students struggled and re-defined what it meant to be an Asian through re-negotiating their educational practices of “doing the Asian thing.” I use three students (i.e., Alex Shui, Rita Ding, and Ella Wei) as examples to demonstrate how students participated in or resisted the social practice of “doing the Asian thing.” Finally, I argue that such self-reauthoring served to deepen students’ “normal” Asian identities and localize the sociohistorical imagery of the model minority stereotype.

The Emergence and Solidification of the Figured Worlds of Normal Asians: Three Institutionalized Effects of Secondary Curricular Tracking

“Schools placed us into a hierarchy.”

I feel that there’s a sort of hierarchy in terms of academic performance...The school system itself forms a hierarchy of classes that they put people in ...When school starts to break students into Level One and Level Two students, um which I will say since middle school, sixth grade. And within Level One in sixth grade, there isn’t any slip going on. And eventually, students who are going to Honors and students who stay in Level One. But at the end [of middle school], it’s pretty apparent to see who’s ready to go to Honors and how’s going to stay at Level One. So from there, students will kind of build up their

differences in academic ability within the class, and you will continue to look for it and see that pattern through different classes, through Honors and AP classes stuff....So the school system has put a hierarchy in place, you know? (Alex Shui)

Asian students learned to position each other and developed their own positional identities by employing the symbolic artifacts created by their schools: curricular grouping and its responding institutional labels of ability level differentiation. Alex later claimed that the school tracking practices made students begin to judge each other based on academic performance. That is, the symbolic value and norm of the institutionally-defined categories shaped how students evaluated each other. As Alex explained,

I remember in sixth grade, I never thought about who in my class is smart or who's not as academically inclined as other people. But it was after we got placed into Level One and Level Two, we kind of had the awareness that Level Two students were students who were not academically as talented as we were . . . I feel that it kind of started when students tend to look at each other in academics . . . and judge each other based on their academic competence as opposed to any other character trait.

What Alex indicated was the institutional ideology behind tracking: a focus on meritocracy, individual attainment, and capacity (LeTendre, Hofer, & Shimizu, 2003). But the question is how did Alex come to position Level Two students as "not academically as talented as we (i.e., Level One) students"? Why did Alex believe that there was differentiated coursework with varying levels of academic content across levels? How did he come to believe that there was a differentiation of student ability? Alex explained:

Well, you know, based on everyday conversations, you ended up getting an idea, like when I was talking to my friends, and we (i.e., Level One students) touched upon the things that had to do with math. That's the little thing we would be talking about. That's just a kind of awareness that they (i.e., friends at Level Two) don't learn the same stuff as we learn and maybe we are a little faster than they are. And you know in addition to that, like they would talk about the topics that

had been covered by our class and you kind of noticed that Level One class was moving at a faster pace than Level Two. And the Honors class pace is faster than Level One, stuff like that. Shelley: so, you guys hung out and talked about grades and what you learned at school all the time?

Alex: Yeah. Sometimes, after we take a test or something, we would talk with other students about some of the questions. And if we were hanging out with students who were at Level Two, they would know that they don't understand because they would say "I don't know," things like that. Or they will talk about things, and we said, "oh yeah, we covered that a while ago."

Alex's explanation indicates that the institutional arrangement of channeling students into vertical differentiation within subjects shaped group members' perspectives toward using academic performance to evaluate each other. Further, the institutional categories created by ability differentiation and curricular tracking (such as Honors students or Level One, Level Two students) carried symbolic values that defined expected outcomes and perceived student academic ability (Meyer, 1980). That is, students learned "to attach meanings and associate specific groups with, different classes in tracked systems depending on the representation of identities in those classrooms" (Carter, 2010, p. 1536).

More specifically, students tended to view the higher tracks as offering complex materials, better teacher quality, strict course sequences, and more prestige with abundant opportunities for success (Gamoran & Berends, 1987; Oakes, 2005). On the other hand, students associated the lower tracks learning with a repetitive and less rigorous curriculum, slow-paced instruction, fewer materials, and restricted learning opportunities (Gamoran et al., 1987; Hallinan, 1987). Such differential symbolic values of curricular tracking allowed students to formally identify or position some individuals as better or more capable than others or vice versa (Oakes, 1987). This was reflected in Alex Shui's comments on the result of his school tracking policy:

People in Honors tend to think that they have the best that school has to offer academically. I feel that a lot of the Honors people don't act to be snobby. They don't act like "oh we are smarter than everybody else' at the school." But like I feel that there's a kind of understanding throughout the

entire high school that the Honors kids are really, really smart. “Don’t get into academic fights with them (i.e., Honors students) because they will win.” Something like that . . . The Level One kids are kind of smart and Level Two kids are a level lower down in terms of their academic abilities.

In addition to acknowledging within-school differences between Honors-track and Level-One or Level-Two students, Alex provided further details about what he meant by his perceived within-class hierarchy. The symbolic artifacts that Alex used to present the differentiation within his cohort of high-achieving students were expanded to specific artifacts: test scores and GPAs.

And within that (i.e., Honors and AP classes), usually there would be students who are a little bit ahead of the class, they already know the materials or learn the materials very quickly, compared to people who struggle and tend to make a lot of mistakes stuff like that. So based on that, there’s also a kind of hierarchy within the class itself where you have students who are able to get A’s in the class maybe without much effort or a little bit of effort, compared to those who you know who work really, really, really, hard and just able to get like a C. There are always gonna [be] great variations between students in terms of academic abilities and you know other students can see that.

In Alex’s case, differences occurred in the use of particular artifacts for positioning between middle and high school. When describing his early middle-school years, Alex used broader institutional labels of the tracking system (i.e., Level Two, Level One, Honors students) to position his peer students. In describing his late middle grades (i.e., 8th grade when students believed that how they performed in the 8th grade would determine which course level they would go to in high school), he used artifacts in a more specific way, GPAs and test scores, to describe the academic hierarchy he perceived within his cohort of high-performing students. Alex’s shift from general to specific artifact type when describing group membership testified the fact that upper-track students judged each other by academic performance.

Additionally, Alex’s positioning of Honors-track students as intelligent by nature/ability or by nurture/effort suggested a vast range of abilities within members of the higher-track. By the time students

enter high school, they have developed a sense of the existence of an academic hierarchy within their cohort because of institutionally defined categories of student ability and performance differentiation (Gamoran, 1986). Peter Ho reflected on his K-12 educational experience as a college student and made similar comments in the interview when asked about the moment he realized an academic hierarchy of everyone's achievement existed:

I think it was actually going into middle school that made me realize the hierarchy. When we went from 8th grade to high school, the school system decided to base our classes (either Honors or regular) by our grades in middle school. Therefore, once we stepped into high school, we already knew who was smarter than others just based on the classes we took. There were people we saw as really, really, smart even through middle school. They were famous for being the smartest people in the class and that carried on into high school.

In summary, this section shows that the long-term process of student positioning was repeatedly built by artifacts related to the curricular tracking system. The artifacts became increasingly specified over time: from a sense of broad track levels (i.e., levels of class), to a specified sense of students' demonstrated academic achievement (i.e., grades and test scores). Such artifacts, produced and legitimated by the school curricular tracking, not only indicated how smart one student was, they also served as indices of positioning so that students learned to judge each other's academic performance and then positioned themselves and others within their perceived academic hierarchy.

Asianized friendship cliques.

Nieto and Bode (2007) claimed that one consequence of tracking is that students "begin to believe that their placement in these groups is natural and a true reflection of whether they are 'smart,' 'average,' or 'dumb'" (p. 111). However, what interested me more was how these Honors/AP Asian students "took up" a positional identity in relation to others via the process of positioning each other. To answer this question, I needed to situate students' everyday social interactions within the institutionalized effect of the curricular differentiation: everyday class schedule and "Asianized" friendship groups. Accounting for

these factors allowed me to explore how peer pressure was produced through the students' everyday social interactions.

To illustrate this positional identification process, let me begin with Sophia Chou's experience explaining why most of her friends were Asian:

You friend with people who go to the same class with you... People start to... like go together with their own racial groups... I think it's mainly because in the elementary school, we weren't separated basically on our skills. But in middle school, you started being tracked and . . . so like ethnicity tends to cluster in terms of educational levels because a lot of Asians tend to go up to higher levels while everybody else is left behind I guess. So then that way you're already to be exposed to more Asian people so definitely you will have more Asian friends.

Sophia talked about her Asianized friendship pattern by situating herself in a given membership that "in Honors classes, they are mostly Asians." Hallinan and Williams (1989) and other scholars argued that students were more likely to form friendships with others in the same track than those in different tracks (also see Schwartz, 1981). "While personal characteristics of individual students and pairs of students have the strongest effects on friendship choices, organizational characteristics of the school, such as tracking, are also important (for a high school student to choose a same-race peer as a best friend)" (Hallinan et al., 1989, p. 67). Students tended to socialize with people who were like them, as Kubitscheck and Hallinan (1998) claim, "due to three dyadic bases of interpersonal attraction: propinquity, similarity, and status" (p. 1). Kyle Lin had a similar argument.

In middle school, I guess. That's the moment they (i.e., school teachers) start separating (students) by classes. And then most of my classmates are really all Asian kids. We have maybe at most two or three white kids. So, at that point, you kind of noticed "it's pretty much all Asian kids." . . . I hang out with my classmates more. They are most [*sic*] Asians and they are second generation. The people you spend most of the time [with] are the people in your class. If you see them for six hours a day, five days a week . . . yeah, you're going to spend time with them.

Kyle continued to talk about the major social groups at his high school and the clique that he belonged to:

In Reagan High North, there are a lot of different cliques or different groups. Usually Asian kids hang out with Asian kids and with a very few exceptions. For the Chinese, kind of like yellow Asian groups. There are two of them. There's one kind of preppy. I am not sure how to explain that . . . , kind of like choir and some are religious. They kind of mix with each other. And the other is my group. They are nerdy and Asian kids who take a lot of Honors and AP classes. And then a lot of times, we hang out with another nerdy Indian group. And then there's one kid who is also a nerdy Indian. But he takes Latin, so he hangs out with some nerdy white kids. So, um, sometimes all these groups are brought together and kind of form one big group. And there's also these other nerdy Indians...but they're...on their own. They are different...So the groups that I mostly hang out with are mostly Asian kids with some white kids mixed in. We usually do stuff together, go to movies, do projects. We usually see each other during classes.

Kyle predominantly socialized with Asian students who attended the same classes as he did. It signified an institutionalized effect caused by the track assignment: a racialized pattern of tracking and student peer worlds. Kyle Lin explained that "people are used to hang [*sic*] out with people who were similar to you." In Kyle's case, the similarity referred to students who are "nerdy" and "had immigrant parents." Kyle later defined "nerdy" as applying to those students who put effort into their grades and took many Honors and AP classes. Kyle also claimed that he actually did not have a chance to interact with Caucasian or African-American students. He emphasized the high school curriculum differentiation practices. And thus, the racial makeup of his friendship grouping with the same-race peers became more salient with higher racial separation.

In my school, we're separated by classes, skill levels. In my classes, I rarely see white people, one or two [maybe] and that's it. I don't think I have black or Latino [classmates]. I mean like math and sciences classes. But English [class] is a different story...Usually in high school, I don't really have a choice (of making friends with Caucasians or black people) because people that I friended with are in that typical 'A' Asian groups...So, once the clique of friends is formed, you don't really make friends with other people. You kind of stick with those people...And then from

there, you kind of stick with that group throughout . . . actually, it starts very early and throughout the years . . . Sometimes [since] elementary school. I said sometimes because elementary school is considered small . . . [but] usually [since] middle school, that's when you start having a few more [Asian] people.

Kyle defined 'A' as "what they're shooting for [in their] grade point average." Kyle's description reflects research that focused on social implications of curricular differentiation, that demonstrated in a variety of ways that "the social landscape is a racial landscape..., intertwined with the academic landscape", especially in high school (Rubin, 2001, p. 103; also see Oakes, 2005). In the event of Asian-American students' educational experiences for this study, the curriculum differentiation aggregated an increasing number of Asian students into the top-tier of the hierarchical academic tracking system. Students' academic and social status within the hierarchical groups tended to stay constant and endured over their secondary school years. Such tracking practices accompanied by school organizational arrangement, class schedules, created "social boundaries" (Carter, 2010), or "friendship segregation" (Moody, 2001) that prevented Asian Honors students from navigating alternative options of cross-racial friendship choices and social interaction.

The interweaving of race and the effects of curricular tracking with students' friend choices produced an inevitable consequence: an unbreakable and sustained Asianized friendship pattern within Asian students' social and academic worlds throughout their middle and high school years. In other words, the interplay of race and curriculum tracking produced two significant institutionalized effects: racialized friendship patterns (Oakes, 2005) and an institutionalized academic hierarchy of student performance (Gamoran, 1992; Oakes, 2005). As Hallinan and Sorensen (1985) argued, over time, the effects of membership in the same track increased the probability that a student would choose a peer (or some peers) as a best friend(s) from his or her class. Curriculum tracking and the organizational structure of class schedules supplied members of the Honors/AP track with a classroom composition: a learning environment where "most of my classmates are Asians," as Kyle Lin and Sophia Chou mentioned. Such a

structural condition thus facilitated Asian students' day-to-day social interaction predominantly with Asian-dominated Honors cohort members and within an Asianized friendship clique formation.

From everyday hangout to peer pressure: the social comparison process as social positioning.

According to Gamoran (1992), "social relations within friendship groups may promote differentiated attitudes and behavior in school" (p. 814). For example, high-track students tend to be more motivated, put forth greater effort, hold higher expectations for themselves, and show more positive and academically-oriented peer interaction compared to low-track students (Oakes, 2005). What were the implications for Asian Honor and/or AP students' social and academic lives in the context that "most of my classmates are Asians" at school? What role did students' social interactions with Asian Honors members play in the social and academic aspects of Asian students' school life? And what became salient in students' social and academic identifications during their mundane everyday social interaction? Kyle Lin responded,

So, back to middle school, your Honors class might be in a class of maybe 100 people. Once you are in 9th grade, you'll be cutting down into halves, meaning a half (out of that one hundred) might go to Level One. So, Level One might be bigger, and if you are in Honors, it might be more specific. Like Honors get down to 50 and put that into halves like in double Honors (math class) (i.e., 25 people). And there might be some shift to people...so that's where things start changing. If you are part of that 25 (i.e., 25 people in double Honors math classes), you are going to see those people for the next four years pretty much... Because in high school we are separated by academic levels. So usually the top 10 percent (students) would associate away from the other 90 percent...The top 10 percent usually associate with each other. This group goes to the same classes every day...your mindset and beliefs become reshaped.

Kyle Lin's excerpt suggests that because of school organization, more and more Asian students attended the same classes. Further, it implies an interesting element of social interaction among peers: social comparison (Festinger, 1954), which mediated to reshape his mindset. This interpersonal social comparison played a vital role in the dynamic relationship among Asian Honors students' self-evaluation,

social positioning, and academic performance. Festinger (1954), a social psychologist creating ‘social comparison theory,’ introduced the idea that an individual tended to make comparisons within his or her own group because the performance of significant others was a relevant resource that affected one’s own self-concept through interpersonal comparison processes. Festinger (1954) contended that “in the cases of abilities,... the action to reduce discrepancies interacts with the unidirectional push to do better and better” (p. 125) and generates “competitive behavior to protect one’s superiority...” (p. 126). Additionally, by comparing oneself to others allows the individuals to “seek information about the world and them in it” (Stets & Burke, 2014, p. 39; Festinger, 1954).

Wehrens, Buunk, Lubbers, Dijkstra, Kuyper, and Van Der Werf (2010) claimed that students emphasize academic performance-based comparisons especially after entering secondary school. “The need for social comparison is high...Because at this age, adolescents develop their identity...Social comparisons at this age may have relatively profound effects on students’ self-evaluation, self-concept, motivation and performances” (Wehrens et al., 2010, p. 204). For these Asian adolescents, the salience of the institutionalized effects of tracking (i.e., students’ perceived academic hierarchy, Asianized friendship group patterns, and everyday class schedules) provided them with social space to closely interact with their peers. Students spent most of their school time together, and naturally, their peer friends became important significant others to each other. However, why is it that peer pressure was the result of students’ everyday hangout? Ella Wei reflected on her K-12 experience as a college student and explained,

Because when you start talking to your friends, you start hanging out. It started with [OC: Ella mimicked conversations she had with her friends] “how’s your school?” “Oh my God, I hated the test on the other day. And what did you get?” And then from “what did you get,” . . . it became “Oh my God, I did better than you” or “I did worse than you...” [OC: Then, Ella talked to me] you realized that there’s pressure around you and you started comparing yourself to like “oh, how is this person doing in comparison to me?” You then get scared that “I am not going to get into

college because this girl is smarter than me and she does more [school-related work] than me.”

So, you will try to do more and take on more.

Ella continued,

Well, I mean, usually I do whatever I want. I feel that I have the freedom to do what I want. But when texting my friends, I asked “are you studying for the history test...?” They’re like “oh not yet, I need to study for my bio[logy] test...” I will be like, “all right, I am going to get a head start for my history because I don’t even take a bio [class] yet” . . . I guess it’s kind of like I have to study, I have to study, I have to study because everybody else is studying. I’m like they’re going to get good grades, and I want to keep up with them because they are my friends. If there are classes that I can’t keep up with them, how can I stay in the loop with them?

Ella’s explanation confused me as she did not take a biology class with her friend, therefore why did Ella’s friend’s preparation for her biology test create pressure for Ella? Why did this pressure lead Ella to decide that she wanted to spend more time on her history test preparation? Ella clarified her meaning and explained that she and her friend were taking the same history class. But her friend was taking more advanced courses (i.e., biology course) than her. Thus, Ella felt that she had fallen behind her friend at that point. Mead (1934) noted that a person’s self-image arises in the process of social experience and activity (i.e., through social interaction with other people) as a reflexive understanding of self and as a response to “the generalized other’s” (i.e., other members of the social group one belongs to) positive or negative feedback provided in social exchange. Holland et al. (1998) further elaborated on Mead’s notion by stating

When we do these things (e.g., thinking, speaking, gesturing, cultural exchange as forms of social and cultural work), we not only send messages (to ourselves and others) but also place “ourselves” in social fields, in degrees of relation to- affiliation with opposition to, and distance from-identifiable others. (Holland et al., 1998, p. 271)

In this case, Ella engaged in everyday conversations about her educational performance in comparison to others. Eventually, such social positioning enabled her to construct and interpret her own social

position in her perceived academic hierarchy in relation to others. That is, students' positional identities emerged out of the social interaction and comparison process (Stets & Burke, 2014). For Ella, by comparing her test scores with her best friends over time, she placed herself lower than her friends within her perceived academic hierarchical structure. Ella positioned herself as "not smart," compared to her friends. To maintain the friendship with her "smart" friends, which was meaningful and important to Ella as an adolescent, Ella realized that she needed to push herself to work hard with an effort to match her friends' level of ability. By doing so, it would allow her to stay socially connected with her "smart" friends or "to stay in the loop with them" in Ella's own words.

In other words, throughout the social comparison process, Ella learned to position herself as "less smart" than her friends who held higher statuses in the institutionalized academic hierarchy. Test scores or academic performances were cultural markers or artifacts that Ella used in the collective figured worlds of "normal Asians." Ella figured out the social norm, "put more effort and time into academic work and get high scores," as a way of being in her social world; she therefore decided to conform to the social norm. In so doing, she could keep up with her friends' pace and make a claim to her social position, so maintaining her clique membership. Ella's acts thus echoed Holland et al.'s (1998) idea that "positional identities are about acts that constitute relations of...affiliation" (p. 128).

Holland and her colleagues (1998) further argued that "positional identities have to do with the day-to-day and on-the-ground relations of power, deference, and entitlement, social affiliation and distance—with the social-interactional, social-relational structures of the lived world" (p. 127). So, did Ella imply that members of the Asian Honors/AP cohort, who were considered smarter than others within her social world, were more influential and had power over those who performed less well than them? If this was the case, then I could infer that in Asian students' figured worlds, students who were "smart" could occupy the positions of privilege and power that allow creation of a social norm (e.g., working hard to keep up with the group) that every member is required to follow. Similarly, would Asian students who failed to follow the social norm to keep up with clique members be "expelled" from the clique?

Interestingly, Ella claimed that this was not the case, however not because students who performed better than others would have more social power over others who performed less well. Instead, it was due to the way the school structured the course schedule. Ella gave me one example of how she lost a close friend because this friend did not manage to move up to the same level of classes as the rest of the members of her clique did.

I feel that it (i.e., comparing yourself to your friends) is your subconscious double-checking to see if you still fit in your friends...It's actually pretty funny. In middle school, we had one friend whom we went to high school with. We used to be really really close to. But we weren't close to her anymore in high school because she isn't in the same classes like we are...So...I feel like in order for you to become closer to some of your friends that you wanted to be, not to detach from your friends and feel you're left out of the group, you would start that you want to catch up with everyone else. So, like, "oh, everyone is in Honors class so I would try to be in Honors class and so on . . ." Because we didn't really see her (i.e., the friend who failed to catch up with Ella's clique) in class. She didn't play the same sports as we did. And she didn't do after-school activities. And maybe because she made new friends and we made new friends. You know..."

[Shelley: so, you mean, attending the same classes is important because that's how people make friends and stay in touch with each other?]

Ella: Uh-huh.

In general, while Ella talked about her peer pressure of "keeping up with her smart friends," she emphasized that her overall pressure was that she had to prove to everyone (including herself) that she deserved being in the Honors class. In Ella's words, "middle school is when you start Level One and Honors. And then that's when you want to be in the Honors to prove to everyone that you are smart... You're worthy of being in the Honors class." Through social interaction and exchange with her peers, Ella learned the set of values and ways of being that defined what it meant to be a member of the Honors-track student group.

Stella Ma, who went to a different high school (Reagan High South) than Ella Wei, shared a similar experience. All of Stella's classes were at AP or Honors levels. She talked about her struggle of maintaining a friendship with friends who failed to move up to the same level of classes with her.

I have two categories of friends. Most of my friends, just like me, we are a bunch of nerds. If we ever were talking on the phone or Facebook, we were always talking about homework. We never talked about anything else but homework... And then I have a couple of friends, like one of my best friends from middle school. [And my friend migrated from the Philippines when she was young.] Because I am in all APs and some Honors classes and she is in Level Two or Level One, there is a gap between us. So, even though she lives a couple of streets away from me, I haven't seen her almost a half year because whenever she asked me to hang out with her, I was doing my homework. She doesn't understand because . . . she doesn't do her homework. She doesn't care if she gets bad grades . . . She doesn't understand so she said that I don't make time for her. She said I should let go once for a while and hang out with her. But...

Some months later, in a conversation with Stella's mom about Stella's course load, Mrs. Ma spontaneously mentioned this particular friend of Stella's. The reason why Mrs. Ma brought up this conversation was because Stella was frequently overwhelmed by her AP course load. To finish her homework, Stella often stayed up late and often suffered from sleep deprivation. Mrs. Ma had been worried about her daughter's health condition. Thus, in Stella's senior year, Mrs. Ma took Stella to visit Chinese doctors on a regular basis. As Mrs. Ma recalled, one evening, Stella told her that she needed to go out with her friend. Stella had homework to do, but she chose to meet her friend first. Stella promised Mrs. Ma that she would "come back home on time and finish her homework." In Mrs. Ma's words,

My daughter has a good friend who is on the regular track. My daughter's and her friend's homework loads are hugely different. They live in different worlds. This girl invited my daughter to hang out with her after school for many many times. But often Stella had to turn her down because she had a lot of homework almost every day. One time, this girl told Stella that "you are no more my friend." In order to maintain this friendship, my daughter sometimes went out with

her even if she had a test the next day...But gradually, they don't have much to talk about and they're no more that close to each other.

Again, what Ella Wei, Stella Ma, and Stella's mother indicated was the symbolic value of what it meant to be a student in the Honors/AP track, that is the necessity of working hard and performing well. Additionally, the institutionalized effect of curriculum tracking limited students' social opportunities to interact with other students who did not attend the same class level. Tracking also created a gap between AP or Honors students and Level One or Level Two students regarding areas such as course load, everyday conversation topics, academic motivation, after-school time use, and daily school experience. Eventually, the institutionalized effects of curricular tracking functioned as a mechanism of student friendship formation based on academic performance that nurtured same-track friendships and punished cross-track friendships. To prevent loss of friendships that students had developed over years, Honors/AP students learned that they needed to work hard to catch up with their clique members, and not fall behind.

In short, the institutionalized effects such as academic hierarchy, Asianized friendship patterns, and everyday social interactions allowed group members to compare themselves to others in terms of academic performance and construct their social positions in relation to others. First, from their social interaction process, students figured out that curricular tracking, indexing social categories of students based on ability and academic performance, served as cultural resources (e.g., GPAs or test scores) for them to use for social positioning. Such cultural artifacts, whose values were legitimated by the school institution, became the essential means by which Asian students' figured worlds were generated, "collectively developed, individually learned, and made socially and personally powerful" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 61).

Furthermore, the social process of comparing one's academic performance to one's peers was integral to nurturing Asian students' figured worlds. The key space, where the comparison process operated in evoking students' positional identities and sustaining Asian students' cultural worlds, was in a student's evaluation (or "calculating" in Holland and her colleagues' term) of the degree to which one's academic stance matched the group norm that granted one clique membership (i.e., Honors-track membership).

Finally, the acts of hard work and high-score attainment functioned as a response to prevent the double institutionalized punishments from happening. That is, if one failed to perform well and downgraded to Level One, the student would lose his or her Honors membership as well as lose his or her clique membership and friendship with the Honors-track cohort. Thus, conforming to the social norm by working hard became the day-to-day collective social practice of the Asian students so that they could claim their Honors-track membership as well as clique membership within the Honors-track cohort.

From Social Positioning to Disposition: The Racialized Discourse on Students' Perceived Peer Pressure/Competition

In my school, everyone here is competing to win...It makes me competitive, too...Top people are very cutthroat...they compete everything. They constantly studying, doing activities. It's just too hard for me. I really only care about my own . . . grades. I don't need to compete with anyone else. I mean people sometimes do better than me and I get a little bit of like . . . I wish I could be a little bit more like them. But overall, it's not ...I mean I don't need to be the top one or anything. It won't really affect that much of my life. (Gloria Kung)

In this section, I focus on students in the top ten percent of the class (top ten or top-tier hereafter) within the Asian Honors group. This focus is because many of the students in this study indicated that the peer competitions of being smart Asians mainly exist in the top ten circle. First, I explain why the distinction of top ten cohort from the rest of the Honors students is important, in that this group of students was seriously involved in solidifying the figured worlds of normal Asians. Secondly, I pay close attention to the dynamics of social comparisons, competition, and social identities performed by the top-tier students by exploring their voices: “you don't want to be a dumb Asian” and “you don't want to lose to people” to illustrate the top-tier students' perceived peer pressure. By presenting the top-tier students' voices, I show how they used the model minority stereotype as a cultural resource to define their norms of academic performance. By so doing, it allows me to explain why peer competition to outperform others mostly occurred and circulated within this super high-achieving cohort.

Competition exists mainly within the top ten circle: A line that separates A Asians from B Asians.

Kyle Lin and Alex Shui talked about a similar idea, in that peer competition at their school was mainly sustained in the upper-level Asian groups where students were in the top ten percent of the class. “If you fall below that top ten percent, you become outside of that circle...” (i.e., outside of that peer competition), as Kyle asserted. If students fell outside of the top ten circle, they would feel less peer competition. Kyle explained that the peer pressure or competition did not exist until he had reached high school. To justify what he meant, Kyle reoriented me back to how the institutionalized categories of tracking shaped students’ labeling of each other.

You really don’t feel the pressure (i.e., peer competition) until high school. In middle school, we kind of feel it but it’s not there because the school doesn’t want to make that segregation. The top students (are) here. The middle students (are) here and the lower students (are) there. They usually just group top and middle (students) together and then the lower students and special needs students together. Like they make this category really broad in the school. And like in high school, they really define it. They really separate you and then they start showing who actually is at which level...like upper-middle, and the middle, then the lower-middle...they have a lot of categories...based on academic achievement... There’s competition...um. And the competition is mainly in the upper Asian group. Usually that’s at the top ten percent or so. But the tension spreads out. And usually the B Asians, I feel that they wouldn’t accept it (i.e., peer competition) as much.

Kyle Lin suggested that the tracking practice at high school, compared to middle school, scaled students into more nuanced categories. Based on academic achievement, the school transformed the existing academic hierarchy for the student body from a general hierarchy, which was structured by three layers: the top, the middle, and the lower in middle school, into a tight vertical structure – in which the detailed labels for the top category became upper-middle, middle, and lower-middle – based on

“competence level” afforded by curriculum tracking. But what did Kyle suggest by using the notion of “upper Asian group”?

As Holland et al. (1998) noted, “positional identities have to do with the day-to-day and on-the-ground relations of power, deference and entitlement, social affiliation and distance” (p. 127). Thus, we need to pay attention to “another facet of lived worlds, that of power, status, relative privilege, and their negotiation, and another facet of lived identities, that of one’s self as entitled or as disqualified and inappropriate” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 125). In other words, I need to uncover the hidden message of the “upper Asian groups” that Kyle expressed for the use of separating his cohort into different statuses of academic achievement. Also, how did this relate to the sociohistorical model of the Asian model minority stereotype?

Kyle: Back to middle school, and high school, you started being separated by academic levels.

Usually Asian kids are smarter. Um, somehow, most of us, we do better in academics . . .

When you see more and more Asian students in your class, you started to believe that the Asian stereotype is true.

Shelley: So, Asians in your school, did everyone try to fit in the Asian stereotype?

Kyle: They didn’t actively try to fit the stereotype, I think. They just came naturally. For my experience, I thought it was normal to get into Honors classes. I didn’t have to try hard to get into Honors classes . . . It’s just normal for us to be ahead of other people.

Shelley: It’s very abstract to me. How do you define that “normal”?

Kyle: So, basically, it comes out from the stereotype that Asian students who do fairly well and succeed fairly well. I mean at my school, because most of us are Asians, the stereotype wasn’t as strong. So, it’s not like all of the Asians were the A+ Asians. There were B Asians, C Asians, and failed Asians . . . I think there’s still a stereotype. It’s just not as strongly enforced, I guess. We don’t actively stereotype (people), it just happens. Um, like Asian kids, they just normally excel more and then they get put in the same classes together and they get ahead.

The aforementioned excerpts show that top-tier students internalized the model minority stereotype and lived up to the Asian stereotype. The social norm was “getting into Honors classes” and “performing well academically.” But what does it mean by “it (i.e., most of Asians perform better in academics) just happens”? Alex Shui provided me with the rationale of “what makes it just happen.”

[In 7th grade], I guess I started to notice that there was a separation in class [regarding Asian and students of other races]... Because probably you started making friends with your class and that became a separation and...the people that you interact with and you kind of form the groups. It started from your class (i.e., Honors class). So the Asians started to stick together and they're kind of pushing each other with that expectations “oh, we're Asians. We are good at math and science. And we are all going to grow up to be engineers and doctors and lawyers,” stuff like that. So...

Alex's opinions echoed the discussion in the last section, in which it was argued that students learned the group norm through social interaction and comparison. In the navigation of one's social position within the cohort, Kyle tended to see achieving high academic performance as a “natural” phenomenon without being aware of the existence of the group social norm. However, while Kyle could not detail what he meant by “it's just normal for us to be ahead of other people,” he claimed that “the higher [the academic status within the cohort] you get, the more you buy the stereotype...” He further broke the categories down:

Kyle: So, the competition was mainly in the upper higher ranking. But regardless the stereotype, I feel like not all the Asians try to buy that stereotype.

Shelley: So which group would buy that stereotype?

Kyle: The failed Asians, they didn't buy the stereotype. The B Asians kind of accept that they are not the best example of the stereotype. So they're kind of in between. And the A Asians are the primary example of the stereotype.

Shelley: Earlier you mentioned A plus Asians?

Kyle: Well, you could break down the group into more specific. So, the higher you get, the more they buy the stereotype. Mostly, there are some exceptions but usually that was the case.

Like our valedictorian, he is a great example of the stereotype typical Asian.

Shelley: Can you define that “typical Asian” for me?

Kyle: The stereotypical Asian person...It has changed a lot and depends where you are. Usually it's the person who studies a lot and gets really good grades. In most cases, their social skills are a little inept because they tend to study more than have social interactions . . . Usually, the stereotype typical Asian comes from a fairly wealthy family I would say because some of them have tutors stuff like that. And only rich families can afford tutors.

It was interesting to see how Kyle was skillful to use the model minority stereotype as a cultural resource to create racialized categories for positioning students based on academic performance. I thus further explored how Kyle defined those categories of Asians he mentioned (e.g., A Asians and B Asians). I asked him to define each category.

Shelley: You said, ‘failed Asian’ earlier?

Kyle: In terms of GPAs, usually the top-tier Asians were around (weighted GPAs of) 5.2-6; that's probably the top ten percent. And then, the next range is bigger, B [Asian] students would be between 4.5-5.2. and those below 4.5 are those who don't care and don't want to try....

Shelley: so, the C Asians are failed Asians?

Kyle: No, C is just a division (of grades). So, if your grades have consistently B's, then you have 5... Actually lower than 5 because our school mixed some classes...If your weighted GPAs is lower than 4, that means you get consistent Cs in all of your classes... Actually, it's better to say unweighted GPAs. So, all four would be A (Asian) students. Three would be B (Asian) students; two would be C (Asian) students . . .

Shelley: Then, how do you define “failed Asians?”

Kyle: The failed Asian is the Asian whose grades weren't that good, who didn't accomplish as much as other people. They didn't buy the stereotype.

Shelley: And how do you define ‘their graders aren’t that good?’

Kyle: There’s no definite standard. There’s no black and white issue. So, in most cases, Asians who are in Honors would be *the normal Asians*. Um, if you are in Level One or Level Two, you usually will be considered as a failed Asian because it honestly wasn’t that hard to get into Honors classes. So, um, these failed Asians, there’s a reason behind why they can’t get into the Honors classes. It’s possible that they don’t study or they have bad influences or got into alcohols [sic] stuff like that.

“Failed Asian” was a term that frequently emerged when I discussed with the top-tier student participants why they worked so hard. Sometimes, students used “dumb Asians” to convey a similar idea. Here, it is important to note that the connotation of “failed Asians” does not contain a definite standard of grades. What Kyle implied is that students’ academic performance was relational based on “the norm” established within the top-tier cohort. In this case, a failed Asian was a student of Asian descent who was not a “normal Asian,” meaning who was not in Honors classes.

Furthermore, as Wortham (2004) borrowed Bakhtin’s (1981) idea and claims that “an individual’s identity depends on social categories and processes..., individuals and groups do not create unique categories de novo, but must instead ‘rent’ categories from the society in order to make sense of themselves and others” (p. 165-167). In this case, the resources that top-tier Asian students like Kyle Lin employed to position themselves and others not only derived from the institutionalized effects of curriculum tracking, but also from the widely-circulating pattern of the model minority ideology. Asian students borrowed social categories regarding ways of seeing Asians from society. Ultimately, an Asianized academic hierarchy became vivid in these Asian students’ worlds.

In terms of social interaction, did Asians of different categories or Asians at different levels within their perceived academic hierarchy interact with each other on an everyday basis? With which category of Asians would the top-tier students socialize more on a daily basis? I thus asked Kyle Lin.

Shelley: So, the failed Asians, do you guys hang out with them?

Kyle: No . . . there is a clear distinction. The A Asians and B Asians usually have a lot of intermixing. You can usually find them in the same Honors classes . . . Honors and APs [classes] would consider the same level. There are several classes so there's a good chance you would just meet them stuff like that. Now for C Asians, they would be in Level One classes or Level Two classes. They usually hung out with white and black kids. There's a good chance that some of the people drank or smoked stuff like that.

What Kyle suggested again was how the school organization of courses structured students' social interaction styles and friendship patterns. The social space at school that enabled "A Asian" and "B Asian" students to interact and nurture friendships signified that higher-level students (i.e., the AP-level and Honors-level students) at Kyle's school routinely attended classes together in any subject except math or science. Such an institutional arrangement provided Honors students interactional opportunities for upward social comparisons (e.g., B Asians like Ella Wei, discussed earlier) with their AP-level counterparts (i.e., A or A+ Asians). Furthermore, what Kyle did not explicitly express was that, for "A Asian" students, interacting with the "B Asian" cohort generated motivation maintain their performance to stay ahead of their "B Asian" peers. In so doing, it would allow the "A Asians" to maintain their higher status, thus separating themselves from their B-Asian (and below) counterparts. In the following section, I explore the voices of the top-tier Asian students (i.e., A or A+ Asians), explaining why the peer competition and social positioning mainly occurred within the top ten cohort.

The voices of the top-tier students: "You don't want to be a dumb Asian."

I don't feel that I have to actually . . . be the very best because there's no real need for that. I mean of course, like identity comes to play once you're like you are one of the top . . . like academic performance at your school. And all of the kids got that designation for you, something like that, you know? I mean it's just like a call on you, you know, [you] kind of get the idea that the top ten schools (i.e., colleges) or so are all Asians and stuff. You realized that . . . a lot of Asians are the best scientists, you know? It's kind of a general stereotype . . . I don't think there's

a pressure to perform well just because you are Asian. I mean maybe a little bit. You don't want to fail . . . [You don't want to] be like a dumb Asian. (Victor Pan)

Victor Pan's overall GPA was 98.7 (on a 100-point scale) at Washington High and he considered himself in the top five percent of students in his class (out of 440). He was not the only student who mentioned "you don't want to be a dumb Asian," which was a persistent statement across several students in this study. In fact, many student participants who were members of the top ten percent of their respective classes expressed similar ideas when discussing what propelled them to work hard. In the conversations, there were other locally produced terms related to "dumb Asians," such as "a failed Asian" or "Asian failure", as mentioned in the last section.

Dumb Asians are...scorned upon by the Asian community in our school, I guess because Asians...they must be smart...I mean it's not that scorn really. It's more like...here's a joke in general like 'why are you not that smart?'... and I mean there are few kids who... perform poorly and yeah... I guess they just like don't fit in with Asians as much. They just hang out with White kids and do drugs, be like Jocks. (Victor Pan)

'Asians fail' is that we joke about that if you got a B+ and you are screwed. (Victor Pan)

Victor later explained that at his school, if a student who was ethnically an Asian and who was not academically high performing, "then, people will not look at you the same.". What Victor suggested was that this relatively low-performing Asian student would not fit in with the high-performing Asian community nor be accepted by its members. Thus, this student would not obtain any friendship from the high-performing Asians and would therefore be forced to turn to other groups for friendship. Again, Victor's "figuring" of the social experience at his school confirmed what I discussed earlier regarding the educational experience of the Asianized friendship cliques. In other words, if an Asian student academically falls behind his high-achieving Asian peers, it would be highly likely for him or her to encounter a corresponding consequence: leaving his or her social community. To prevent losing a normal Asian membership from happening, Honors/AP students were motivated to work hard to maintain their friendships as well as claim their membership.

However, what did it mean by “people will look at you the same or differently?” Victor’s explanation focused on the social interaction process from a majority-minority perspective within the Asian student community. Such a majority-minority perspective played out to be the institutionalized effect of curriculum tracking: aggregating an increasing number of Asian students in advanced classes throughout secondary school. Institutionalized effects like this shaped students’ academic, racial, and social landscapes (Oakes, 1985), as I discussed earlier.

Because like . . . if there’s a hundred of Asians at our school. [In fact,] it’s more than 100 in our class, but I narrow it down to one hundred. Out of this one hundred, there is 90% [of Asian students] that are academically umm like . . . they are capable of performing well, and then there are 10% that are different, right? People expect to see you as the 90% because there are so many Asians just there, doing well. And if you are so different from them, people are like ‘why are you not the same,’ you know? And then they will pick up that difference and it’s how they’re gonna treat you, being like the ugly duckling of the Asian community. But like if you are the ugly duckling of the Asian community, it doesn’t mean you have to make yourself stay within the Asian community. A lot of them just hang out with the white community. They don’t really care at all and they don’t necessarily want to associate themselves with Asians. There’s a lot, a lot of bunches of people do that and I don’t personally think that’s bad . . . I don’t think that if you are Asian, you have to be part of the Asian community . . . things are like academically well performing. (Victor Pan)

Victor’s description suggested that the overwhelmingly large number of high-performing Asian students and their academic performance served as an unspoken norm that defined what it meant to be a member of the Asian community at his school, as being “capable of performing well.” The “ugly duckling of the Asian community” described an Asian student whose academic performance was relatively low, compared to the majority of the community. Victor explicitly noted that the ugly duckling had the choice of *not* following the rule: caring about grades like most Asians did. But the inescapable consequence of such a choice was to give up his or her “Asian” identity and leave the Asian community.

In other words, if this relatively low-achieving student did not wish to be positioned as “an ugly duckling,” the only choice that he or she could make was to strive to improve his or her academic performance. Using such a rule enabled him or her to un-tag him or herself from the ugly-duckling position and claim membership of the normal Asian cohort. That is to say, being a relatively low-achiever was not compatible with the status of being a member of the majority Asian group. One had to make the choice of taking up which identity to perform. Such a choice would result in different educational trajectories: upward or downward. Performing poorly would lead to the loss of one’s membership within the dominant Asian community where most students were relatively high-achievers. Thus, to be an Asian required a threshold to be surpassed: performing well as a normal Asian.

Victor’s statement of “you don’t have to be part of the well-performing Asian community” suggested that one had the choice of buying the ticket to Asian membership or not. Victor’s assertion further allowed me to revisit and examine Ella Wei’s experience. To reiterate, when Ella positioned herself as relatively less competent than her better-off friends, she had the desire for self-improvement, and she *chose to* work hard(er). Ella made the choice to follow the group norm and to improve her performance because she wanted to use that approach to claim and keep her membership and belongingness to her Asian friendship clique. As Ella Wei reflected on the discussion about the peer pressure she perceived around her,

Peer pressures...it depends on who you friend with. So, if you choose white friends and don’t constantly talk about grades and compare yourself to other people, you won’t feel too competitive. But obviously, if you choose friends who don’t care about grades or school, and that won’t affect you...It (i.e., peer pressure) just really depends on which group of people you hang out with. (Ella Wei)

In summary, the ability-grouping practices not only constrained choices of cross-race friendships accessible to Asian students, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, as curricular tracking also restricted “the choices available to students . . . for social comparisons of abilities and thereby influence the frame of reference students use for self-assessment” (Reuman, 1989, p. 178). For an Honor-Level

(and above) student of Asian descent, the choice of becoming a member of the dominant Asian group at school indicates an unspoken rule: a commitment to keeping up with the Asian majority by working hard academically.

Failing to keep up academically and thus performing relatively poorly would cause two interrelated consequences. One is to fall behind the group, possibly dropping off to Level One, which would mean a downward track change in an individual's educational trajectory, and the other it to lose his or her Asian membership for two reasons. The first is a difference in course schedule which would make it difficult for students who are not on the same track to keep in touch and maintain friendships on a regular daily basis. The second is that the student who dropped to Level One would be less likely to be accepted by the (normal) Asian crowd. This would mean that a student's years of friendship that had developed since elementary school could gradually disappear. So, the choice was stark to the students: "to be an ugly duckling or not."

The competition within the top-tier students: "You don't want to lose to people."

For a top-tier student, the hidden message behind his or her claim "you don't want to be a dumb Asian" indicated that being a dumb Asian would lead to being positioned as an other, resulting in a loss of his or her connection with the normal Asian community. To avoid such a scenario from happening, one needed to maintain progress and keep up with his or her Asian cohort by working hard academically. Earlier, I discussed the connotation of "people look at you differently" in the ugly duckling section. In this section, I explore what it means by "people look at you the same." Specifically, what did that "Asian community" look like from an insider's perspective regarding social interaction or comparison? Here is Victor's version of his description "90% of the Asian community."

A lot of Asians they just hang out together. They just form an Asian knot . . . like a giant community. I mean that there are many communities, many circles with a lot of Asian people. But like in general, it's like all of the small communities, and we know each other very well... There's a sense that you don't want your friends [to] laugh at you because you perform poorly on a test anything like that. I think it goes around like the middle school where people are more

conscious about their test scores. You would like [to] compare to your friends like “oh, what [score] do you get?” Things like that. It’s just like a sense of competition, and you don’t want to lose... You just put that sense like “I just don’t want to lose to people,” you know?... I mean being a loser is a temporary thing in that sense... but it’s just more personal on like friend level. You don’t want to lose and [you want to] be cool... you know? (Victor Pan)

Victor’s excerpt indicates that the effects of tracking through secondary school led students to place ever greater value on test scores. Further, through everyday social comparison experiences, the top-tier Asian students individually tended to compare themselves with similar others “to get an accurate evaluation of one’s abilities” (Stets & Burke, 2014, p. 39). Meanwhile, through the social interaction process, students learned that performing relatively poorly, compared to the rest of the high-achieving group would result in losing one’s membership and one’s social status in that group.

Students, therefore, had developed an understanding of, or they had “figured out,” the importance of academic performance on friendship maintenance. “Keep performing well” persisted as an intentional behavior to reduce discrepancies between their own and other high-achievers’ level of performance. Most importantly, when Victor claimed that he wanted to perform well in order not to lose friends, he was actually implying a salient consequence of everyday student interactions and social comparison amongst the relatively high-achieving members: peer pressure and competition with “a focus on demonstrating competence by performing better than other students” (Bergin & Cooks, 2000, p. 442).

I began to detect the phenomenon of student peer pressure and competition even after only three student interviews had been completed. I therefore decided to ask questions explicitly regarding student peer pressure with my next student interviewee, Nathan Yang, a self-reported member of the top-three percent of students with an unweighted GPA of 3.9. Nathan provided his version of peer pressure around him.

Nathan: In our school, especially we have a large Asian population, there’s a lot of peer pressure.

And I think that’s what really drove me to be as the best as I can. Because without so much pressure . . . like I have a friend who goes to all the clubs, has really good GPAs,

really good SAT scores, and if he weren't in my life, I wouldn't have followed the same drive, the same academic drive, pushing myself for doing better. A lot of people might think peer pressure might hurt you, but I think at our school, everyone around you is like pushing for perfect scores, perfect SAT scores. I think that's what really pushes me to try hard, to try my best.

Shelley: Is there any bad implication?

Nathan: Peer pressure definitely helps me. But by the same token, it's definitely like . . . brought me down sometimes because I always compare myself to people who are better than me. I would ask myself like why can't I be like them or what will make me different [if I] move to the next level. But . . . like . . . at that moment, I was already on the upper [level] of our school.

Even though Nathan recognized the downside of peer pressure and competition, resulting in high anxiety levels, he continued to emphasize the significant role of peer pressure in his life. He stated: the pressure "push[es] me to be better... because naturally, you want to be the best. You want to stand out, just like in general for colleges and jobs... for everything." Nathan claimed that he always compared himself with people who performed better than he did. But unlike other students in this study, Nathan rarely mentioned if he compared his test scores to those of his friends to understand their relative positions. However, he shared an example of how he compared himself to his classmates secretly. That is, through observation:

There was one kid who became the valedictorian. He always studied extra texts for national competitions. In the home room [at school], every morning, he would have extra textbooks readings in spite of what we had. That was really inspiring me. I was like "what am I doing? I am just here writing my homework, and he is studying for his national competitions." That was really pushing me to take more initiatives on my own.

Nathan maintained that the competition amongst his peers was a friendly competition. Nathan's friends and he helped each other regarding the fields of schoolwork or extracurricular activities such as

joining academic clubs and doing projects together for regional competitions. Similar to Nathan's reflection, Alex Shui thought peer competition was friendly competition. For example, in high school, Alex secretly chose a friend who was better than him in terms of academic performance and sports (i.e., Alex and his friend attended the same classes and a sports club). "I would try to beat him in addition to academics . . . try to prove to myself that I was better than him."

By reiterating the purpose of why he wanted to constantly keep improving himself, Alex re-confirmed the importance of friendship for secondary schoolers and of negotiating ways of obtaining a ticket to an Asianized clique membership at school. As Alex explained, "in high school, you want to be accepted... Students judge people how smart they are based on their GPAs." But "what happens to people who are not as smart as you guys?" I asked. Alex gave me an example about his own experience of failing to keep up with friends that he used to be close to, resulting in losing his clique membership.

Alex: I mean my friends or I will not be like hostile, saying like "you got a B in the class. I don't want to hang out with you anymore." I feel that there's definitely a falloff in terms of our respect for a person who used to get A's [if the person started to get B grades]. But if we knew that the person did very very poorly in the class and we would kind of tease him. It's kind of a bad thing I know because you shouldn't judge people based on their grades or things like that. But in high school, I feel that we tend to do a lot of judgments based on how well other people are academically. I have instances like people that I used to be close to. They kept going up. They're really way up to the top. Eventually they potentially became valedictorians . . . They came to interact with me a lot less . . . it's not a point where I talked to them and they ignored me. They won't actively seek me out and hang out with me or anything like that. So that's kind of . . . you know?

Shelley: You mean they ignored you when you talked to them?

Alex: I wouldn't say they would ignore me. If I say "hi," they would say "hi" back. It's just that you know they wouldn't actively seek me out, engage me with any kind of social interactions, you know? They wouldn't message me on the Facebook and see how I am

doing or invite me to some kind of party anything like that. So, I guess they wouldn't be like my friends who put that kind of effort to interact with me.

Alex's description demonstrated his realization that his access to that valedictorian club was minimized due to his "low" position in relation to those potential valedictorian candidates. What surprised me was that Alex, who self-reported as a top-one percent student of his class with an unweighted GPAs of 3.85, still had a feeling of being excluded and unaccepted by members of the very top group. This incident echoed what other students claimed earlier about the high intensity of competition in Alex's high school even though many students in this study claimed "it's a friendly competition."

Akin to the Honors-track students (i.e., those below the top-ten percent cohort), the top-tier students also positioned themselves based on academic performance, which served as an indicator of how smart a person was. The top-tier students tended to separate themselves from those whom they deemed "less smart" than them. However, in behavior that was identical to that of the Honors-track students, the top-tier students like Alex and Nathan who were positioned as "not like a potential valedictorian type" still made the choice to maintain their strong work ethic in order to prove to themselves that they could perform better than those "very top" students.

Furthermore, for the top-tier cohort, "smartness" and "test scores or GPAs" became identical and interchangeable markers for students relative self-positioning. The interplay of smartness and test scores again confirmed the institutionalized effects of curriculum tracking; the symbolic values that Honors/AP classes convey and the academic hierarchy that I discussed earlier. Meanwhile, Alex's schooling experience showed that students not only learned to employ academic performance as a cultural script to position each other, as they also had figured out that academic performance is the cultural resource to use for labeling or putting value on each student. Additionally, academic performance became another reference for students to include or exclude their clique members. Therefore, the fear of losing one's group membership due to failing to match his or her friends' academic level existed within the top-tier cohort as well.

Therefore, due to student peer pressure, did every member of the top-tier cohort need to work hard to race to the top? Victor reminded me that this was not the case. He contended that, “you don’t have to be the best... You can’t always be the best [because a lot of Asians are] really, really, competitive and they are really, really, smart . . . I had been taking classes with these people since sixth grade.” Victor continued,

You can’t always be the best of everything... especially when you are friends with [people] who are really on top [of the class] ... You know that you are like on the similar performance level. [In fact] it’s a lot more fun [because] it’s not that you win all the time or like you lose all the time. it’s just that you remind each other that . . . you just want to keep performing well... And eventually you realize that you are in the competition with your friends. It’s unspoken but it’s out there and you know it. Everyone knows it very well. It’s not like severely impacting your friendship or anything like that. It’s just there to drive you on.

Similar to Victor’s statement, Kyle claimed that hanging out with the same group of friends over a timespan of years meant that they would start influencing each other’s ways of thinking or behaving. In Kyle’s case, the mindset of “working to be the best” was the result of his social interaction with his peers.

Eventually, I saw my classmates worrying about the same things. Everyone started having the same mindset or a lot of people started having the same mindset... [The mindset] to always go forward to push for the top. That’s kind of what happens when you are in classes with the top-five percent or top-ten percent [students]. Um, the idea of keeping on working to be the best.

Covington (1989) argued that while competition seems to be almost inevitable in most classrooms, competition in fact was “generated in part by a minority of students who define[d] their worth in a competitive way” (p. 98). Although Kyle Lin and Victor Pan had different views on whether a member of the top ten needed to race to the very top of their class, both of them pointed to the same nature of the classrooms they were exposed to: the competitive dynamics of their learning environment that their school (the tracking) and the top-tier students co-constructed.

More specifically, through academic tracking and its institutionalized effects, Asian students, especially the top-ten percent students, were oriented toward a particular way and style of being an Asian student. Engaging in everyday conversations and comparisons with friends about each other's academic performance allowed an Asian student's opportunities to figure out their own relative social position, either lower or higher or similar compared to their friends' statuses. The self-perceived achievement-related discrepancies between self and others through daily social interaction and comparison thus generated peer pressure among students and motivations for the student to work hard(er). Particular discourses for maintaining membership were created, valued, shared, and widely circulated, "Don't be a failed Asian," as a standard for the purpose of retaining one's membership within the Asian Honors students' figured worlds. "Keep working hard in order to keep up with your peers" thus made sense to the participants of normal Asian figured worlds and became a collective social practice.

In summary, Holland et al. (1998) argued that "localized figured worlds have their own valued qualities, their own means of assessing social worth" (p. 128-129). In the world of normal Asians, which was collectively figured and shared among the Honors and AP cohorts, students were ranked and positioned by their academic performance with more specific differences of test scores within their imagined academic hierarchy. Such an institutionalized effect of curricular tracking offered symbolic artifacts for Asian students in their everyday social interactions and comparisons, which allowed them to position themselves successfully within the classroom hierarchies. Students' recognized peer pressure and eagerness to belong propelled them to actively participate in this virtual reality. Asian students' figured worlds of normal Asians were thus successfully mobilized, localized, and shared socially and culturally. This was done through the continual participation in mundane, day-to-day, social interactions and comparisons amongst Honors- and AP-tracks students.

Re-Authoring: Avoiding Social Shame and the Localization and the Activation of the Sociohistorical Imageries of the Model Minority Stereotype

After I got into Honors classes... the majority of them became Asians... So, the Asians started to stick together and they're kind of pushing each other with that expectation "oh, we're Asians. We

are good at math and science. And we are going to grow up to be engineering and doctors and lawyers, stuff like that.” (Alex Shui)

In my process of unraveling the myth of why and how Asian students worked so hard and took up the model minority identities (such as, “You don’t want to be a dumb Asian”), I found that Asian students had understood and advanced their tools (or means or symbolic artifacts) in their discursive construction of making sense of their figured worlds. Through the secondary schooling, such a tool was transformed *from* the curricular tracking resources (i.e., test scores, GPAs, and labels like Honors or AP classes) alone *to* the hybrid of the curricular tracking resources and racial terms: the two major essences that characterized the Asian model minority stereotype. Such a specific way of employing the model minority stereotype as a primary cultural resource to construct one’s learning experience and everyday social interactions with peers in the practice of positioning this local meaning-making process not only occurred among the A Asian cohort’s learning and social identification but also the B Asian group’s learning and social identification at school.

Generally speaking, Asian students became aware of the differences between Asians and their peers of other racial backgrounds based on academic performance (particularly in math) at school. Through their ability-based tracking experiences, Asian students found more Asian peers in their middle school classes (particularly in math Honors classes), and later they found that their classmates in high school Honors-level or AP-level classes in math were mostly Asians. These Asian students discerned and came to believe that the Asian stereotype is real: they viewed Asians as indeed being intelligent and good at math. Thus, the widely circulated pattern of the model minority stereotype began to take effect in these Asian groups. Asian students therefore started using the sociohistorical model of the Asian-related stereotype as a social norm to define what were anticipated and acceptable behaviors and what were undesirable educational practices or results. For example, that Asians are supposed to be smart and good at math or an Asian student without A’s is a “sin.”

This section explores the Asian students’ discursive positioning, “positioning by the cultural artifacts of discourse” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 137), to understand how the students’ social identities of being a

“normal Asian” became thickened and habitualized; and how this subsequently influenced the Asian students’ educational practices. For data analysis, I treat students’ struggles to live up to the model minority stereotype as a space for self-reauthoring as a response to multiple inner conflictual voices. I argue that this process of self-reauthoring served to localize and consolidate the sociohistorical model of the Asian model minority stereotype, making this sociohistorical model activated, sustained, and widely circulated overtime. More specifically, I explore how the students employed the model minority stereotypes (i.e., the racial terms) for self-renegotiation or social positioning, which later shaped their educational practices as a response to their imagined worlds of normal Asians. Analyzing the Asian-related racialized discourse offered an additional means of interpreting how Asian students’ social identification transited from social position to disposition.

In short, the Asian adolescents’ vulnerability to the kind of social pressure of living up to the model minority stereotypes highlighted their high school experience. Their peer pressure, produced through their everyday social interactions and social positioning throughout their secondary education, provided opportunities for self-renegotiation, reinterpretation of their positioning within their perceived academic hierarchy, and re-shaping their educational practices. I found that the outcome of this self-reauthoring process was largely reproductive rather than transformative, meaning the students *decided* to comply with the “Asian norm” as an answer to remake the world in which they live, rather than abandon the rule. Through this self-refashioning process, students created their own meanings and developed dispositions (or students habitualized) in response to their perceived peer pressure and other figured worlds; and reoriented their educational behaviors and practices.

Why did the Asian students decide to hold on to and utilize the model minority stereotype as a cultural resource for sense-remaking, instead of creating something new? The vital essence for the students to make such a decision lay in whether the student wanted to claim his or her Asian clique membership or not, as I discussed in the first section, from the institutionalized effects of curricular tracking. However, even though students’ self-reauthoring was a reproductive process of the model minority stereotype, the

question was to what degree Asian students accepted, rejected or negotiated the Asian-stereotypical identities being offered to them?

Below, I present the Asian students' worldview of the peer pressure that surrounded them and that made them feel a need to "keep up with the Joneses" (termed by Rita Wei) or "blindly follow the crowd" (termed by Kyle Lin). First, I show the locally-produced content of the model minority stereotype that students used as their cultural resources to describe their peer pressure. These racial terms served as a means to "publish" the students' social identities that they had internalized as well as to position themselves and others. Then, I selected three students' experiences as examples to illustrate how they used their racialized artifacts to answer their perceived worlds of normal Asians, and what decisions they made via self-reauthoring, which shaped their educational practices and social worlds.

Saying and doing "the Asian thing": The ideology and practices of the localized model minority stereotype.

What was in the localized model of the model minority ideology in Asian students' figured worlds of the "normal" Asian? Below is a selected collection from my student participants.

"If you don't do well, you are DisgrAsian." (i.e. 'Asians who disgrace their parents') (Stella Ma)

"The expectation that Asians are smart. They think quickly and they understand math very, very quickly. They are expected to be excelling. They're expected to get A's." (Alex Shui)

"The only word we use is 'Asian fail.' You're a bad Asian if you get a B." (Ella Wei)

"You do well because you're Asian." (Stella Ma)

"We have the same term [i.e., failure Asian] called disgrAsian. Like, you are an Asian, but you're disgraced . . . so disgrAsian." (Stella Ma)

"If you didn't get an A, for us, that's an Asian failing." (Rita Ding)

"Asians can't get a B because they are Asians not Bsians." (Kyle Lin)

"Oh, wait. You are Asian. You're supposed to be doing better. You should be getting better grades." (Kyle Lin)

"They (i.e., Asians) are mostly white if they don't get super high scores." (Alex Shui)

“I do know a lot of Asian people in Level One and a lot of Asian people in Level Two. It’s not that they lose their Asian status. Because they’re no longer getting all A’s. It’s just that you’re no longer stereotypical Asians... We just call them whitewashed. Or we say they’re kind of blended with American culture of not academically excelling.” (Alex Shui)

“Anything lower than A minus is considered as Asian failing.” (Alex Shui)

“An Asian without A’s is a sin.” (Alex Shui)

“Oh, you know? You are Asian. You should be good at math.” (Alex Shui)

“Oh, you are mostly white because you’re not getting As.” (Alex Shui)

“We know like ‘Asian fails. Everyone jokes about that if you get a B+ and you are screwed.’”
(Victor Pan)

“You are not Asian if you don’t get straight As.” (Alex Shui)

“It would be a surprise if an Asian wasn’t in Honors classes.” (Rita Ding)

“If I do bad on a test, a friend who’s not Asian would be like ‘You are an Asian. How could that happen? You are an Asian!’” (Stella Ma)

“Asian stereotype? (Stella Started laughing) I mean . . . (it’s) like pressure or things we have to hold on our shoulders because a lot of people *do* expect us to do well. . . . They expect you to do well because they think that Asians do well on everything.” (Stella Ma)

“It’s kind of you’re expected to do well, not you’re expected to work hard. People don’t see your labor work because they think that since you’re born Asian, you know how to do well on these things. You don’t need to work hard to get what you have.” (Stella Ma)

“I mean, in school, sometimes I do well, and they’re saying ‘oh, damn Asian’. No! It’s not because I am Asian. It’s because I studied last night.” (Stella Ma)

“Sometimes I am afraid if I do (the test) badly, like one time I told my friend that I am afraid that I will do badly because I didn’t study last night. My friend said ‘don’t worry. You’re Asian.’”
(Stella Ma)

“If you get a B, then people would be like ‘wow, you’re getting B. But you’re Asian. Why?’
(Stella Ma)”

“Asians are good at math . . . Asians always get A’s . . . Asians are always smart.” (Sophia Chou)

“For an Asian, anyone below an A doesn’t look smart.” (Peter Ho)

“If he is a Chinese but he does badly. We just say ‘he’s not an Asian.’” (Peter Ho)

“Asians are assumed ‘they are smart, work hard, and everything.’” (Rita Ding)

“Everyone just automatically assumes that you are really smart. People are like ‘Oh, you are talented,’ or ‘they’re basically talented because they’re Asian.’” (Rita Ding)

“Like for (Asian) people who are not that smart, (other) people are like ‘Wait. But you’re Asian.’” (Rita Ding)

“Everyone assumes that I am smart because I am Asian.” (Rita Ding)

“If I got a B on my test and my friend asked me ‘how did you do on your test?’ I’d say ‘Oh, an Asian failed the test.’” (Rita Ding)

“Can you help me with my test? Because you are Asian and you are smart and you should know it.” (Ella Wei)

“The whole point of the stereotype is . . . the sense of achievement . . . you’re not actually like striving or even exerting effort. You’re able to maintain that level of excellence just by being an Asian.” (Victor Pan)

From the above excerpts, we can see that the particular ideology of being “normal” Asians was thoroughly entangled with the academic tracking system and the institutionalized effects of tracking: Asian, good at math, Honors, APs, smart, and attainment of very high grades. As much as I was amazed by how rich the data I collected regarding the racial terms related to the model minority stereotype was, I could not stop wondering if these Asian students were essentially being overly harsh, even brutal, to each other by using these racial terms for evaluating each other’s academic performance. Interestingly, many student participants explained to me that “it is more joking around than an insult.” Furthermore, they claimed that using the race-related phrases was a way for Asian students to motivate each other to work

hard and achieve academic success collectively. For example, as Victor Pan explained, the Asian students themselves would not particularly bring up the Asian-related topics in their everyday conversations “because it’s kind of awkward.” That is, unless the conversation was about someone’s being near the academic borderline. Someone was “falling off the Asian standard zone.”

Say like a kid was in Honors in middle school, he’s really smart. And all of sudden, something happened and he got really stressed out and he started failing his courses... And then, other students are like “what’s going on?”... Because we have high expectations on this kid but he’s not meeting them, right? But he’s failing. He’s not like really failing. His failing is . . . just like below the Asian standard. At that point, you’re kind of want to warn him a little bit.

In addition to using Asian-related terms to “motivate” their peers to work hard(er), the Asian students also used racial terms to make fun of themselves if they fell off the Asian standard occasionally. For example, Alex Shui said, “sometimes if I do poorly on my test . . . I kind of used Asian terms ‘oh, I just dishonored my family’ or ‘I disgraced my dad.’ It’s mentally playful but it’s a little bit kind of . . .”

However, even though most Asian students treated these racial remarks as jokes, it did indicate that Asian students internalized the model minority stereotype and were skillfully utilizing such a cultural tool for their everyday social positioning. This reproductive process served to localize the sociohistorical model of the model minority stereotype through their doing “the Asian thing” (Victor Pan).

“The Asian thing,” as termed by Victor Pan, referred to the college-application-related practices (including how many AP courses one took, what grades one got, and what extracurricular activities one took) that a majority of the Asians did compete for or “blindly followed” (coined by Kyle Lin). Also, it referred to the areas in which Asian students competed at school. Doing “the Asian thing” served as a course of action for Asian students in response to their figured worlds. It further became a means for students to claim their Asian membership. Therefore, what was doing “the Asian thing?” or in what ways did Asian students localize the model minority stereotype and compete at school? Below is a selected collection of the educational practices that my student participants defined as doing “the Asian thing” at their schools.

“Grades, how many activities you do, what classes you take, SAT score.” (Peter Ho)

“It’s like . . . playing the violin, playing piano, being good at math and sciences.” (Victor Pan)

“So, basically, they’re doing the Asian stereotype thing, being good at math and good at science. And it’s not really like a personal achievement or anything like that. They’re doing something that other Asian kids are doing. They’re doing what other Asian kids are doing in general.” (Victor Pan)

“Doing the Asian thing is like the bubble of the stereotype. . . . Why doing the Asian thing? Because there is an overwhelming number of Asians doing this. And it becomes a generalization.” (Victor Pan)

“Getting mostly A’s and being in all Honors classes.” (Sophia Chou)

“I don’t want to be seen like I am a failed Asian . . . I don’t want to be seen that I am the only Asian who doesn’t know what she’s doing all the time. It’s kind of pushing me want to do well. . . . It’s just like a little stereotype that . . . puts on everybody.” (Stella Ma)

“Because to all Asians, you have to live up to that expectation. ‘Oh, every other Asians [*sic*] around me are doing well. I must have disgraced my family’” (Stella Ma)

“You can be doing really well. But if that is not as well as other Asians . . . you’re disgraced . . . We call them failure Asians, grades below B.” (Stella Ma)

“When it comes to Asians, if an Asian is like just not caring about the school, the society would be like ‘oh, that’s not right. You’re supposed to be smart. You are supposed to work hard.’ And I guess some people just feel the need to fit into that role.” (Alex Shui)

“So, a lot of people think that, ‘you know? Asians are always smart. They have to do really well. So, it’s like, in my school . . . if you don’t do well, you’re looked down upon (by your peers). ‘Look down’ as like a failure or stupid. You never want to look stupid because that’s humiliating.” (Victor Pan)

“It’s like people expect you to be good at something like math, so you try hard to make sure that you are good at math . . . And actually you back it up by being good at math because you think you actually should be. So you do it.” (Sophia Chou)

“Like you’re kept being told that you should be good at math and science so you try your best to make sure it happens. So, there are a lot of Asians who are good at math and science.” (Sophia Chou)

“If you are an Asian, you have to be smart. You have to study a lot. You have to have best scores.” (Peter Ho)

“[Asian students] they’re always competing with each other. They always try to beat the other person.” (Peter Ho)

“I am going home and study for the rest of my life.” (Ella Wei)

“Bye, Asians. I am going back home studying. Don’t forget to play the violin.” (Ella Wei mimicked what Asian students said when they left school for home)

“Oh, you are an Asian. You want to take all the AP classes.” (Rita Ding)

“My friends have really high standards. It made me feel that I was not working hard enough.” (Rita Ding)

“Like being an Asian and you’re bad at math, that’s really a thing that they need to try to figure out who they are.” (Ella Wei)

“Most Asians, they will try to stay up as much as they can. They’re like school, school, school . . . they’re all-nighters.” (Ella Wei)

Over time, through the Asian students’ discursive positioning of themselves in relation to others, saying and doing “the Asian thing” ultimately served to localize and stabilize the model minority stereotype in their figured worlds. In the practices of social positioning, members of the figured world of the “normal” Asian learned and internalized the advanced “social norm” of being a normal Asian. In this study, all the students expressed their own struggles in complying with doing ‘the Asian thing.’ Furthermore, many of their college-prep decisions related to what courses or what extracurricular

activities to take were influenced by their perceived peer pressure, because everyone was doing the “Asian thing” (Victor Pan). “Because everyone is high-achieving. You kind of don’t want to be left out,” as Kyle Lin claimed. He thus asserted that “some kids don’t know how to cope with stress and they just . . . charge blindly forward.”

Kyle Lin was once a member of the “blind” Asian crowd who just charged forward. Kyle’s freshman year at high school was overwhelming. He took double math classes (taking Geometry Honors and Algebra 2 Honors in the same year). He was involved in many extracurricular activities such as running, auditing orchestra, and playing violin. Every day after school, Kyle got home extremely exhausted and had no energy left to do his homework. He was doing the Asian thing “like everybody did,” as he commented on his own behavior.

After a serious discussion with his parents, Kyle decided to drop some extracurricular activities. He stopped orchestra, running, and violin lessons. Kyle had the realization that (in his words) “mostly you just can’t do everything. Pick and choose what you have to.” Taking two Honors-level math courses made Kyle suffer every day and thus his parents tried to convince him to drop Algebra 2 as well. However, Kyle refused to do so. In the end, Kyle got a C+ in Algebra 2. Kyle later regretted his decision and said, “by that time I should [have had dropped Algebra 2]. It’s not worth it.” The reason why Kyle said, “it’s not worth it” was that he blamed this grade C+ for ruining his overall GPA and thus, he was denied entry to prestigious medical schools. Kyle later explained why he did not drop Algebra 2. “By that time [as a 9th grader], I have my pride. I got into the double [math] Honors program and my classmates were there. And I thought that would be bad if I dropped out. So I decided not to.” Kyle continued,

I mean, [if you drop out Algebra 2], you would hear the gossips or rumors that “oh, this person dropped out.” And then every person has a point of view on you because of these rumors.

Because it just shows that you try to do something, and you failed. That’s the whole point behind it.

Kyle decided not to take the whole package of “doing the Asian thing” and thus he refused to continually comply with doing as many extracurricular activities as possible. However, as much as Kyle

disliked the Asians who blindly followed the model minority stereotype, his decision to not drop the Algebra 2 Honors course suggested that he could not lose his Asian membership either. He did not want to be labeled “failed” by his peer friends. Moreover, taking two of the highest-level math courses at the same time was important and essential to Kyle’s identity of being a normal Asian because most of his friends were in the two classes and he did not want to lose his friends. Again, Kyle’s case illustrates the importance of claiming Asian membership to an Asian high schooler.

Below I use three students (Alex Shui, Rita Ding, and Ella Wei) as instances to demonstrate how students participated in and/or resisted the social practice of doing “the Asian thing,” which shaped their educational behaviors. I had two reasons for choosing these three students. One was because these three students attended the same school (Reagan High North) where everyone shared a similar perceived academic hierarchy and in which everyone experienced and responded to a similar phenomenon of peer pressure. The other was because “being good at math” was an essential trait of being a stereotypical Asian. These three students took different levels of math courses throughout their high school years and at the end of their senior year, they had a one- or two-year math curricular gap among each other. The task of answering to their worlds was influenced by the students’ positions in relation to their perceived academic hierarchy. Choosing these three students who had different course trajectories in math enabled me to analyze and compare the students’ subjective experiences regarding how their different social positions would shape their course-taking decisions or behaviors as a response to their perceived peer pressure. Further, by so doing, it allowed me to show how students developed new social competencies or new identities to answer and reshape their figured worlds as normal Asians.

“A monster, social failure, constantly chases us. We can’t afford to get lazy” (Alex Shui).

Alex Shui self-reported that he was in the top one percent of his class out of 600 students. The competition within his top one percent cohort was “a little bit too competitive,” as Alex described it. Instead of talking about this competition as akin to one in which one must race to the very top of the class, Alex claimed that “it’s a competition that you don’t want to be the worst [in].” He explained,

[You don't want to be the worst,] the worst in terms of academics and grades. So, if everyone else surrounding you is doing really well, it motivates you to be up there with them, I guess. And like as long as you fall into the acceptable range, they're like consider you as "oh, Alex can stay here, Alex can stay there." It's not a big deal. We're all like equal in terms of the intelligent [*sic*] level. I personally feel a little bit satisfied with falling in that range. I don't need to be the best (in order) to be with the best, I guess I can say.

Alex's excerpt suggested that what motivated him to work hard was a desire to claim his Asian membership to the top-tier clique. He further explained that "the acceptable range" stood for a test score range of 93-100 (A or A+). "Because that kind of difference is not enough to say one kid is smarter than another kid. So, like in the acceptable range where everyone is still treated equally," Alex noted.

Alex further pointed out that the students whose test scores fell in the range of 93-100 would be considered equally smart. However, he added, if one fell into A minus (below 93) or B plus or below, Asian students started to pass judgment. For example, "Oh, the kid who gets A's or A plus is definitely smarter than the kid who gets a B plus." Thus, for Alex, he did not need to work hard to be a valedictorian or salutatorian. As long as he was also getting As or A plus, like his other top-tier members, he would be respected and considered intelligent. "I just need to be up there where I am respected and like being treated that I am smart. People are aware that I know what's going on at school, stuff like that," as Alex commented.

However, what would have happened if Alex had failed to maintain his grades as a top-tier student? Alex claimed that when an Asian student was no longer a stereotypical Asian, the dominant Asian group would start calling the person out by referencing the un-Asianness of that person. For instance, "not good at math" or "not smart" or "you are mostly white because you're not getting As." As Alex explained,

Um. People will call you out on it. They would say like "Oh, even though you are an Asian, but you are not smart on that. You are not good at math. That's really weird." . . . Your friends might feel as if you don't quite belong to their group either. And that may not be necessarily because

they see themselves as better. It may just be [because] they don't see you as passionate as they are. [It's] simply because you know you don't work as hard as they do.

Interestingly, Alex emphasized that "I definitely do get the A's," which was the reason why he had never experienced being singled out by his friends saying he was "whitewashed," meaning an Asian who's "kind of blended with American culture of not academically excelling," as defined by Alex. Again, through Alex's emphasis on his consistency in getting A's, he highlighted the importance of what it meant to be considered as a "normal" Asian: intelligent, good at math, and getting As.

In articulating his struggles of dealing with peer pressure, Alex, in fact, renegotiated what it meant to be a normal Asian and reinterpreted his social position in relation to other top-tier Asians. He learned that maintaining grades with a range of 93-100 could help him claim and maintain access to his top-tier Asian clique. He did not need to strive to be the best among the best. However, although Alex described his peer pressure as a positive peer pressure: "the pressure to try to be the best as you can be academically and try to work hard, and stay competitive," he still felt stressed out.

Alex's constant fear of being left behind his stereotypical Asian cohort not only kept him working hard but also exhausted him. "You can't get lazy. And you can't let yourself not study because if you do that, you will have social consequences [i.e., losing Asian membership] in addition to academic consequences" such as not going to a good college, Alex claimed. He used the metaphors of "a conveyor belt" and "social failure as a monster" to describe his fear, the world he lived in, and why he had to constantly keep working hard.

I guess to say that there's some kind of monster or some kind of machine that's like chasing us and we're on a conveyor belt, and you have to always continue to progress. And if anyone trips, you know, they'll be eaten up. You can't afford to fall back. You can't afford to be lazy. Because then you know you will fail and you will fall behind, I guess.

Alex continued,

It's kind of as there's some kind of a monster that is a social failure that constantly chases us. We can't afford to get lazy because if we stop running or if we trip and we fall, and we don't get back fast enough, we will be consumed by the monster. . . . We won't be able . . . to get back to up there where people continue to run.

"You get double punishments if you don't fit in the Asian stereotype," Alex claimed. Alex's notion of "double punishments" indicated getting low grades that resulted in not being able to go to a "good" college and being excluded from the Asian community. In order not to be expelled from his top-tier clique, Alex felt the need to fit in the Asian stereotype, and thus he continued to work hard. In short, Alex used "persistently working hard and striving high" as an answer to his cultural worlds. In so doing, he was considered intelligent, successful in getting good grades, and good at math by his peer friends and was therefore accepted by his top-tier Asian clique.

"I would prefer to be recognized as 'Oh, that weird creepy girl' instead of 'Oh, that smart Asian girl' because a lot of us are smart" (Rita Ding).

Surrounded by high-achieving friends, Rita felt "pressured to be smart," particularly in her math classes. Rita learned that "Asians are smart and good at math" after being grouped into Honors-level (and above) math courses throughout her secondary education. In her words, "Oh, this is why people think all Asians are smart . . . good at math. [because] it's all Asians. . . . It's a high level of one ethnicity. I don't know why." Also, Rita felt that she was expected "to be really smart and pretty good at math." She explained, "because people just look at me (and think), 'Oh, you're Asian, so you're good at math.'"

"It would be kind of a surprise if an Asian wasn't in Honors classes," Rita claimed. With this internalized expectation, when Rita was a 9th grader, she was placed in Level-One physical science class. She immediately felt "something not right" and went up to the counselor immediately after her first class. She explained, "I was one of the only two Asians in the class. I kind of got the feeling that 'I am not supposed to be here.' This [class] is not for me . . . I should be in a more challenging class." Rita's counselor agreed that Rita was misplaced after examining her grades and academic record. According to

Rita, she met all of the course requirements and “just lacked teacher recommendation” because she forgot to apply. The result was that Rita was moved to Honors biology (the other course choice).

In the first semester of her senior year, Rita took five AP courses, including Calculus AB, AP Biology, AP literature and composition, AP Government and Politics, and AP Spanish. Meanwhile, she had one sport, one music, and one academic extracurricular activity that fully occupied Rita’s weekday afternoons, not to mention that Rita had to work on her college applications in the same semester. Therefore, Rita always came home exhausted. The heavy workload from her AP courses, however, made her stay up very late. Sometimes she did not sleep at all and went to school the next morning. Rita struggled academically and suffered from sleep deprivation almost every day. In a conversation on about why Asian students take so many AP courses, Rita provided her perspective that explained why she took so many AP courses in her senior year.

I am not sure if it’s because of the expectation that ‘Oh, you are an Asian. You want to take all the AP classes.’ Or ‘a lot of my friends are taking AP classes, so I should take them as well.’ I don’t know. I know that I am taking a lot and a lot of my friends are also [taking a lot of AP classes].

Rita claimed that all the people in her classes were mostly Asian and those were the people she spent time with socially. The rationale behind Rita’s course-taking decision did not directly point to living up to the model minority stereotype. However, by doing the same thing as her friends, Rita was complying with “doing the Asian thing:” doing what most Asians did, so that she could maintain friendship with her Asian friends.

Through interacting every day and “talking about other people” with her friends over time, Rita established her own version of the imagined academic hierarchy. Rita also learned her academic position in relation to others, even though she rarely participated in the conversations, as she expressed it: “I really try not to add to it. [But] some people really like to gossip.” In Rita’s perceived academic hierarchy, she felt that she was at the very bottom, compared to her other Asian friends.

It was kind of in my mind, and I never articulated it. But it was like “Oh. Yeah. These people are really smart, and they do really well. They have enough extracurriculars. They attended all the academic activities.” And these people work very hard . . . I wouldn’t say I was actually at the bottom of my classes. But I kind of knew it . . . I was at the very bottom . . . It made me feel a little bit hurt.

Although Rita struggled academically with completing her homework almost every day, she did not consider dropping out of any Honors course and moving to a Level-One course as a choice. Rita chose not to take a less challenging course that would have made her life easier. She explained the reason for this was that “It’s kind of like a social shame because people look at you [and it’s] kind of like ‘Oh. You what? You’re not good at math?’ [It’s] like you’re dumb.”

Again, Rita’s comment confirms that which was discussed earlier: the “social punishment” (in Alex’s words) or the “social shame” (in Rita’s terminology). One would lose his or her access to the normal Asian community if the student lost his or her “Honors-level” status. Rita further used the metaphor “keep up with the Joneses” to illustrate her point. “Of course you want to keep up with your friends . . . you don’t like people saying, ‘your friends are smarter than you.’” Rita thus conformed to doing the Asian thing.

Rita’s constant comparison to her high-achieving Asian peers within the perceived hierarchy in her mind made her suffer. However, she still wanted to stay on the Honors-track, where most of the other Asian students were. Rita did not express it explicitly in interviews, but her voice of struggling with living up to the Asian stereotype or catching up with her high-achieving Asian friends prevailed in her narratives. Her continuous fear, “the pressure of fear of failure” was present throughout her high-school years.

For example, Rita felt pressured to be smart. “It’s kind of like being captured to be smart.” Rita felt the need to help friends when they came to her for math help. However, Rita found herself situated in a dilemma: no matter if she could or could not help get the answer to the math problem. Rita explained,

If I can't [solve the problem], I feel that I am disappointed them, the Asian expectation. . . . It makes me feel that I am not living up to the expectation. But if I do help solve the math problem, I feel that I am perpetuating the stereotype. . . . If you live up to it, it's like . . . you're just encouraging people to say "Oh. Yeah. I know that Asian girl. She's good at math." So, obviously, Asians must be good at math. No!

For Rita, helping friends solve a math problem or not was a struggle and a source of pressure. To comply with the Asian stereotype or not, such struggles provided Rita with opportunities to renegotiate her identities and re-author a new identity to reshape her educational behavior. Rita preferred that others called her "crazy, weird, and strange" instead of being known as "that smart Asian girl." For instance, if one of her friends said, "bite me," Rita said she would bite the person because she liked making people laugh. Rita explained,

It makes me want to stand out as an individual, not like sitting under the umbrella that . . .

"Asians are good at math." So, I kind of want to be like one individual known for myself, not because 'Oh, she's an Asian and she's good at math.

Therefore, what strategies did Rita take in response to her struggles of "keeping up with Joneses"? Or specifically, how did Rita respond to her social status, self-positioned "at the very bottom" of her perceived academic hierarchy? Interestingly, Rita claimed that she did not care. "I tried to do the minimum work just to pass everything." However, even though Rita said she did not care, she later explained that she did try at the beginning of every school year. "Definitely I tried. But I guess I just got discouraged a lot . . . and then eventually I just decided not to try." Rita articulated,

At the beginning of every school year, I was very optimistic. I would be like 'this year, I will get straight A's, go to lots of clubs, do all these things, like a perfect student.' And then something happened. I got bad grades. Getting bad grades made me feel that 'Oh. No. Everything is ruining. I won't be able to get an A in the marking period.'

Rita continued, "Sometimes . . . I look at the top people in my hierarchy, I kind of look at them, (thinking) 'Oh, I will never be like them.' So maybe I should just not try." In other words, Rita tried to do the whole

package of “the Asian thing” at the beginning of a semester, influenced by her awareness of being a normal Asian. But then, she felt discouraged to keep doing so after she got bad grades. Getting bad grades made Rita feel that it had destroyed her goal of getting an A in the marking period. Instead of pushing herself to work harder to get an A (and so conforming to the Asian norm), Rita decided to “do minimum work just to pass . . . to survive.” She provided an explanation in the conversation below on how she defined typical Asian-American girls,

Rita: Hard-working. We typically don’t go to social sciences . . .

Shelley: Does the Asian stereotype bring you pressure to work hard?

Rita: Yes, it does. But I try as much as possible not to have it influence me that much.

Shelley: What did you try?

Rita: Like not getting good grades or do minimum work to pass . . . I don’t know. I just don’t work super hard.

Apparently, Rita did not reject the smartness aspect of her Asian identity. It was under this smart Asian umbrella that she desired to be different from the smart Asian group. “I don’t want to be exactly like other Asian girls . . . I just want to be . . . known not just as that smart Asian girl . . . because a lot of us are smart,” as Rita concluded. Therefore, Rita’s resistance to living up to the model minority stereotype showed in her choice of “doing minimum school work just to pass (the Asian norm)” by calculating how many points one assignment took. Then, she would make the decision of what she needed to do with her assignment. In Rita’s words, “I just don’t work super hard,” like other smart Asian girls.

“I don’t fit the Asian persona that you think of me as . . . I am not a perfect Asian. But I try.” (Ella Wei).

I mean it’s [Ella’s academic performance] not like star-like. I don’t get 2400 in my SAT practice test. But I am content with it. I am in Honors classes, and I take APs. I have one Level-One class, but it is the kind of class that you look for and find comfort in . . . I guess I’m content with it.

Like I am not [in Level Two] . . . I am not saying Level Two [students are] stupid. They are not stupid, but they just don’t try. But it’s like ‘I’m happy where I am. Because I know I work for

it . . . ' And it wasn't because I took Kumon [a private math enrichment center] or I got tutors when I was young, or I went to SAT classes. It's because I sat down with the book and I study every single day for a test. And I am willing to learn. (Ella Wei)

Unlike most of the "normal" Asians, Ella Wei took some AP courses, mostly Honors classes and one Level-One class in math, where Ella claimed that she was one of the only four Asians in that class and was also the only student in this study who took Level One math, across her high school years. "I am more an extracurricular girl," Ella stated. Ella was active in a student-led organization at school and she had a rich list of extracurricular activities. She played three sports, including tennis, and served as a coach at school every day. Ella attended two academic extracurricular activities, and she volunteered for several years in two child-related organizations, a hospital, and Chinese cultural associations.

In my first interview with Ella Wei, I asked her to describe her academic performance. Ella immediately entered her figured worlds of normal Asians, using artifacts such as "like star-like" and "get 2400 in SAT practices" as references to position herself in relation to other Asian students (who took Kumon, were tutored, or went to SAT classes as "the Asian thing"). Ella was aware that she was not one of the "normal Asians" because of her Level-One status in math courses, which was a trait of un-Asianness. Hence, Ella emphasized that she was in Honors classes and took some APs. Furthermore, Ella separated herself from Level-Two students who were (in Ella's own words) "not stupid but . . . just don't try." By so doing, it allowed Ella to position herself as a student who was "not stupid" and "willing to learn," which helped her maintain her connection with her Asian friends who were "smarter" than her.

Ella identified herself as a "white-washed" Asian or "twinkie:" "yellow outside but white inside," Ella explained. She published her being "white-washed" to reject the social position of being a normal Asian. Therefore, Ella avoided being invited to occupy the "smart Asian" position. She claimed that she found it a compliment when being called a "twinkie." She explained,

Sometimes I see it as a compliment because . . . the racial stereotype for Asians and Indians are like "oh, you are book smart. All you do is study study study, and you don't have your social life." And I'm like I am twinkie, and you guys know that. Like if I fail something, I fail

something. If I get a C in the class, I get a C in the class. I'm more loose about it. People acknowledge that and I like that.

Ella positioned herself as a “white-washed” Asian to remove herself from the stereotypical “book smart” Asian cohort. Thus, she needed not to engage herself or to be engaged in the severe peer pressure that circulated in the normal Asian world. In so doing, if Ella got a bad grade that was below the Asian standard, she would not receive pressure from her peer friends who tried to pull her back onto the bandwagon. However, even though Ella rejected her position as “not a perfect Asian” and refused to follow the educational practices that defined a normal Asian, I found that she was skillful at using the Asian stereotype as a resource to describe the “Asian thing” and “Asian persona” that she claimed she did not fit. For example,

You know? When it comes to a group of Asian people, they all talk about the same thing over and over. “What is your SATs? What college are you going to? How many classes are you taking in APs? . . . [The typical Asians] always do homework on time. [They] always study before the exam. [They] always excel at whatever they’re good at. [They] always get . . . the highest level of the class. . . . They’re constantly trying to do better for the competition, not for themselves. . . . That’s where they get their happiness from. They’re probably just robots. . . . They’re constantly trying to be the best. And apparently, being the best is to be number one and beating everyone else.

Ella felt that these typical Asians were “dumb” because “they’re just pushing for a grade.” Ella used “robots” and “a mechanical style” to describe these typical Asians’ study style, “like they read this chapter and hope that they will remember it all.” Ella highlighted the social consequence of being a “normal Asian”, making friends only with the same “super hard-working Asians,” led to the peer competition that existed around them. By using this narrative, Ella intended to justify her “white-washed” persona as well.

The friends that you [book smart Asians] make with super hard-working Asians, they are all the same. You have no diversity, and you feel like all you have to do is studying. And such like you

are in the competition with them. But when you feel that you are white-washed, then you feel like there is amount of people to talk to, you have the potential to talk to, to widen your conversationality [*sic*]. . . It helps you socially because in the future, you will need it.

Interestingly, through the interviews on the topic of Ella's social world, Ella realized that all her friends were like typical Asians: "They were the Asian, Asian people that I usually met and they always seemed miserable." By "Asian, Asian people," Ella defined it as Asian students who "gain knowledge for no reason and trying to be the best. Those people are book smart, socially awkward" in other words, Ella highlighted "the Asian thing" that these Asian Asians did. In Ella's comment, "they're always like 'Yeah. I am going home studying.' (And) they rarely went out. . . . The idea of having fun would be like going to bookstores and buying more books."

Meanwhile, through the discussion regarding her social and academic life, Ella realized that she actually did not have any white friends, although she called herself "whitewashed." Ella did not have the kind of white friends whom she felt close enough to spend time with socially, for example, like "hey, let's go out for dinner one time and talk." Ella later explained, "if you choose white friends and don't constantly talk about grades and compare herself to other people, you won't feel competitive." Furthermore, Ella attributed her "being unable to make white friends" to the nature of her community: the majority of her neighbors were Asian. "I don't have a choice (of getting to know neighbors of other races)," Ella claimed.

Such a mismatch between Ella's self-identified "white-washed(ness)" and "actually having no white friends to hang out with" suggested that Ella struggled with her perceived peer pressure resulting from her figured worlds of normal Asians. Ella was surrounded by a group of typical Asians who were competitive and frequently competed with each other. She gave credit to the competitive environment in which she lived by commenting, "it's good because it makes you smarter." But Ella also felt the negative side of the competitive environment—the peer pressure that pushed her to do more.

You realized that there's pressure around you and you start comparing yourself to like "oh, how is this person doing in comparison to me?" You then get scared that "I am not going to get into

college because this girl . . . is smarter than me and she does more than me.” So, you will try to do more and take on more.

Ella thus felt that she got “stuck in the bubble.” She got trapped in the environment where everyone was “working super hard.” Ella described, “every Asian you see is studious . . . Every single Asian person at school is in AP courses because they’re pushed to study.” Situated in such a competitive world of normal Asians, Ella struggled and felt forced to work hard. On one hand, she regretted that she did not have opportunities to make friends with non-Asian friends who would not constantly talk about and compare test scores. On the other hand, she felt a need to stay with her smart Asian friends because it made her want to work hard and not to be left behind. Eventually, Ella did not choose to leave her Asian community. For example, Ella could have turned to her non-Asian classmates in her Level-One math classes and make friends with them; but she did not. Ella chose to be surrounded by a group of hard-working Asians, embraced her Asianness, and made the decision to work hard. By so doing, Ella not only was able to keep up with her smart Asian friends, she could also prove that she was “not stupid” in her Asian community. Ella explains,

Because all I know is (learning) how to become an Asian because this is how I live in life. . . .

Like, these are all my friends. They live here. I live here. I make friends based on where I am and based on who I am . . . I think, I want to be competitive because I don’t want to get left behind. I don’t want to be the one people are like “Oh, you’re stupid because you’re in Level One. And you’re not in all APs.” I don’t want to be left behind so I am trying to catch up.

Ella accepted that she was not a “normal” Asian and that this led her to live in an academically less competitive world. Unlike Rita Ding who preferred not to be called “Asian,” Ella accepted her racialized identity as being an Asian (but “white-washed”) and chose to partially participate in “doing the Asian thing” to maintain her strong work ethic. Ella decided to embrace the aspects of Asianness in terms of “working hard, doing homework, and staying up late for studying” to engage herself in the normal Asian community. This allowed her to keep pace with her high-achieving Asian friends in the same Honors (or AP-)track classes like history or English. Through “trying to catch up” with her “perfect” Asian friends,

Ella presented herself as “caring for academics and making progress,” which were also the major traits of being an Asian. In so doing, Ella could avoid the consequence of losing her membership to the dominant Asian group, preventing herself from being positioned as “stupid,” and showing that she was worthy of being in the Honors class as well as being an Asian.

In summary, from the three students’ subjective experiences of social identification presented above, I have shown three points. First, when a student decides to stay in the Asian community, the model minority stereotype becomes the primary resource for the student to make sense of him or herself in relation to others and to craft responses to answer his or her world. Secondly, the higher a student’s social position located within the perceived Asian academic hierarchy, the more likely it is that that student would fully comply with the model minority stereotype and do “the Asian thing.” And thirdly, students at different social and academic positions perceived similar social punishments (specifically, if one fell away from the Asian standard, he or she would lose access to the Asian community) and thus students situated in any place within their perceived academic hierarchy struggled. Such struggles served as space of renegotiation of self and opportunities for Asian students to reproduce the very discourses of the model minority stereotype and cultural expectations that ultimately served to localize the widely-circulated imaginary of the model minority stereotype.

Conclusion

Asian students’ racialized learning identities and their corresponding figured worlds are not pre-existing; they are not owned by their ethnic group. Instead, Asian students’ racialized learning identities are practice-linked identities that develop through participation in K-12 schooling practices structured by curricular tracking. As Holland et al. (1998) pointed out, “the development of social position . . . into dispositions to voice opinions . . . comes over the long term, in the course of social interaction” (p. 137-138). Throughout the secondary schooling years, the institutionalized effects of curricular tracking (students’ perceived academic hierarchy, Asianized friendship pattern, and everyday social interaction) are facilitated within-Honors and within-AP cohorts’ social comparison of academic performance. Asianized group membership becomes the “cue” for students to process their positional identification.

In this racialized identification process, the investigated Asian students learned to incorporate the cultural artifacts of tracking-based and race-related resources that co-produced the Asianized discourse about their perceived peer pressure. Asian students acquired and mastered the skill to use the Asianized discourse as artifacts for self-positioning and reciprocal positioning of others, to express their envisioned peer pressure of living up to the Asian stereotype, and to re-articulate what it meant to be an Asian. Examining how Asian students developed their senses of learning what it meant to be a normal Asian help us understand the process of how the larger sociohistorical circulating models, such as the model minority stereotype, are successfully engaged in the local events of cultural production.

It was through this self-reauthoring process that the students enacted their capacity to remake the world in which they constantly struggled. Such spaces of reauthoring not only served to solidify the Asian students' figured worlds of normal Asians, but also helped the widely circulating imageries of the model minority stereotype become localized among the high-achieving Asian students, particularly within the top-tier cohort. Students created their own definitions of being an Asian and developed dispositions in response to their culturally-produced peer pressure and other figured worlds. This self-refashioning process ultimately transformed the Asian students' social identification *from* social position, something artificially attached onto students, *to* disposition that solidified the existence of their figured worlds of normal Asians.

Finally, analyzing the racialized discourse on Asian students' academic performance that particularly occurred within the top-ten percent cohort of the Asian students has enabled us to understand how the localized model minority stereotype took effect, why the students decided to live up to the stereotype, and the reasons why the Asian students persistently and constantly worked so hard and achieved high points. The analysis of the three students' responses to "doing the Asian thing" and how they approached this through educational practices indicated that the higher one's social position was relative to others in students' imagined worlds of normal Asians, the more likely one would fully live up to the model minority stereotype. The academic effort that one exerted begot indicators of claim to and identification with "normal Asians." Furthermore, social punishment, such as losing one's Asian membership as a

consequence of not complying with the Asian stereotype, functioned as a key catalyst for the students in their adoption of racialized identities, that is, unless one decided to withdraw from his or her normal Asian membership.

Chapter Six: The Overlapping Figured Worlds of Asian Moms and the “Good” Students: The Cultural (Re)production of Asian Model Minority through the Mechanism of Asian Moms’ Gossip across Community and Home Contexts.

When you see many parents in the community made their children attend all kinds of after-school academic centers or participate in many kinds of extracurricular activities, you would worry that your child might fall behind those children if you do not make your child do the same activities.

(Gloria Kung’s mother)

The theme of gossip and parent peer pressure among Asian mothers emerged immediately in the discourse of how and why immigrant parents become engaged in their children’s K-12 schooling and after-school activities during my first round of interviews. Most of my parent participants felt a pressure if they did *not* follow the mainstream Asian parents’ approach to building up their children’s resumes. “When people around you are doing the same thing, you have the pressure to follow,” Mrs. Kung asserted. Particularly, this trend occurred when they were first-time parents who were not familiar with the American education system and did not know how to help their first child navigate the American K-12 education system roughly one decade ago. Unfamiliarity with the American education system and not following the road most traveled – doing the same activities most Asian families were doing – would make novice² Asian parents doubt themselves and worry that their children might fall behind other students who were taking the related activities.

Such parent peer pressure resulted in the interviewed Asian mothers increasing their children’s after-school activities following what other experienced and “successful” families did for their children. The notion of “successful” was applied to families who had a child who went to an Ivy League school (or other prestigious school) or who was a “good” or “successful” student at high school (e.g., students who had nearly perfect GPAs). Ella Wei termed Asian parents’ acts of following the “successful” family

² I have borrowed Lave and Wenger’s (1991) notions of “novice” and “experienced” from their theory of legitimate peripheral participation to illustrate the process of how a newcomer Asian mom learned how to help her child go through American K-12 education from experienced Asian moms (who had had some experience in this process) in the community.

model as “hopping on the bandwagon.” In Victor Pan’s view, one of the compelling effects of Asian moms’ hopping on the bandwagon was to cause “those Asian kids [to] look like [they’re] from the same factory or manufacturer. They are mass-produced . . . the mass production of [the] ideal robot child.”

How did Asian moms’ peer pressure emerge? How did Asian moms respond to their perceived peer pressure? And how did Asian parental peer pressure relate to their social identities, parental expectations, and involvement in their children’s K-12 education and after-school activities? I found the key to the generation of parent peer pressure in the predominantly Chinese immigrant community embedded in a complex mechanism that was initiated and maintained by immigrant parents (mainly by Asian moms): Asian moms’ gossip. The initial social space where Asian moms formed their gossip circle originated from the local Chinese language school.

Chinese school is an institutionalized social space where novice Asian parents send their children to learn their parents’ mother tongue, and where parents could meet and socialize with other Asian parents and later establish a friend circle. Asian moms’ gossip was co-constructed by a group of immigrant parents who shared similar immigration backgrounds. In this study, most of the mother and father participants were born, grew up, and finished college education in China (four parent participants) or Taiwan (twelve parent participants), while only one mother came to the U.S. as a teenager. Among these families, all father participants had a Master’s degree or had completed some doctoral studies in the U.S., and most of their careers were STEM-related; most mother participants had a bachelor’s or an associate degree in Taiwan or China. Some of the parents had a Master’s degree in STEM in the U.S. Members at the Chinese school were comprised of two groups. One was a group of novice Asian families whose parents were first-generation and whose children had just entered the K-12 education system. The other was a group of experienced Asian families whose parents were first-generation and their children were upperclassmen and “successful” students. The Chinese school became an initial learning space for novice Asian moms to learn how to help their children navigate the American school system from experienced parents.

Through Asian moms' gossip, immigrant parents obtained and exchanged ideas about their children's K-12 education and students' performance. They learned from each other, regarding family educational practices, how to arrange their children's after-school activities or how to help their children succeed at school. In this process, Asian moms identified and learned from the "successful" family models (i.e., the families who had at least one child who was outstanding at school or went to a prestigious college). Asian moms asked questions and navigated ways to help their children succeed at school and become competitive in extracurricular activities with the aim of sending their children to a "good" college, just as the "successful" families in their community had done.

It was through this mechanism of Asian moms' gossip that Asian parents learned to position their children in relation to the "good" students whom Asian moms identified through the Asian moms' gossip. Also, "hopping on the bandwagon" led to the phenomenon that children attended many of the same after-school activities. This provided a foundation for parents to compare their own child to other students regarding academic performance and achievement. Such social comparison and positioning further enhanced parents' peer pressure that in turn shaped Asian parents' expectations for their children and practices of involving their children in after-school activities throughout their K-12 schooling years.

This chapter presents my analysis of the learning process used by Chinese-heritage immigrant parents in terms of how to be a parent and how to help their children succeed in the U.S. K-12 education system. This is looked at through the overlapping figured worlds of Asian moms and "good" students, intertwined by the mechanism of Asian moms' gossip. Asian moms' gossip comprised two core ingredients that made information concerning the "good" student model travel across the community and home settings. One was parent-parent interaction in the community, while the other was parent-child interaction at home. In this chapter, I demonstrate how children and their educational practices related to college-application items (i.e., GPAs, SAT scores, extracurricular activities, and volunteer work) served as mediating sociocultural resources that evoked and sustained immigrant parents' interwoven figured worlds over children's K-12 schooling years. The artifacts related to a child's K-12 education catalyzed Asian moms' implicit social identification of "how to be a parent in the U.S." and explicit learning experiences of "how

to help their children succeed at school.” The mechanism of Asian moms’ gossip served to “orchestrate” Asian moms’ expectations for their children. Through demonstrating the mechanism of Asian moms’ gossip, I present how Asian moms collectively created a singular expectation for their children “to be like that good student” by interaction with their peer parents in the community; I also describe how parents brought information home and called on their children to occupy this “good student” position, and how their children responded to their parents’ offer in the home context.

Based on the findings, I argue that the mechanism of Asian moms’ gossip not only functioned as a response to Asian parents’ scarce knowledge of American K-16 school systems and American society, but also mediated the complex relationship between Asian moms’ social identification, positioning, learning (how to help his or her child navigate American K-12 education), students’ after-school experiences, and students’ learning identities. Additionally, the Asian moms’ gossip served to localize and circulate the sociohistorical pattern of the model minority stereotype and facilitated the cultural (re)production of the model minority who collectively did the “Asian thing.” As Victor Pan commented,

A lot of Asians they just study well. . . . Curricular activities that Asians choose to have are always sciences and math led. They play the violin, piano . . . they play tennis as a sport. . . . So many Asians have those at a point that 95% of them are doing the same thing. . . . Basically, everyone looks the same.

Most importantly, Asian moms’ gossip not only produced the effect of “everyone was all over everyone’s business” (termed by Stella Ma) in the community, but also it served to thicken students’ learning identities and intermingle community members’ multiple figured worlds in the school context as well as in the family context.

In the following section, I first explain how novice Asian moms entered the overlapping figured worlds of Asian moms and “good” students by attending Chinese language school, and learned the norm: “this is how we help our child succeed and go to Harvard.” I identify two institutionalized effects of Chinese school: Asian moms’ friend circle and visualizing the “successful” family model. I end this section by describing how children and children’s educational performance served as artifacts that evoked

immigrant parents' overlapping figured worlds and connected novice Asian moms to the experienced mom model of those who had "successful" children.

Secondly, Asian moms did not learn to be immigrant parents in the U.S. by reproducing parenting skills that they learned from their parents in their homeland. Rather, they learned how to be a parent through a process of social identification starting with "I don't understand this American system. How can I help my child then?" It was through learning from the experienced parents that novice Asian moms identified as in positions of authority. Within this context, I provide the parents' perspective to describe how Asian moms' everyday social interactions and updates about their children's everyday life produced their experienced social pressure. I detail the mechanism of Asian moms' gossip that sustained Asian moms' figured worlds as well as finalized Asian moms' decision of "hopping on the bandwagon" as a response to overcome their "not understanding the American system." By offering parents' perspectives, I explore the complex relationship between Asian moms' social comparison, learning, and their identities. Through identifying the "good" students and reaching out to their families, I show how Asian moms "downloaded" the widely-circulated pattern of the model minority stereotype.

Thirdly, I zoom in on the mechanism of Asian moms' gossip and provide the students' perspectives on how Asian moms shared information about each other's children with other Asian moms, how their parents brought the "gossip" home, and how students responded to their parents' bringing the "good student" model home. I first present students' interpretations of their parents' "gossiping": sharing, comparing, and "bragging about" children. Then, I show how parents offered the position "to be like that good student" to their children at home. Finally, I use three families (the Ma, the Chou, and the Shui families) to demonstrate three consequential effects that the mechanism of Asian moms' gossip achieved. The first effect is that the mechanism of Asian moms' gossip facilitated the spread of children-related information so that "everyone is all over everyone's business" in the community. The second is that gossip helped thicken Asian students' learning identities and interwove their multiple figured worlds across home, community, and school settings. The third is the mechanism of Asian moms' gossip

functioning as the localization, circulation, and reproduction of the sociohistorical model of the model minority stereotype.

This study does *not* suggest that the Chinese immigrant fathers do not care about or participate in their children's education. Among the ten participant families in my study, there were seven fathers who joined the study and shared their views. However, more than half of the Chinese immigrant fathers in this study were the main breadwinners. Thus, it was usually the mothers who were the caregivers and involved in their children's education. Asian fathers had fewer opportunities to interact with other community members on a regular basis. Hence, Asian mothers had more opportunities to interact with other Asian moms in the community and thus formed their gossip circle over time. However, not being a member of Asian moms' gossip circle did not indicate that the Asian fathers did not know anything about community happenings. As Kyle Lin's mother explained, "their [the fathers] wives would update them [on] what happened in the community at home." Also, some of the fathers had rich knowledge about the U.S. college-application system, such as Nathan Yang's father. He was considered an authority on this subject and many Asian mothers or Asian fathers consulted him for advice. Thus, I use "Asian parents' gossip" and "Asian moms' gossip" interchangeably in this chapter.

Entering the Figured Worlds of Asian Moms and the "Good" Students: Two Institutionalized Effects of the Chinese Language School

One year after my 1.5 years of data collection for this study, Sophia Chou's mother invited me to a party that celebrated the Chinese New Year at a Chinese school. At the party, Mrs. Chou directed my attention to a lady who was speaking to the audience with a microphone. She said "this is the tiger mom I constantly mentioned in our interviews before . . ." Later, many Asian moms came to greet Mrs. Chou. Mrs. Chou excused herself and walked to the back of the party room with her friends. They (i.e., four Asian moms) stood there, forming a circle and chatted for about half an hour . . . (from the author's fieldnotes)

In this section, I explore two institutionalized effects of the Chinese language school that made the mechanism of Asian moms' gossip function and novice Asian moms' learning possible. The first is that

the Chinese school served as a social space for novice Chinese immigrant parents to meet, build social networks, and form a circle of close friends over time (i.e., from children's elementary, middle, and high school education). This circle of friends later became key members generating the mechanism of Asian moms' gossip, which I will detail in the second section. The other is that the Chinese school provided rich resources for the novice parents to navigate the U.S. education system, which included education seminars that promoted a "successful student" or "going-to-Harvard" model. "Successful" indicated "recipes for helping children go to an Ivy League school," as Victor Pan defined. I end this section with how "children and their educational performance" functioned as artifacts that evoked Asian moms' figured worlds and connected novice Asian moms to the "successful" family model of experienced parents.

Chinese school, the initial institutionalized social space where novice Asian moms built information networks and formed a circle of "Asian mom" friends.

The Chinese school is the major place where you can meet with other Chinese immigrant families. . . . After you get to know them, a group of Asian moms would get together. Then, we chat and share our experiences of living in the U.S. If we encounter a problem (e.g., how to prepare for the Naturalization Test or what is PSAT?), we come here and ask for advice. . . . We also share details about how our children are doing. (Sophia Chou's mother)

All of my student participants began attending Chinese school at pre-K age. Many of them received pre-K through 10th-grade Chinese language education and graduated. Interestingly, most of my student participants hated their Chinese school; Kyle Lin and Victor Pan gave similar comments: "the Chinese school is bad." "It's a waste of time." The second-generation children disliked the Chinese school mainly because of its learning style (i.e., rote-learning), copious and "boring" homework, or the learning difficulties of writing traditional Chinese characters. Stella Ma graduated first from her class, and she volunteered at Chinese school after she graduated. Stella Ma recalled that for the first few years she kept complaining to her mother about her Chinese school. She commented, "it [going to Chinese school] took

my entire Saturday, and my friends would be like ‘hey, come hang out with us.’ I was like ‘no, I have to go to Chinese school.’ . . . It’s embarrassing. . . . I just didn’t want to go.”

Many parents in this study remembered that every Friday night before the Chinese school day was “a huge fight” between the children and the parents. Children cried loudly and refused to do the homework, or they refused to go to the Chinese school the next day. Parents had to find ways to calm their children down, and parents’ strategies included helping their children with their Chinese homework. Victor Pan was one of these children. “My parents and I were like co-workers, doing the homework. They wrote down the answers, and I copied it over.” As most of the immigrant parents did, Stella Ma’s mother explained the reason why parents were willing to do their children’s homework for them. “All I want is that my child is willing to go [to Chinese school], sit and listen in the classroom.”

On the contrary to the second-generation children who hated Chinese school, Chinese immigrant parents found the Chinese school an indispensable social space to make connections with other Chinese immigrant parents in the community. This social space was particularly meaningful to the immigrant Chinese parents who were new to American society and started their families in the U.S. Such inexperienced parents could discuss and learn from knowledgeable parents regarding American society, school system, and how to help their children pass through an American school smoothly.

Angela Kung’s mother finished her college education in Taiwan and migrated to the U.S. with her family in the 1990s. As she recalled, she felt isolated in the U.S. for many years. She spoke limited English and knew nobody except for her family members. Mrs. Kung tried to improve her English by taking classes in the U.S.

But I did not have a car and no information. . . . I encountered many challenges. . . . Like when you did not have a car, you would want to know where you could take a bus. . . . Back then, I had no connections . . . I did not know what to do and how to survive here.

Mrs. Kung married her husband who came to the U.S. for graduate studies in a STEM-related field. Mrs. Kung later learned from a friend who said, “go find a Chinese school, and you will find lots of resources there.” Mrs. Kung thus enrolled Angela and her brother in a local Chinese language school.

Since then, Mrs. Kung has found opportunities for meeting and making friends with other Taiwanese immigrant parents; she no longer felt lonely. She found that she finally connected herself to “the world” where she could learn how to understand U.S. society and the American school system better.

Furthermore, she could make friends, discuss problems she encountered, and learn what other parents did for their children as well as how they prepared their children for American K-12 education.

Also, to show their children how much value parents placed on the matter of learning the parents’ mother language, most of my parent participants volunteered their time at the Chinese school. They either taught Mandarin at various levels (e.g., Chinese as a foreign language) or took administrative positions such as managing academic or general affairs. Particularly for novice parents, volunteering time at the Chinese school provided them with more opportunities to interact more deeply with other Chinese parents in the same community. They were thus exposed to more social opportunities after forming a circle of close friends. As Stella Ma’s mother’s experience showed:

While children were in class [at Chinese school], we [i.e., Asian moms] were gathering in the cafeteria. Some of the working moms took that opportunity to go grocery shopping. We, the stay-home moms, just hung out in the cafeteria. I sat there with a group of other mothers, just chatting.

Sophia Chou’s mother explained that “when you see the same group of people over and over, over time you would make friends with them. Especially, you would make friends with people whose children go to the same classes with your child.” Kyle Lin’s mother further described the nature of her friend circle: “We all left our hometown behind, settled down and started our family here. . . . We’re all like nuclear families . . . People in this community we hang out with are like our extended family members.”

Essentially, the Chinese school provided opportunities for novice immigrant parents to establish social networks with other immigrant parents who came from a similar background. In this social space, novice parents could find comfort, learn to cook and share hometown food, exchange parenting ideas, learn about U.S. society and education, and look for solutions to their problems related to their children’s school or themselves together. Furthermore, Asian moms tended to form a circle with other Asian moms whose children were taking the same classes with their children. By so doing, parents could learn, discuss, and

navigate the U.S. education system, school policies, and exchange ideas about how to help their children at American schools. This group of people (including the parents and children) would see each other over 12 years before children went to college, assuming they did not move to other districts or leave the Chinese school.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that Chinese school was *not* the only institutionalized social space for Asian moms to socialize in on an everyday basis, form a circle of friends, and develop long-term friendships. Chinese school could be the initial social space and a core social space, but it was not the only one. Over their children's K-12 years, such institutionalized social spaces extended to the places where parents attended students' school events, such as college fairs, school night, café night, and choir practices.

Moreover, the extended social spaces included the school parking area where parents waited and picked up their children after school every day; or the parking space where children attended after-school activities (e.g., enrichment tutoring centers, science summer camp, or music school). As Sophia Chou's mother explained, "if you see the same people over and over, at one point, you would start talking with them. From nodding to saying 'hi,' . . . , you would start talking and sharing information about your child." Mrs. Chou shared an example from a parking lot where Mrs. Chou met a friend, and the friend said, "We need to rush to the violin class. My child will have an audition next week." "Then, you would discuss your child's activities with them," Mrs. Chou added. Eventually, the social spaces for Asian moms to socialize, exchange information, and ask for advice expanded into their personal spaces such as Asian parents' parties and over the telephone. Over time, Asian parents' parties and telephone chats served as two major social spaces for Asian moms' social interaction, including updating information concerning their children's everyday lives, exchanging and learning new information, and "gossiping".

Chinese school, an institutionalized social space that was full of "Crouching Tigers, Hidden Dragons" that promoted the "going-to-Harvard" model.

“The Chinese school is a place full of ‘Crouching Tigers, Hidden Dragons,’” claimed Kyle Lin’s mother. This Chinese idiom describes an area filled with talented or extraordinary people who kept a low profile. In this case, Mrs. Lin referred the words “Tiger” and “Dragon” to the Chinese immigrant parents’ credentials and career backgrounds. Most of them were top-tier university alumni in Taiwan or China and had a doctorate or master’s degrees, such as in the STEM or medical field in the U.S. Specifically, some of them were alumni of Ivy League schools or prestigious schools (e.g., MIT or Caltech). Some of them worked at a prestigious university or at transnational corporations. Some of them were founders of technology companies. There were one or two who worked for the United Nations. Sophia Chou’s mother gave a more specific example. She labeled and pointed out a “tiger mom” at the Chinese school. “This ‘tiger mom’ had two master’s and one doctorate degree in the U.S., and her husband was a doctor in a hospital in the U.S. Currently, she was part-time teaching at an Ivy League school.”

Furthermore, to help novice immigrant parents navigate the U.S. education system better, the Chinese school regularly hosted educational seminars and workshops every year. Seminars such as “how to make your child succeed through K-12 education,” “how to get your child to go to Harvard,” “tips for preparing your college application,” or “things you should know about financial aid.” Many invited speakers were “successful” parents or students. By “successful,” the Chinese school meant first-generation parents whose child or children went to a prestigious school or second-generation children who went to a prestigious school. For instance, Gloria Kung’s mother shared her learning experience through the Chinese school.

[Regarding how to build up a child’s resume for the college application], my son was the first child, and we were panic [*sic*], and we didn’t know what to do. . . . Then, I learned that there was a schedule about “what to do” at each year of high school from the workshops at Chinese school. . . . Like what tests you should take in the 9th grade, how to build up your resume step by step since 9th grade . . . and so on. . . . Then, when Gloria [Mrs. Kung’s second child] entered high school, we knew better what to do and what to prepare for each year of her high school life.

That is, Chinese school performed as an institutionalized social space where novice parents could encounter many of the experienced parents and their children who were “successful.” Further, Chinese school served as a learning space, providing rich resources that promoted the “successful” model (the Ivy League model). In other words, the Chinese school served as a sociocultural context in which novice Asian parents were surrounded by a group of “successful” parents and “successful” children. In Victor Pan’s words, “that’s probably the original robot (i.e., the Asian model minority), either a good doctor or a good engineer or lawyer who are successful in making a lot of money.”

Hence, once novice Asian parents entered Chinese school, they were immediately attracted to the cultural persona of Asian moms and their ‘successful’ students. Chinese school served as a local meaning-making space where neophyte parents instantly learned the norm after entering the figured worlds of Asian moms and the “good students.” They learned how help their child succeed at school with the aim of entering an Ivy League school. They walked into the figured worlds where experienced members who were “successful” or who made their children “successful,” were viewed as being in a position of authority and where newcomer parents occupied the position of novice members. As Stella Ma’s mother claimed, “we did not understand this (American education) system at all. Thus, we asked around and followed what the experienced people do.” Not understanding the American education system allowed newcomer parents to self-identify as inexperienced immigrant parents in the U.S., which motivated their behavior of learning from the “successful” parents. As a result, with many “successful” families surrounding them, these novice Asian parents started their parenting journey with a specific question in mind: what is their (the experienced Asian parents) recipe for making their child successful and getting them to Harvard?

Children and their educational performance as mediating resources that consolidated Asian moms’ figured worlds.

Whenever parents meet up in their kids’ extracurriculars, parties, or whatever kind of social settings, they always talked to each other, and gossip . . . they talked about everything. They

talked about kids. They talked about other people's kids. They talked about schools and anything.

(Kyle Lin)

From my experience of shadowing Sophia Chou's mother, Kyle Lin's mother, and other parents to school events in the community, I found that my parent participants and their friends (other Asian moms) always started their everyday conversation with a question akin to "how's your son (or daughter) doing at school?", or "My child is taking what activity . . . and I need to drive him or her here and there" These greeting styles suggest that "children and their school affairs" served as artifacts for Asian moms to solidify their figured worlds of Asian moms and "good" students over their children's K-12 schooling years.

My visit to Kyle Lin's mother's electronic device repair store serves as an example of such interactions. Mrs. Lin's friend dropped by because something was wrong with her son's phone. They started their conversation with "how's your child doing" And the conversation lasted about 10 minutes.

Mrs. Lin: How's your older son? Has his school started yet?

The friend: He left home last week and currently he's in California. How about your older son?

Mrs. Lin: He is working on his applications to graduate school for this coming fall.

The friend: The tuitions you cover for your first child's school and your second child's school, is there a big difference?

Mrs. Lin: It's a big difference. . . . The state government doesn't have money. . . . A friend of mine whose child went to an out-of-state public university [like Mrs. Lin's first son], the tuition was \$50,000-60,000 a year"

(Data from the author's participant observation)

The topics of this conversation covered annual tuitions across several prestigious schools, for example, Dental Medicine in Columbia (\$80,000), NYU (\$100,000), U. Penn (\$90,000), and UC Berkeley. "California is a good place. Kids don't want to come back after going to school there", to "I want to live in California after I retire. My sister lives there." After Mrs. Lin's friend had left the store, Mrs. Lin

turned to me and said, “when I encounter other Asian parents, I always spend time chatting with them for a while. This is how we get information.” Interestingly, Mrs. Lin said, “this friend is just an acquaintance, not even a close friend.”

Taking my shadowing of Mrs. Chou as another example, the occasion was a Chinese New Year party that the Chinese school hosted. Soon after we arrived, many Asian mothers came to say “hi” to Mrs. Chou, and they started talking. In this process, Mrs. Chou introduced me to her friends saying “this is my friend.” We said “ni-how” in Mandarin (“hello” in English) to each other. Mrs. Chou and the other Asian moms then walked to the back of the party room and chatted for about half an hour. I chose not to join Mrs. Chou and her friends’ chatting because my presence, as a stranger to Mrs. Chou’s friends, might make other Asian mothers uncomfortable in sharing their intimate thoughts with each other. Later, Mrs. Chou shared with me what was in her conversation with the other three Asian moms.

It has been a while not seeing these friends since my children graduated from this school. . . . One asked me which college my daughter [Sophia] goes to. Another asked me how my second daughter is doing and what grade she is in [i.e., Sophia’s sister was a high school senior, and she was waiting for the results of her college applications]. Then, I asked how their children were doing.

Mrs. Chou’s “asking questions back” indicated that reciprocal information sharing and exchange were important participatory elements in the Asian mothers’ figured worlds. As many Asian moms (e.g., Mrs. Kung, Mrs. Lin, and Mrs. Chou) pointed out, “if you always get information from others and refuse to talk about yours, then people will stop sharing information with you.” Below I summarize Mrs. Chou’s description of what she learned from the other three Asian mothers in their 30-minute conversation.

Friend A had three daughters. Her oldest daughter went to a seven-year medical school in California. This was her fourth year. Her daughter came home 2 or 3 times a year. She and her husband missed their daughter a lot. So, this Friend A envied Mrs. Chou that Sophia went to a local university so that she could visit home often. But Mrs. Chou did not agree with her friend by saying “as a college student, she should have fun with her friends, not with her parents.”

Friend B had two daughters. One went to U.C. Berkeley, a junior student. Mrs. Chou congratulated her friend, saying “one more year and you will finish your responsibility of paying the college tuition for your daughter.” Friend B added that her second daughter would go to college this year. And that two children attending college in the same year would become a huge financial burden to her family. Friend B then asked Mrs. Chou questions about FAFSA (i.e., A Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and how to ask for more scholarship from the school. Mrs. Chou said to me that because Friend B did not have any loan or mortgage the chances of getting a larger scholarship or student loan were low.

Friend C's oldest daughter had finished her college education. Her second daughter currently was a high school junior. Friend C's second daughter had been doing her volunteer work at this Chinese school for several years. At this point, Friend C was looking for volunteer opportunities in a nursing home for her daughter. But she had difficulties to find one because many of the opportunities had been taken.

In the 30-minute conversation, Mrs. Chou and her friends updated each other about how each of their children was doing at school and what challenges or problems they had at that point. They also asked for advice from Mrs. Chou whom they deemed as “experienced” and thus occupying a position of authority, particularly as Mrs. Chou was known for helping Sophia successfully appeal for more scholarship money (Sophia got more than \$10,000 difference). This incident suggested that Asian moms' figured worlds were sustained by the mediating sociocultural resources of children's academic achievement and their “successful” college preparation experiences. In other words, through asking about how each other's children were doing, these Asian mothers consolidated their figured worlds where there were experienced members (i.e., Mrs. Chou whose daughter had gone through the college-application process, went to a prestigious program at a “good” school, and got a significant amount of scholarship money) and novice members (e.g., Friend C whose daughter was in high school and Friend B who sought advice on winning a larger scholarship).

Without my asking, Mrs. Chou continued and explained to me why her Friend C was looking for volunteer opportunities in a nursing home for her daughter.

There were too many Asian students who had Chinese school as their sites of performing volunteer work. This “sameness” made their applications look bad to the college admissions officers. . . . Do you remember the “tiger mom” at the Chinese school? [I nodded] Her oldest daughter was the first one in this community who formed a band and played in a nursing home [as her volunteer experience]. Alex Hsui was the second one. Now, many of the parents changed strategies [i.e., not doing volunteer work at Chinese school]. They looked for opportunities in nursing homes or child care centers that serve students with disabilities. But many of the opportunities at these centers in this area had been taken. So, my Friend C will have hard time to find one.

The comment about “the sameness” in Asian students’ application results was the conclusion that Mrs. Chou and many of my parent participants had reached. Mrs. Chou used the notion of “sameness” to explain why many of the high-achieving students in their community (the class of 2013 that included Sophia) got many ‘waitlist’ results in their applications to prestigious schools. These were schools such as Harvard, Cornell, NYU, Princeton, Cooper Union, Brown, and Carnegie Mellon. Mrs. Chou used the “tiger mom’s” daughter and Alex Shui as examples of “not doing the same volunteer work as most of the Asian students do” to justify the reason why she thought the “tiger mom’s” daughter and Alex Shui got accepted by an Ivy League school. Mrs. Chou continued,

Everybody has similarly super high scores in his or her GPAs and SAT. Most of them have similar extra-curricular activities such as playing piano and violin at the professional level [state or east coast]. They have some years of science-led or math-led summer camp experiences in Columbia, Cornell, or John Hopkin. They won many after-school competitions from region to state or east coast level such as in model UN, Odyssey of Mind. . . . They had volunteer work in Chinese school, and the topics all students wrote in their application essays were all about their Chinese culture.

Mrs. Chou's Friend C learned a lesson from the parents of the class of 2013: having volunteer experience at a Chinese school was no longer appealing to top-tier college admissions officers. As Mrs. Chou commented, the admissions officers "already see a lot of good Asian students, and they did all the same. So, you need something about you to stand out." Volunteering time at a nursing home or other welfare center would be more attractive to those admissions officers because it was something different from what the majority of the Asian students did. Friend C felt convinced by seeing some "successful" examples in the community such as Alex Shui and that "tiger mom's" daughter. Therefore, Friend C made the decision to jump off this bandwagon (i.e., following the crowd to volunteer at Chinese school). She identified an alternative and "successful" model performed by Alex Shui and one of the "tiger moms'" daughters. Thus, Mrs. Chou's Friend C made an effort to find her daughter a volunteer opportunity at a welfare center. By saying "many of the opportunities had been occupied," Mrs. Chou suggested that other families in the community also learned the lesson from the class of 2013. They were "faster" than her Friend C and had found a nursing home. This was why Mrs. Chou concluded that Friend C would have difficulties to such a volunteer opportunity.

It is worth noting that in the narrative of "how is your child doing," the topics of the conversation evolved as the children grew. For example, when children were at elementary and middle school, the topics for conversation would center on students' school grades, tests, exams, school activities, and extracurricular activities. When children entered high school, the topics would revolve around college-application items (i.e., GPAs, SAT, extracurricular activities, volunteer work, and college essays). Some specific topics were "how do I understand the school policies" such as the high school four-year curriculum, honors, AP programs, or PSAT, SATs, or the senior prom. Or, "Should my child get SAT tutoring and from where?" Over time, items related to college applications were used as cultural and collective resources for sustaining the Asian moms' figured worlds.

Eventually, talking about children's school life, school events, and their educational performance and achievement allowed Asian moms to understand how each student performed and what test score they got. For example, Gloria Kung's mother was with her friends. It was the season when many high school

seniors took the SAT. Thus, the topic for conversation this time centered on how their children performed on this test. As Mrs. Kung recalled,

Someone told me “your daughter Gloria did so well on her test last time. She only took once and then her grade is so high [i.e., 2340].” One mother, whose son is a high-achiever, said, “I don’t know how my son performed.” Then, another mom responded, “your son got 230 in his PSAT, correct? He should be all right on this test” . . . Later I learned that her son got 2400.

The instance shown above indicated that in their previous round of interaction, Mrs. Kung and the mother whose son was a high-achiever shared the details of their children’s PSAT and SAT scores. Therefore, one of the Asian moms in Mrs. Kung’s circle could use the two pieces of information that she learned earlier to participate in their following conversations. But the question was, were these Asian moms aggressive in gathering other students’ school grades or test scores? Kyle Lin’s mother claimed that it was not true.

We do not purposely pry into other children’s privacy like their test scores. . . . In the U.S., you can’t ask everything. Particularly, it would be weird if you ask your friends directly about their children’s test scores or school grades. It always comes up with a conversation and the information would come out naturally. [For example,] whenever our children entered an upper grade, we would ask around. We identified the parents whose children already had the subject instructors whom our children were going to have. We asked about how their children’s experiences were. . . . Some teachers were strict with grading [and that’s the moment when parents started talking about the grades their children got].

In summary, the Chinese language school functioned as an institutionalized social space that grouped novice Chinese immigrant parents and connected them to experienced (i.e., “successful”) parents in the community. Surrounded by many “successful” models, novice parents entered the figured worlds of Asian moms and the “good” students. They learned the norm of being one of the members in the figured worlds: “help your child succeed at school.” This sense-making process informed novice Asian moms of their place within the sociocultural worlds of experienced versus inexperienced parents. Such a social

identification process situated novice Asian parents as learners. They started navigating how to prepare their children to be “successful” at school and later could go to a “good” college by following the path that the “successful” families had traveled.

Furthermore, within this sociohistorical context at Chinese language school, novice Chinese immigrant mothers had the opportunities to interact with and form a group of inexperienced parents who could navigate the path to student success together. By talking about children and asking how to help their children succeed at school, it allowed novice Asian moms to consolidate their figured worlds over time. As I showed above, the conversation that Mrs. Chou and her friends constructed indicated a classic example of how Asian moms entered their figured worlds simply by talking about their children and asking about ways to help their children. The case of Mrs. Chou’s Friend C showed an example of how a novice Asian mother learned from her peer friends through Asian moms’ everyday conversation that shaped her type of involvement in her daughter’s volunteer experience.

From Everyday Update to Asian Moms’ Peer Pressure, and Hopping on the Bandwagon: Asian Moms’ Perceptions of the Mechanism of Gossip in Facilitating Their Learning

Yeah, a lot of gossips [*sic*]. A lot of gossips happened to these Asian moms in Chinese school or something like that. Like all of their kids would be in class and they sit around a table in the cafeteria. (Stella Ma)

How did I know what SAT was, what PSAT was or for what schools my child should aim? [OC: Mrs. Lin stressed her tone, indicating that she did not know what the American K-12 education and its relation to the college-application.] Which school had what strong programs? Or was there any hidden criteria that you needed to pay attention to while applying to a certain school? Like Stanford, I learned that this school prefers students who are strong in extracurricular activities, like being a great singer. . . . I learned these ideas from talking with other parents . . . (Kyle Lin’s mother)

Asian moms’ gossip circles (Asian moms’ gossip hereafter) provided many functions to Asian moms. First, it functioned as an essential mechanism for Asian parents’ “survival” in terms of learning how to,

for example, make hometown foods, how to prepare for the Naturalization Test, how to understand American school policies, or how to help children navigate the American K-12 education system that they did not experience themselves. Also, Asian moms' gossip served as a comforting circle of friendship for rectification counseling when one encountered parent-child relationship problems or marriage problems. For instance, when a child refused to talk to his or her parents about school, the mother could ask other Asian moms for advice. Or if one's daughter was overwhelmed by a heavy load of school assignments and upcoming tests and cried at home, the mother could ask other Asian moms whose children were in the same class for advice. I found that the mechanism of Asian moms' gossip played a crucial role in facilitating how Asian moms helped each other and obtained ideas of how to help their children navigate K-12 education. Nonetheless, it was also this social interaction that produced Asian moms' peer pressure that dictated a certain type of parental engagement in their children's education and after-school activities.

Below, I first sketch the mechanism of Asian moms' gossip to present how it mediated the complex relationship among Asian moms' learning, social positioning, social identification, and their children's educational experiences. Then, I explore parents' perspectives of the mechanism of Asian moms' gossip in shaping their decision-making of "hopping on the bandwagon," which mainly occurred during students' elementary and middle school stages and why. Then, I finish this section with how the act of reaching out to the "successful" families to benefit from their knowledge served to download the sociohistorical pattern of the model minority stereotype.

Sketching the mechanism of Asian moms' gossip.

The Asian moms' gossip was composed of two key social interactions. One was through parent-parent interaction and social comparison/positioning in the community. The other was parent-child interaction at home: Asian moms brought their peer pressure home. Initially, Asian moms talked about their children and updated and obtained information regarding children's performance in the community during everyday interactions with other Asian moms. This process of Asian moms' information exchange and social comparison produced Asian moms' peer pressure, which I will explain in the next sections.

Through the Asian moms' gossip, Asian moms identified the "good" student model and brought the information home to their children. Asian moms disguised their expectations in discourse such as "I heard someone is doing 'X'. I think you should also be doing it." This parent-child interaction in the exchange of the targeted information (i.e., the "good student" model) updated both parents and children. The notion of "updated" refers to the result that Asian moms verified the accuracy of the information with their children – because some parents tended to "exaggerate" or "brag about" their children's achievements, as claimed by many of my student participants like Alex Shui and Kyle Lin.

Thus, after bringing the information home, Asian moms felt the need to triangulate the information with their children or the children felt the need to double check the information with other students. From there, the targeted information spread through the community (i.e., from Asian moms to children at home, then from children to children, children to Asian moms, and then Asian moms to Asian moms in the community). Thus, the "good student" model and information about "good students" became widely circulated in the community where the Chinese immigrant families had lived for over 20 years. The mechanism of Asian moms' gossip produced the phenomenon "everyone was all over everyone's business." Furthermore, Asian moms' gossip acted to localize the sociohistorical pattern of Asian model minority by spreading overachievers' advice through the community and by making their children follow this "good student" model at home. For instance, Stella Ma's mother commented,

How do I know Cornell is a good school or not? It's all from what they (i.e., other Asian moms) say, like "wow. That kid is excellent. He got into Cornell." "Wow. That kid is amazing. She got into Princeton." That's how we got information . . . Then, I told my kid, like "I heard people say that school is really really good. Do you wanna . . . ?"

In the following section, I provide parents' perspectives on their social interactions to demonstrate how the mechanism of Asian moms' gossip operated in the community setting. I first show how and why Asian moms' everyday update regarding their children's after-school schedule and other "good" children's achievements functioned as parent learning and a source of pressure. The notion of learning refers to parents following the "good" model and doing what most families do as an approach to help their

children. “Pressure” indicates Asian moms self-positioning as “not knowing the American education system” that would make them worry that their children could fall behind. Also, not following what the majority crowd was doing produced another type of pressure for the Asian moms: worrying that their children might fall behind other students who were doing the targeted activities. This social practice, essentially following the crowd, occurred mainly during students’ elementary and middle school education. Finally, I demonstrate how novice Asian moms reached out to learn from the “successful” families and provide insights about how their advice served to download the widely-circulating imagery of the model minority stereotype.

The pressure . . . within the Asian community . . . I mean the Chinese community, I guess the Chinese know each other, and they know each other’s kids. And they all hang out together and discuss their kids’ grades and life with each other. . . . And then you know this kid, on Tuesdays, goes to swimming. And (on) Wednesdays, he goes to practice tennis. On Thursdays, he goes to art class and on Fridays he goes to a church camp . . . You hear about all those people doing so much stuff in their lives. And then you figure that you (your child) have to do something because your child didn’t do anything. (Stella Ma)

“Hopping on the bandwagon:” “We don’t understand this (American education) system. How can we help our children then? So, we follow what other people say and do.”

Many Chinese immigrant parents in this community sent their children to learn a lot of stuff when children were at elementary school. . . . These children’s schedules were so tight. . . . Like when their kids finished school around 2 or 3 p.m., they rushed to a violin class at 4 p.m. and then a piano class at 5 p.m. The child had dinner in the car. Then, they rushed to a mental arithmetic lesson at 6:30 p.m., and then a dance class at 8 p.m. (Ella Wei’s father)

Many of my parent participants considered that “Asian moms’ gossip” acted as a major access for them to learning how to arrange their children’s after-school activities when children were at elementary or middle school. For example, Sophia Chou took piano and painting lessons when she was in kindergarten. Sophia Chou’s mother remembered that when Sophia was four or five, she saw some of her

friends send their children to take private lessons, such as mental arithmetic or swimming. Mrs. Chou recalled her motive for sending Sophia to a private piano lesson:

[It was at a friend's house, and we're having a party] . . . Back then everyone's children were around 5 or 6 years old. The hostess said, "Oh, my daughter has been taking a piano lesson for a while." And then that child played a song in front of everyone. . . . Then, some of the other parents felt that "I think, it's about time for my child to take a piano lesson too." So, that's why it becomes a basic. Everyone here has at least two or three years of piano-learning experiences.

Mrs. Chou remembered that the little girl was playing "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." "The song was very simple, but at that moment, you felt that you should send your child to learn and take piano lessons as well." Mrs. Chou further explained that many families in the community did the same thing: "every child started with taking piano lessons when he or she reached the age of four or five. And then sometime later, children took swimming lessons, painting, or dancing. They were the main after-school activities elementary-level students had, and parents drove them to these classes every day." Mrs. Chou emphasized, "everyone was like 'do not make your child lose at the starting line'." Mrs. Chou felt pressured, and thus she signed her two daughters (Sophia and Sophia's younger sister) up at a local piano center.

Angela Kung's mother had a similar experience of following what other Asian moms did for their children. She claimed that most of her ideas of how to build up her children's (particularly for her first child's) K-12 after-school activities were mainly from the Asian moms' gossip. For example, when Mrs. Kung's son was a 7th grader, at a Chinese language school she was shocked by the fact that most of her son's classmates were absent from class. She later learned that all her son's classmates were taking a SCAT (School and College Ability Test) test that day. The reason for taking SCAT was to apply to CTY summer programs (Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth). Those children did that because they got a notice from school, an inquiry to register and taking a SCAT test to apply to a science summer camp at Johns Hopkins University.

“It seemed that it was a ‘must’ experience that high-achieving middle school kids had to have,” Mrs. Kung explained, because she saw all the other children in her son’s Chinese school class had that experience except for her son. However, without receiving the school notice, Mrs. Kung did not know what to do at that time. Then, one of her friends told her, “go register and take a SCAT test. That’s the qualification of applying to the CTY summer programs. You don’t need a letter from the school. No need to go through the school. You can apply to that program by yourself.” However, Mrs. Kung still did not know when her son should take the SCAT test. It was not until she was at a party with other Asian moms when she learned from another Asian mom who said “I will take my child to take a SCAT test this month.” Mrs. Kung said to me, “I immediately asked my son to go online and register . . . Then, (he applied and) he got accepted. He then had that summer camp experience.”

Mrs. Kung shared another story of how she helped her son catch another opportunity through her Asian moms’ network: the Columbia University Science Honors Program (SHP) on Saturdays throughout the academic year. The Columbia SHP offered primarily STEM-related courses for high school students who had a strong interest in science and math. Mrs. Kung described: attending the Columbia SHP was “a great opportunity for a high schooler” because “high schoolers could use the lab at that school and actively interact with those professors.” However, Gloria Kung’s brother did not know this piece of information although many of his high school peers attended the programs; neither did Mrs. Kung. Mrs. Kung did not know about the Columbia SHP until she attended an Asian parents’ party. As Mrs. Kung recalled,

Some of the mothers talked about this program and said “it’s easy to apply but hard to get in.”

[OC, the application included an unofficial copy of the applicant’s secondary school transcript, a personal essay, two letters of recommendation, and an entrance examination administered by the university] . . . Not many students got in because you [i.e., the student] need to be really good at math and science.”

Mrs. Kung learned the news about the Columbia SHP at an Asian parents’ party. Furthermore, she learned the admission criteria via her conversation with other Asian moms. After acquiring the “how to,”

Mrs. Kung immediately urged her son to download the application form online and gather all the materials for the application. Then, Mrs. Kung's son submitted his application one day before the deadline.

Based on Mrs. Kung's two examples, the Asian moms' gossip provided a major access point for Mrs. Kung to obtain information of how to build up her son's resume through learning from what other Asian moms did for their children. Thus, Mrs. Kung claimed, whenever she got opportunities to socialize with other Asian moms, she was "prepared." In her own words, "I need to expand the size of my radar screen [to learn what others were doing] and help my son catch the opportunities." Mrs. Kung further revealed the reason why she was aggressive in asking around and gathering information for her children. She explained,

Whenever I heard someone saying things knowledgeably on what they did for their children and the reason why they did it, I got nervous and felt pressured . . . I felt pressured because I was afraid that my child would lose to other children if I did not do the same things for my child. . . .

We did not grow up in this American society. We had limited access to know American people. . . . We don't read the [English] newspapers. We don't watch the [English] news. How do we know all the things? It's all from hearsay [in this community].

Angela's mother used the term "o-ba-san's wisdom", a Japanese term meaning "elderly women", to describe her "learned" knowledge of what to do to build up her children's resume. Mrs. Kung used the term "o-ba-san" to refer to her status of being an immigrant parent in the U.S., speaking limited English and being unable to understand the American education system on her own. Such a background made Mrs. Kung feel disconnected from mainstream American society. However, with the help of her Asian moms' network, Mrs. Kung could learn about American society and its education system through her talk with other Asian moms.

Mrs. Kung positioned herself as an inexperienced and nervous mother who was afraid of making her children fall behind other children in the community due to her limited knowledge of the American education system. Mrs. Kung thus felt pressured while she interacted with other Asian moms, who she

deemed as “knowledgeable.” The pressure occurred when those experienced Asian moms detailed how they got their children into prestigious summer programs of which Mrs. Kung was unaware. Being afraid that her children would fall behind those students who attended the programs because her children did not, Mrs. Kung, therefore, had to increase the size of her radar screen. Mrs. Kung decided to be “all ears” when talking with her peer friends to obtain or accumulate her “o-ba-san’s wisdom” by following what other Asian moms did for their children.

Victor Pan was the second child of his family. He shared his observation of watching his mother learn how to build up his older sister’s resume through Asian moms’ gossip. When this was occurring Victor Pan was in middle school, and his mother was learning how to help his sister, a high schooler, regarding enriching her after-school activity. Victor recalled,

My mom gossiped a lot with her friends. It’s really obvious. She talked with all the Chinese parents, (like) “Oh, is that what your kid’s doing? Your kid is so smart. . . . My kid is doing this now . . .” We also have family friends who have kids. Other parents are always like “you should do this program, I heard this is really really good. . . . My child is in this program. It will look really good on the college application. Your child should probably do this.” My mom was like “ok. Let’s do that.”

I then turned to Victor Pan’s mother, asking her idea of how to help her children navigate the American education system. Her response confirmed what Victor described and she explained why asking friends for ideas was important for her decision-making process regarding how to help her children succeed. “I didn’t go to (K-16) school here. So, I have to ask around.”

Mrs. Kung’s and Mrs. Pan’s experiences presented a unique and collective social practice within this local Chinese immigrant community: Asian moms’ behaviors of asking around, sharing information about children, and catching information (and opportunities) for children as an approach to enrich children’s after-school experiences. Novice Asian moms positioned themselves as having only scarce knowledge about the American education system. They created a localized learning identity of “I don’t understand this system . . . so I follow what people say and do.” Such a social identity dictated novice Asian moms’

behavior to collect information about what other experienced Asian parents did to build up their children's resumes through their social gatherings. Inexperienced Asian moms' acts of learning from other experienced families served two purposes. One was to counteract their "unknowing" about the U.S. education system which they deemed as a disadvantage. The other was to help their children build up their resume or improve their school performance. Ultimately, through the mechanism of Asian moms' gossip, the individual acts of learning and following what the successful families did turned into a collective social practice in the Chinese immigrant community.

Asian moms' social pressure of *not* jumping on the bandwagon: "I worried that my child might fall behind if he didn't take the activity that other students were taking."

There is a group of mothers at the Chinese language school. They all like to compete their sons together. . . . Umm, so like if someone said "Oh, I am bringing my son to a summer program at Cornell" and then all the other mothers will try to sign up and jump on the boat. It's really competitive. (Sophia Chou)

"Hopping on the bandwagon" originated from the novice Asian moms' belief that it would lead their children to success, emulating the successful families. Therefore, not following the mainstream generated novice parent peer pressure, making them think "am I wrong?" Alex Shui's mother had such a reflection when she learned that many of her friends had signed their children up at a local, famous SAT group tutoring center.

In the year when Alex was in 9th grade, Mrs. Shui received a phone call from Mrs. Li, who was well-known for teaching SAT English in the community. Mrs. Li asked if Mrs. Shui would be interested in signing Alex up for a one-year-long SAT group tutoring course. The class was composed of a group of four students to share the cost. Mrs. Shui refused to do so because she understood that Alex's endurance of rote-learning could last for two to three months only; this one-year-long tutoring style was not a good choice for Alex.

However, during the summer when Alex was a rising sophomore, Mrs. Shui heard many of her friends talking about Mrs. Li. "This teacher is so good at teaching SAT English," as Mrs. Shui recalled. Alex's

mom learned that every child she knew at the Chinese school was taking that one-year SAT program. Mrs. Shui panicked. “Almost everybody went to this person.” Mrs. Shui then doubted her previous decision of not signing Alex up. “Am I wrong? Did I make the wrong choice for my son?” Mrs. Shui immediately called the SAT tutoring center and wanted to sign Alex up. But this time, Mrs. Shui’s request was rejected because there were no seats available. Mrs. Shui described,

I called Mrs. Li. She said “it’s fully packed. No more seat available.” Then, Mrs. Li talked with me about how many classes she had for this one-year SAT program and who were those students in these classes. I was shocked by the fact that I know all of the students who were taking her class.

After the conversation with the SAT tutoring instructor, Mrs. Shui felt even more anxiety. She felt more pressured by learning the fact that not only were the children in her Asian moms’ friend circle taking the SAT program, but also many students in Alex’s class at the American school. Mrs. Shui knew that English was Alex’s weak point. She became worried that Alex might thus fall behind his peers, especially when a large cohort of them were taking an SAT English tutoring class. Therefore, Mrs. Shui immediately hired an English tutor for Alex that summer.

Downloading the sociohistorical pattern of model minority stereotype: Novice Asian moms’ reaching out to the “successful” model to acquire detailed advice.

If there is a very successful kid [in the community], then a lot of parents would want their kids to be like that kid. So, they will try to find out what makes the kid successful. (Kyle Lin)

The novice Asian moms continuously sought information regarding what other children were doing or who successfully achieved something, and would specifically contact such families. They would communicate with the parent or student of a successful family to learn from their experiences. I use the phrase “downloading the widely-published model minority stereotype” to describe the communication process of Asian moms and successful families. I use the term “download” to contrast with Asian moms’ later action of “activating” the model minority stereotype through bringing their acquired information

(which “good student” is doing what and how) home to their children, which I will elaborate on in the next section.

Stella Ma’s experience serves as an example of contacting successful families. Stella enjoyed reading and writing. Many of her friends asked Stella to proofread their essays for their college applications. She also taught her friends how to make every word count within a 500-word limit essay. At her American school, Stella’s English teachers often used her essays as models for the class. Stella’s mother was one of the Asian moms who used gossip to inform their decisions of what activities her children should engage. Mrs. Ma signed Stella up for an SAT English tutoring group in the year when children entered 10th grade. After attending the class twice, Stella refused to go because she felt the class was “boring.” The instructor also told Mrs. Ma that Stella did not need the tutoring class: “She doesn’t need a tutor. She can study on her own.” Furthermore, the instructor complimented Stella’s English achievement in front of other Asian moms when they picked up their children: “Stella’s English writing is excellent. She did not need this tutoring class” (in Mrs. Ma’s words). This comment from the English tutor was widely spread in the community. Mrs. Ma thus received many phone calls from other Asian moms, asking about how Stella reached this level.

In this case, other Asian moms positioned Stella as a “good” student who was excellent at writing, praised by the SAT English tutor whom Asian moms positioned as an authority. Thus, many Asian moms “swamped” the Ma family’s house with the aim of learning Stella’s learning techniques as well as Mrs. Ma’s approach to making Stella an “excellent” English writer. Meanwhile, the news that “Stella is excellent at English writing, and thus she was ‘kicked out’ by the English tutor” (in Mrs. Ma’s words) was widely circulated across the community. After that, when Mrs. Ma and Stella encountered other Asian moms, they always got compliments such as “your Stella performs so well. That is so good.” This “fame” brought Stella pressure to maintain her level of excellence. As Stella commented,

I don’t want them to say something bad about me. So, I try to carry myself correctly. Asian parents are so gossipy. And especially now we’re hearing from colleges. “Oh. That kid got into Cornell.” “Oh. That kid didn’t get into Harvard. Oh . . .” It’s weird.

Sophia Chou's father depicted his wife's and other Asian moms' acts of asking around as "Bow-Da-Tin" in Mandarin (i.e., 'Mrs. Nosy Parker' in English). Interestingly, Kyle Lin used "vultures" to describe Asian moms when they collect information for their children (about what other children did). Kyle Lin's use of "vultures" indicated Asian moms' specific acts: reaching out to other children to obtain information. Taking Victor Pan as an example, Victor Pan was known as an overachiever in his community. In his senior year, he attended the Columbia University Science Honors Program and took a math course in an Ivy League's mathematics department. He also helped the math department at his high school redesign its four-year math curriculum. Victor Pan frequently encountered "purposeful" greetings from other Asian moms. Victor described,

A lot of Asian parents . . . they are awkward sometimes. They would come to you and like "Hey, you took all the AP courses. It's so good for you." It's not a real conversation. They just want to ask you "tell me your resume now." . . . They ask me like "how do I study?" . . . "How did I get such a great grade?" Anything like that. . . . "What did you use for studying here and there? Should my kid take AP US history?" something like that. . . . You just want to avoid it.

More interestingly, Victor made fun of his mother and self-reported that his mom was also one of the Asian moms who were "socially awkward sometimes." Victor and his mother were very close because it was always his mother who drove him to attend after-school programs through his K-12 education. Thus, Victor spent a great deal of quality time with his mother in the car. Victor often shared his school life with his mom, which included who were the "good" students in Victor's class, which Mrs. Pan wanted to know. After learning from Victor about his classmates, Mrs. Pan could talk about Victor's school in depth to her friends. For instance, one time during my visit for interviews, Mrs. Pan and Mr. Pan showed me pictures they took at Victor's high school graduation ceremony. Mrs. Pan pointed to one student and said "this one goes to NYU, a film production major. The tuition is about \$80,000 a year. He has rich parents." Then, Mrs. Pan pointed to some other students. "This girl goes to Princeton. And that girl goes to Princeton, too. This girl in red had the opportunity to take a college-level math. But she did not challenge herself, like the way Victor did."

The reason why Mrs. Pan wanted to know who were the “good” students at Victor’s school was that she wanted to understand how other “good” students performed in relation to Victor. Therefore, when Mrs. Pan had the opportunity to see these “good” students, she made an effort to talk to them. Mrs. Pan’s efforts turned out to be the moments that Victor referred to when he said “my mom was socially awkward sometimes,” and the moments that Victor felt “embarrassed” about. These instances often occurred when his mom went to Victor’s school. As Victor recalled,

So, when she comes to my school and when she sees them [the “good” students], she would [go up to the person and] be like “oh. You must be this person. Blah, blah, blah,” and talk about all the academic random stuff, like “how do you study SAT.” . . . it’s very embarrassing and in general, like . . . you don’t want to associate yourself with her like that. It’s like “I don’t know this person.”

Victor gave a specific case at an award ceremony that his school held each year. Victor’s school also invited parents for co-meetings that day. Mrs. Pan attended the ceremony with Victor. On their way to the auditorium, Mrs. Pan saw one of Victor’s friends “Tom Lee, and he’s very smart,” as Victor commented. When Mrs. Pan saw him, she asked Victor “That’s Tom Lee, right?” Then, (in Victor’s words) “she started running toward him,” saying to Victor “I got to talk to him for a moment.” What did Mrs. Pan say to Tom Lee? Victor described, “She’s like . . . ‘You are so amazing and everything. What do you want to do for this summer . . . stuff? My son is so lazy’ . . .” Victor continued,

That kid was like [feeling] awkward . . . [It’s] an awkward moment. It’s just very very embarrassing . . . I kind of know my mom for her socially awkward looking, [since then], I just keep her from trying to do anything like this as possible.

Victor described that he had been acting “lazy” at home in Mrs. Pan’s eyes. By “lazy,” Victor meant his sluggishness in the summer of his rising senior year. Mrs. Pan attended many workshops for college applications held by Chinese schools. She also contacted some parents of Victor’s friends who were studying at Ivy League schools for tips for their success. Among those tips, Mrs. Pan learned that the summer of students’ rising senior year was the time to start college applications; Victor had not started his

applications. Therefore, when Mrs. Pan saw Victor “sitting around, playing some games, and listening to some music on my computer . . . , she just started shouting,” as Victor recalled. Mrs. Pan deemed Tom Lee as a potential valedictorian and a more hard-working student than Victor. Hence, she positioned Victor as “lazy” and wanted to know how Tom Lee would spend that summer.

Victor Pan was not the only student who described Asian parents as “being socially awkward sometimes.” Alex Shui had a similar experience. He explained,

Because they (i.e., Asian parents) tend to emphasize grades, grades, [and] academics, or like “you got this such such grade” . . . It’s just awkward because that’s not usually something we would talk about. But the parents kind of played it out like “my son is not as good as you. You are really good at whatever.” It’s just really awkward sometimes to go through that with my parents.

Alex Shui’s and Victor Pan’s narratives not only highlighted the academic-oriented topics in Asian moms’ gossip circles, but also the nature of parents’ social interactions with students or with their peer parents: social comparison as social positioning. In Victor’s case, because Mrs. Pan saw that Victor spent time playing video games she positioned Victor as a “lazy” student, compared to the “good” model that she learned from Victor and other Asian moms. In Alex’s case, the Asian parents (that Alex encountered) compared their children to Alex. They positioned Alex as “being better than their child regarding academic performance.” Hence, many students such as Victor Pan and Alex Shui commented on their Asian moms’ gossip: “some parents have a habit of comparing and competing their kids to others.” As Alex commented,

Asian parents always talk about how their children are doing or like what colleges they got into, which college they’re going to, or how they’re doing at college. I guess it’s all about academically how well their children are. . . . Asian parents’ talk tends to capture around how their children are doing relative to all the other children.

In summary, novice Asian moms considered their scarce knowledge of the American education system as a disadvantage that might lead their children to fall behind other students. Asian moms thus created a localized learning identity and corresponding behavior: “I don’t understand the system . . . so I follow

what people say and do.” Asking around, catching information, and chasing what the experienced families had learned became a common and collective social practice for inexperienced Asian moms, which resulted in “hopping on the bandwagon.” However, avoiding the bandwagon also generated social pressure that was applied to novice Asian moms.

By identifying the “successful” models in the community, contacting families who possessed these models, and learning from them, novice Asian moms “downloaded” the widely-circulated sociohistorical model of the model minority stereotype. Through collectively following the traces left by the “successful” families, novice Asian moms engaged their children (i.e., an act of activating the model minority imagery they downloaded earlier, which I will talk about in the next section) in a certain set of after-school experiences which embodied “the Asian thing” over time. The after-school activities that many of my student participants had in common over their K-12 education were piano, violin (or viola), Taekwondo, summer science camp (at 1 or 2 prestigious schools), SAT group tutoring, and volunteer work at a Chinese school. Based on attending many similar activities, the sameness of children’s performance related to their college applications turned into specific artifacts for Asian moms’ social comparison and positioning. The phenomenon of social comparison mainly occurred and persisted after students entered high school, which I will explore next.

Asian Moms’ Social Comparison as Positioning across Community and Home Contexts: The Activation and Localization of the Sociohistorical Pattern of Model Minority Stereotype in Asian Immigrant Families

Even though you have no intention to compete your child [*sic*] with other parents’ child . . . but your child was doing the same activities as other children did, [which provided a base for social comparison]. . . . Over time, what result came out from each one (i.e. each child’s achievement related to these activities), people [in this community] will know eventually . . . You don’t have to broadcast. Everyone will have an idea [of how your child performs in relation to his or her child and to other children] in his or her mind. (Sophia Chou’s mother)

Mrs. Chou's comment suggested that Asian moms' collective social practice of "hopping on the bandwagon" resulted in the following consequence: most of the children in the community attended the same activities. Such an outcome provided a foundation for Asian moms' in-depth understanding of every child's educational performance in the community (including children's school performance) through gossip. Over time, children's performance regarding their college applications (e.g., school grades, SAT scores, or results of extracurricular activities, such as winning a state-level competition) served as precise cultural resources for Asian moms to compare their children with other students.

Importantly, all the students' educational performance or achievements (e.g., GPAs, SAT score, the state-level or East-coast tennis competition, the colleges that students applied to or the Ivy League schools that accepted students) carried symbolic meanings derived from the American college admissions system. By learning what result came out from which child through the Asian moms' gossip, it allowed Asian moms to establish an imagined academic hierarchy in their figured worlds. Also, it allowed Asian moms to evaluate how their children performed relative to other Asian moms' children and whether their children were falling behind other "good" students in the community.

More specifically, comparing one's child's educational performance with other children's achievements provided a major sociocultural resource for Asian moms to evaluate how well their child performed in relations to others. Once one Asian mom learned, through her exchange of information with other Asian moms, that her child did not meet the same standard as a supposedly "good" student, she felt pressured. She became worried that her child might fall behind other "good" students or she hoped that her child could be as good as that "good" student. The question is: how did Asian moms respond to their perceived peer pressure?

I found that Asian moms brought their peer pressure home, disguised by the narrative of "Hey, this person is doing this. You should also be doing that too," an example raised by Stella Ma. The discourse of what the "good" student has achieved served as a mediating artifact for Asian moms to position their child as not performing well compared with the "good" student that they had identified through their

gossip. This discourse of “good” students also acted as a motivation tool for how Asian moms inspired or expected their children to improve and perform better.

Through my one-year participant observation, I *never* captured a moment in which Asian moms explicitly compared their children with those of another parent (e.g., ‘my child is better than yours.’). Rather, it was through parents’ interpretations of how their peer parents talked with them or through their children’s descriptions and interpretations of how Asian moms talked about their children to other Asian moms. Furthermore, I learned from children about how their parents brought the “good” student model home to their children. Learning from the children’s accounts allowed me to document how Asian moms’ practices of social positioning occurred across the community and home settings. This social process (i.e., Asian moms’ bringing the good student model home to their children) served to activate the model minority stereotype they “downloaded” through interacting with some successful families in the community. Further, parents’ acts of telling their children about the good student model activated the localization of the widely-circulated model minority stereotype into the Asian families.

Below I present students’ perspectives on how the mechanism of Asian moms’ gossip completed itself through two reciprocal social interactions. One was students’ perceptions of how Asian moms talked about their children by “sharing,” “bragging,” or “comparison.” The other was students’ interpretation of how Asian moms brought their gossip home as artifacts for positioning their children. I explain why and how the social positioning within the family context functioned to thicken students’ learning identities from the home to school settings, which ultimately led to the production of a new generation of Asian model minority. Finally, I use three families (the Ma family, the Chou, and the Shui family) as examples to vividly present how children responded to their parents’ social positioning at home. Specifically, I document a school event (Café Night) during which I shadowed Sophia Chou’s mother, which allowed me to display how members (parents and children) of the two families responded to information (e.g., “an email from a Harvard alumnus”). By using this specific incident, I highlight how the mechanism of Asian moms’ gossip ultimately acted to localize and circulate the sociohistorical pattern of the model minority stereotype.

Sharing, comparing as social positioning, and bragging in parent-parent interaction: “By the way, my son got into Brown.”

Asian parents always talk about how their children are doing or like what colleges they got into, which college they’re going to, or how they’re doing at college. . . . It’s all about academically how well their children are. . . . Asian parents’ talk tends to capture around how their children are doing relative to all the other children. (Alex Shui)

The acts of positioning one’s child in relation to other Asian moms’ children frequently occurred during Asian moms’ gossip, especially when a child achieved something significant. For instance, “Oh, my kid got a nearly perfect SAT score.” “Oh, my kid did this well on tennis tournament.” “My kid did this well on a regional audition of violin” or “My kid got a full-ride scholarship from a prestigious school.” Kyle Lin’s mother explained why she and other parents loved to talk about their children. She said, “we are very proud of our children. So, when our children got an award or something, we will share the good news with our peer parents.” But interestingly, Mrs. Lin’s notion of “sharing” turned out to be “bragging,” “exaggerating,” “show off,” or “comparing” in the eyes of the second-generation children. As Kyle Lin described, “When parents were talking to one another, it’s usually kind of a ‘show off.’ ‘Oh. My son is an A+ student.’ ‘Oh, my son is going to this school. Blah blah blah.’ It’s a show off to other parents that ‘oh. My kid is better.’”

One of the reasons why many students used “bragging” or “exaggerating” to describe how Asian moms talked about their children’s performance was that students would verify the information with their peer friends. For example, Alex’s mother told Alex that she heard one mother saying that her daughter (who was one of Alex’s close friends) got a full-ride scholarship from a prestigious school. “And she got into one of the many good programs in that school.” After hearing the news, Alex congratulated his friend. But his friend said, “Yeah. I got into that program, but I didn’t get a full scholarship. I just got \$10,000.” Based on many cases Alex had observed, which included this one, he thus concluded that “a lot of parents tend to exaggerate their children’s achievement and compared it to some other people.” Alex continued,

I felt that Asian parents . . . they kind of go into two extremes. They either all the way complain about their child or praise their child to no end. And [they] try to make their children better than everyone else. So, there's never a middle ground there . . . , [like] "my child is a mediocre student, but at least he does this well." . . . So, I felt that it's just kind of Asian parents' approach when it comes to talking about their children.

Alex further gave an example,

If there's something that my parents constantly talk to me "oh, this person is so good at this. Oh, this person is so good at that." I will tell them "actually, that kid is not that good." Like that kid's parents might think their kid got A+, but actually he told me he only got B-. It's really they're exaggerating.

Nathan Yang was famous for his overachievement in the community. He was a top-three percent student of the class, very good at math (taking double math classes), a good tennis player and a tennis coach at school. He was also selected to be one of the few at his school to perform in a state-level audition of viola. Nathan said his mother often bragged about him behind his back. But the question is: how did Nathan learn that his mom loved to show him off to other Asian parents?

"I would always find out that . . . a month afterward that she was telling everyone that how well I did on my SAT and how well I did on my GPA," Nathan explained. As Nathan indicated, the news about his achievement was spread by members of the Asian moms' circle, and it took about one month for the information to circulate back to Nathan. Taking Nathan's SAT experience for example, in his senior year, Nathan became well-known for "making a giant 100-point gap each time," which equated to huge progress on his SAT tests in the Asian moms' cultural world (i.e., from 2100 to 2360 within a year). Nathan took his SAT three times. The first time, he got "2100 something." Nathan then was convinced by his father to take two months of tutoring and then he got "2200 something." Nathan did not take another tutoring class after that because the tutoring center did not have any class that suited Nathan's needs. Nathan thus decided to self-study. He said, "so, from the time, [I] just practiced, practiced, and practiced day and night." And the third time, Nathan got 2360.

After Nathan's mother "broadcast" his huge progress, Nathan received many inquiries from many Asian moms, asking him about how he could jump one-hundred points each time. Nathan encountered one particular Asian mom that he found "weird" (in Nathan's word). This Asian mom said many good words to Nathan and praised his hard work, Nathan claimed, but "she and her family were not even close to us." Nathan continued,

I was a little bit embarrassed because like my SAT score and my GPA, I don't really want to be broadcast to the entire world . . . I personally don't share my score to other people . . . [but] my parents would often brag about me, behind my back without me.

Did Nathan's parents brag about him when he was with them? The answer was yes. For Nathan, he always wanted to avoid attending Asian parents' parties, but his mother could always find a reason that Nathan could not decline. Nathan gave an example of how his mom used his presence to "show him off" at an Asian party with local families. Below was one time he attended an Asian party with his parents.

Like . . . the Asian parties, I would always ask my parents why I need to go . . . I was like . . . go there, wave to someone, say "hi" and stand there for five minutes. And then they were just like ignoring me. . . . That's the purpose of why they want me to be there, I think, in my opinion, just to show me off. Just be like "oh he did this so well and so and so . . ." I was like "Mom, what are you doing?"

Nathan asked his mom not to share his achievement with other people. "But . . . I know that she won't stop . . . so complaining won't do anything," Nathan commented at the end of the interview. Similar to Nathan Yang's experience, Victor Pan knew that his parents would not stop bragging about his achievement either. After Victor was accepted into an Ivy League school, he received an invitation from a Chinese school to share his experience regarding how he got into the Ivy League school and received a significant amount of scholarship from that school.

The Chinese school that invited Victor was not the Chinese school that Victor had attended. Also, Victor did not have any relationship with that Chinese language school, and neither did his parents. Geographically, this Chinese school was about a three-hour drive from Victor's home, which suggested

people at that Chinese school lived in different districts and communities from Victor's family. So, the question is, how did people at that Chinese school learn that Victor got into Brown? Victor explained,

Because my mom is one of the biggest mouths in the world. Like I tell her "don't tell anyone."

And then five minutes later, she will be on the phone "oh. My son told me . . ." So . . . [after some time that my mom learned that I got into Brown], One time she called a friend and said . . . I like your recipe. I tried it last time, and it was really really good. And . . . [at the end of the conversation, she said . . .] by the way, my child got into Brown.

Victor's example illustrated that after his mom had learned that Victor got into Brown, she was proud of Victor and wanted to share the good news with her circle of friends. Mrs. Pan skillfully wove the information about Victor getting into Brown into her conversation with her friend concerning recipes. By the end of the conversation, Mrs. Pan used "by the way . . ." to release the good news to her friends. Later, the Pan family received many phone calls asking Mr. and Mrs. Pan about how they helped Victor secure a place at Brown.

Below I show some examples that either parent participants or student participants interpreted it as "bragging," "comparing," or "positioning" in their experiences.

My friend called me, telling me that there is an "A" roll [a student who got straight As] student post at the school. After the second marking period, the school listed the names who got straight A on one wall in the hallway. I told her that, "I didn't know this post." My friend said, "your daughter is also on that roll . . ." [OC: later, Mrs. Chou explained to me], Sophia's official name is Jun-min Chou. But everyone called her Sophia. Not many people know Sophia is not her official given name. I didn't tell this friend, but she knew it. (Sophia Chou's mother)

My friend asked me which tutor Stella sent to for proofreading her college essays. I told her that Stella did not do that. Thus, my friend asked another person. Then, the person told my friend that 'save your money. You don't need to find someone to proofread your daughter's essays. Your daughter might be able to get in that good school, but how she could survive is another story. (Stella Ma's mother)

One time, I attended my daughter's orchestra event at her school, I encountered two mothers whose oldest children were my son's classmates. One of them went to an Ivy League school, and the other went to a prestigious out-of-state school. I asked the mother whose son went to that prestigious school questions about that school . . . "how much is the living expense in that area . . . how is the room quality of the dormitory . . ." Then, the other mother asked me, "didn't your son go to the local state university?" I told her that because my son just got into a graduate school in that school . . . But the thing is, that's not her business. But I felt that she looked down on my child and me. (Gloria Kung's mother)

My son was a high achiever at high school. He got offers from many top-tier schools. But he chose the local state university while many of his peer friends chose prestigious out-of-state schools or Ivy League schools. One time, one mother, whose child went to Stanford, asked me which college my son went to. I told her "the local state university." She looked surprised. From that look, I felt she despised my son for choosing a local university. (Gloria Kung's mother)

My daughter applied to three schools at this local state university. Based on what I have learned thus far, except for the student who got a full-ride scholarship, my daughter was the one who got the largest amount of scholarship (\$24,000) from School of Business. But another school that my daughter wanted most, she only got \$3500. I heard one of her friends whose GPA's is just 0.05 more than Sophia's. But he got \$ 24,000 from that school. (Sophia Chou's mother)

These cases, shown above, indicate that the Asian moms' acts of social comparison or bragging about their children's educational achievement formed a unique social practice within the Asian moms' figured worlds: social positioning. Asian moms who "bragged" positioned their children as "better" than other Asian moms' children. Those parents who were unable to "brag back" at that round of social interaction felt implicitly positioned as "my child is not as good as that person's child." Many Asian moms felt pressured through this type of social interaction. As Stella Ma shared,

I feel like, maybe you [i.e., Asian moms] would feel pressured because you talk about all these kids around you, like who are going to good schools. Or you know some of them are like "oh, did

you hear about that kid? She applied for this scholarship, and she got it. She's going on a full-ride or whatever." And then it put pressure on you because you feel like "oh, crap. I have to pay all my life on this shit (i.e. the child's tuition), and I need a lot of loans.

Asian mothers responded to the pressure they acquired from their gossip circle by bringing the pressure home. I found that Asian moms disguised their peer pressure in the discourse of "I heard someone did well in . . ." and brought it back to their children. That is, the discourse of the "good" students functioned as essential mediating artifacts for Asian moms' social positioning of their children as opposed to the "good" students they captured through Asian moms' gossip. And the "good" student model became a role model that Asian moms expected their children to follow or match. "Oh, why can't you be more like so-and-so. He does this . . .," as Kyle Lin concluded,

When the parents bring that kind of conversation back to their children, they think that it's a way to motivate their kids. Like Kid X's mom heard Kid Y's mom said that Kid Y got an A in his or her exam. Then, Kid X's mom went home and told her child "Oh. I heard that Kid Y got an A. And what did you get?" They think that will motivate their children to work harder to be more like Kid Y.

Asian moms' acts of social positioning children at home: "Oh, did you hear about that girl? She applied for five scholarships."

I know that they (i.e., parents) compare you because they want you to try to better yourself . . . and you know one parent would be like "oh, your daughter is so nice, she got this award." And then you (as a parent) hear about it, you will be like "maybe my daughter should get an award too" because you want your daughter to go out and do something amazing. So, a lot of their expectations are based on what they heard what their friends' child did or something like that.

(Stella Ma)

I know my best friend's mom is always like "you'd better watch out him or her because he might be better than you in this and I want you to be the number one." (Ella Wei)

Kyle Lin claimed that Asian moms “usually pick[ed] up the smartest kid, like ‘Oh, this person got A+ on all the exams” as a role model for their children to follow. Asian moms’ acts of identifying the “good” student model (i.e., “the smartest kid” in Kyle’s case) in the community and bringing the information about the “good” students home functioned as the precise moment in which the artifacts of “good students” traveled from the community to home settings. This process (i.e., Asian moms’ bringing the “good student” model home) activated and localized the widely-circulated model minority stereotype in the Asian families. For instance, “Kid B is on the Honor Roll. He’s in the top 1% of the class. He is the valedictorian and he got straight A.” After an Asian mom had learned the information about what one student had achieved, she brought the information home mainly for two purposes. One was to triangulate the information with her child and confirm the accuracy of the information. For example, after learning a student was accepted into NYU Stern, Sophia Chou’s mother “verified” the information with her.

Sophia: My mom would bring back the information and verify the information she heard. All she said was about who got in and who didn’t and then asked me . . . Like the guy [i.e., one of Sophia’s friends] who got into NYU. My mom asked me if he got into NYU. I said “yeah.”

Mrs. Chou (in Sophia’s words): I heard his grades are really bad.

Sophia: Yeah. I think they are. He doesn’t like to do his homework . . . yeah.

In this conversation above, Mrs. Chou learned from her Asian moms’ network that the student who got into NYU Stern did not do well at school. But there was another student in the community applying to NYU Stern as well. He was not accepted. “We feel so sorry for this guy. He had a better grade, but he didn’t get in,” Sophia recalled her mother saying. Mrs. Chou and her other friends kept wondering why this student, whose academic performance was less impressive, could get into NYU, a prestigious college. Therefore, Mrs. Chou brought this information home and asked Sophia about this student’s academic performance at school. Mrs. Chou wanted to confirm the accuracy of the information “a student, who performed less impressively, got accepted by NYU Stern.” Sophia certified the information. Then, Mrs. Chou reached her conclusion: this student’s father was an NYU alumnus. “He got his master’s degree in

MBA from NYU Stern . . . Maybe, the reason why he can get into NYU was because of his father . . . ,” Sophia repeated her mother’s conclusion.

Interestingly, many students claimed that the information that Asian moms learned from other Asian moms, “sometimes they are not correct” or “it’s not even true.” Nonetheless, by hearing the information their Asian moms brought home, students learned what other students’ academic performance or achievements were. Through cross-checking with their peer students about the accuracy of the information that Asian moms brought home, the artifact of the “good student” model, portrayed by Asian moms, was circulated across the community, home, and school settings.

The other purpose of Asian moms’ bringing information home was that they used the information about what the “good” student did as an artifact to position their children as inferior to the good student. Asian moms used the “good student” model to motivate their children to match that “good” student’s performance. That is, Asian moms based their expectations on what they learned from what other Asian moms’ children did. They asked their children to catch up with the “good” students. However, this “pushy” parenting style worked best while children were still at elementary and middle school. Children started resisting their parents’ “indoctrination” (i.e., comparing them with other children and asking them to follow the “good students” model) when they got older, especially after they entered high school, the period of adolescence. “When you are teenagers, you are more rebellious,” Victor Pan commented. Alex Shui illustrated his response after hearing his mom bring information about a “good student” home: “I don’t really care . . . I usually one ear in and one ear out.”

However, many Asian moms did not stop bringing information home even though they knew their children may ignore it. It was because of the Asian moms’ self-perceived limited knowledge about the American college application system, which they deemed as “a disadvantage” because they were unable to help their children. Hence, Asian moms felt a need to learn from other experienced parents about the college application system and the upper-class students’ experiences. Bringing information home about the *dos and don’ts* that the experienced families concluded became novice Asian moms’ major approach to helping their children. This trend persisted and occupied an important role in Asian moms’ lives after

their children entered the 11th and 12th grades. During the last two years of a student's high school, Asian moms frequently talked about who got into what prestigious colleges and with what "magical" recipes, or what outstanding performance a student had achieved. At home, Asian moms used the discourse of "I heard someone doing . . . I suggest . . . you should also be doing that too" as their way to guide children. Simply said, by using the discourse of "that good student," Asian moms positioned children as not as good as that "successful" student, which formulated their "expectations" (e.g., "do not fall behind the good students" or "try to match the good students").

Therefore, with the information input from parents, students continued to learn new information about their peer students regarding each other's academic performance or achievement. At this point, the discourse of the "good" students' academic performances turned into "add-up" resources and traveled to students' figured worlds across the home and school settings. That is, the "good student" artifacts travelled to students' figured worlds of normal Asians in the school context and getting ahead in the family context.

It is worth noting that Asian parents also brought "bad" examples (e.g., the mistakes students of the upper classes made) home to their children. The purpose of bringing a "bad" model home was to remind their children to avoid the mistakes previous students made. By doing so, their children could learn from others' mistakes and then match the "good" student model and succeed. For example,

A student, who ranked the number two of his class, he applied to all Ivy League schools. But he got no offers from these schools. The only choice for him was going to the local state university. Something's wrong here. (Kyle Lin's mother)

Like somebody didn't do well or maybe somebody got into trouble for something. We all know. We all know. (Stella Ma)

One student he did and submitted his applications at the last minute. Then he was waitlisted from all the schools, except for the local college. Then, he went to the local college. (Kyle Lin's mother)

A student, he got a full-ride scholarship from the local state university. But he chose Carnegie Mellon. After one year, he could not handle the academic pressure and wanted to transfer back to the local state university. This time, the local university rejected his application. Then, this student transferred to a local community college. (Sophia Chou's mother)

If they see someone who's doing poorly in school, they'll be like "Oh. That child does poorly at school," and they will be telling their children and complaining about it. (Alex Shui)

The Ma family: Stella's perception of her mother's acts of bringing the Asian moms' gossip home.

Stella Ma claimed that she learned a great deal of what she should be doing for her college applications from the information her mother brought back through the Asian moms' gossip. She described, "I am pretty sure if I didn't have all these people to follow, I would be very confused." For example, in her junior year, Stella learned from her mother about many *dos and don'ts* of college applications that her mother grasped from the Asian moms' gossip. For example, "Last year, a lot of seniors had their last-minute college applications procrastination, and they did not get good results." In general, the top three lessons Mrs. Ma brought back for Stella were, "to ask teachers for recommendation letters early," "to start the application early," and "to send your college essay to the professional. Have them proofread your essay."

Stella did not always take the advice that her mother derived from gossip because some of the advice was "ridiculous," as Stella asserted. Among the top three pieces of advice her mother learned from outside, Stella only took one piece: ask teachers for recommendation letters early. Stella explained,

My teacher recommendation letters, I already got them in my junior year. That's what Asian parents were talking about. Make sure that your children get their recommendation letters from Junior Year. In Senior Year, that's when teachers get a lot of requests. And then a lot of teachers would have to tell you that "Oh. I am sorry. I am booked." If you request in your junior year, when they get your letter, they still have a lot of time to write it. If they don't have time to write

it, they start bullshitting on your letter. So, that's some advice my mom got from her friend "to get the recommendation letter earlier."

Stella accepted the rationale for asking teachers for recommendation letters earlier and thus she did it. But, Stella failed to start her applications early. In the first two marking periods of her senior year, Stella had a heavy load of schoolwork, in taking all AP courses and preparing for her October SAT. Like many other students in the community, Stella suffered from chronic sleep deprivation. Thus, she did not start her applications until a few months before the application deadline. Stella also rejected the idea of sending her college essays to a professional proofreader. She explained, "You pay someone to read your work? . . . Some people they charge so much for an essay. One word for one dollar. It's ridiculous."

Stella asserted that her mother only gave her suggestions which Mrs. Ma had learned from gossip. "Basically, she never pushes on me based on what she heard somebody was doing. Most of the time, she would suggest it, but she never forced me," Stella added. Even though Stella could make decisions based on her own judgment, she sometimes felt a need to take her mother's suggestions. Stella felt that her mother would (in Stella's own words) "guilt [her] into it, like 'oh, she's doing that. You don't have to do that but maybe you should.' And then, you get the impression that 'I have to do that.'" Stella further explained,

Sometimes, they [parents] base what they want you to do upon what they know what other students were doing. And anything that other students were doing, they think that's what you should be doing. Especially when the students used as an example are good students.

What Stella indicated was that Mrs. Ma formulated her expectations for Stella based on what she learned through Asian mom's gossip. Further, she identified the "good" students as role models and brought knowledge of what they did home. Mrs. Ma called on Stella to occupy the position of being like the good student via comparing Stella with that targeted "good" student. In other words, Stella was afforded the position by Mrs. Ma to be like the good student and do what that good student does. Facing her mother's "summons," Stella did not fully reject or fully accept the invitation to that position. Instead, she partially accepted or rejected her mom's offer, as I demonstrated above, using the example of the top

three tips of the college application process Stella learned from her mom. Below I show more examples of the “good student” model that Mrs. Ma downloaded through her talk with other Asian moms and brought home to Stella. In Stella’s words,

“Did you hear the student? He’s teaching viola. He’s taking three summer classes. And right after these classes, he goes to swimming class. And then he goes to viola classes and track classes.”

And I was like “Oh, I am sitting home, vegetating.” Compared to him, I didn’t do anything. And then, [my mom would be like] “Oh, you should be more active. You should do more stuff.”

My mom used to compare me a lot to my two friends. I have two friends that I used to grow up with . . . starting when I was really young, my mom liked to compare me with them a lot. Back to the time that I used to play the piano, both of them were very athletic and good piano players. So, whenever they played the piano, my mom was like “did you hear that? Can you do that?”

Mrs. Ma had the habit of comparing Stella to the “good” students in the community when Stella was young. Mrs. Ma offered the “good student” model to Stella by positioning Stella as inferior to the “good” student. Thus, she wanted Stella to learn from the “good” student model and follow what the “good” students did. Mrs. Ma’s act of social positioning hurt Stella emotionally. “I don’t like being compared to other students, mostly because it makes me feel that I am not good enough,” Stella commented. As Stella grew, she kept fighting with her mother by exclaiming “stop comparing me,” and the tension between Stella and her mom escalated over time. After one incident occurred, Mrs. Ma stopped her behavior of comparing Stella to other students. As Mrs. Ma recalled,

Stella was a top-tier student of her class [at Reagan High South, RHS]. A friend told me, the reason why Stella was a top student was that she was not at Reagan High North (RHN). “RHN was far more competitive than RHS,” My friend said, my daughter’s school was easy because most of the students were not as competitive as the students at RHN . . . Then, I repeated what my friend said to Stella. Stella turned angry. She said to me, “I am a high-achiever because I work extremely hard, not because I stay in a less competitive school . . . How could these people say that?”

Mrs. Ma immediately apologized to her daughter and promised Stella that she would not bring such a topic home again. Mrs. Ma explained to me why she brought this piece of information home. “I was influenced by my friend and worried that Stella’s academic performance might be not as good as the students at RHN. What if she was right?” Mrs. Ma hoped that Stella could do something about it [e.g., performing better to show her friends that it was not true.]

To be more specific, Mrs. Ma had been worried that Stella might fall behind her peer students at RHN. Thus, for some time, she had the idea of transferring Stella to RHN. She gave up this idea because Stella refused to do so. Mrs. Ma claimed that many of her decisions were affected by the Asian moms’ gossip. For instance, Mrs. Ma was influenced by her peer friends and thus sent Stella for many after-school tutoring programs when she was in high school. As Mrs. Ma explained,

Since my children were young, I had told them that when I hear something from outside, I will bring it back as a suggestion for you. As a parent, that’s what we [Asian moms] do [to help our kids] . . . For instance, I would say to her, “people said this tutor is very good and many of your friends are there . . . Do you wanna give it a try? . . . I did not receive the K-16 education here in the U.S. I [came for graduate studies in the U.S. but] did not finish my master’s program here. I was totally unclear about the American education system. So was my husband. My generation, most of us came here for graduate studies. We knew nothing about the college applications. . . . We’re totally unclear. . . . So, how do we help our children? Thus, I listen to what other Asian parents say. I do what they do.

Mrs. Ma positioned herself as not understanding the American education system, which shaped her style of involving herself in Stella’s education: by following what other experienced parents did for their children. Not understanding the American K-12 education system and the college application process also influenced Mrs. Ma in that she was unable to judge whether the educational practices that the experienced Asian mom group had engaged in would work in her family or not. What Mrs. Ma could do, however, was rely on and trust her peers’ judgment. Therefore, after Stella entered high school, Mrs. Ma sent Stella

to private tutoring centers in math and English, based on what she learned from her Asian mom peers' experiences. In Mrs. Ma's words,

Students at Reagan High North, they attended all kinds of tutoring programs. When I hear, someone says which tutor is great and many people have sent their kids to that tutor. . . . So, when my friend wanted to recruit Stella to form a new group tutoring class, taught by a famous tutor. I said "yes" and sent Stella over. . . . The only great thing about having a private tutor is that you forced your child to sit down and study. It's like you have someone to study with your child. Because we could not do any help, all we could do is to hire someone to help our children.

After Stella became angry and upset at the incident in which Mrs. Ma's friend positioned Stella's school as less competitive than RHN, Mrs. Ma started filtering information that she heard through gossip. She did not bring all information home to Stella. Even if Mrs. Ma brought gossip home, she explicitly told Stella that "it was just a suggestion." "I would tell her what I know and what I think. But it's up to her to take it or leave it," as Mrs. Ma claimed. At this point, Mrs. Ma had stopped letting the Asian moms' gossip dictate her expectations for Stella. However, Mrs. Ma began to be confronted by her friends, such as "why didn't you make Stella do that? I heard someone say this is how we can do [it]."

Stella volunteered at a Chinese school on weekends in her 11th and 12th grades. Mrs. Ma always drove Stella there and waited for Stella at the Chinese school. After witnessing her mother being "challenged" by other Asian moms in their everyday conversation, Stella changed her perceptions. Stella started seeing her mother's social pressure derived from other Asian moms in the community. She realized that living in a community full of "successful" students could produce pressure if one's child was not "good enough" to talk about. She began interpreting her mother's approach, "bringing in a 'good student' model home," less as positioning her as a "not good" student. Instead, she considered her mother's method more as a motivator to inspire her to better herself, and not to fall behind other good students. Stella stated,

I remember that I used to fight with my mom "stop comparing me." But after a while, I kind of realized that in the way she complimented them [the good students], it's not that she wanted me to be just like them. But I think she tried to make sure that I was motivated to do better after all,

not fall behind. But she doesn't do that anymore. . . . I guess, Asian parents have the tendency to compare you to other people's children. So, say, you grew up with a group of kids, and they all do really well . . . I think they're leaning toward wanting you to do well. . . . If your parents who have friends whose children are very successful, it will help them hold a higher standard. I guess they might be embarrassed if their child didn't do really well.

Stella Ma's statement of why Asian parents loved to compare their children to "good students" highlights two points. First, most of the Asian mothers were unfamiliar with the American K-12 education and college application systems. Hence, they needed to use gossip as a channel to learn how to help their children succeed. Secondly, identifying the "good" student model and learning how these "good" students arrived at their "outstanding" level of success educated novice parents who sought to teach their children how to succeed. Being worried that their children might fall behind the "good" students, Asian moms used the "good" student model as their expectations to motivate their children to do better and catch up with the "good" students.

Stella commented that Asian moms loved to compare, "especially if you are very competitive." She found that many Asian moms in her community wanted to know "Hey, what's your ranking in high school?" "They want to know if you're in the top ten percent or if you're in the top five percent in your grade." To illustrate what Stella meant by how Asian moms motivated their children to do better by comparing them to "good" students, she gave me one instance that happened to her. Stella recalled that it was when she was taking summer classes for math SAT II. A mother of one of Stella's friends who studied at Reagan High North came to Stella's mother. She asked for the possibility of signing Stella onto a SAT group tutoring class in math with her son. Stella recalled the conversation between her mother and her friend's mother.

Mother of Stella's friend: "Would your daughter like to be in Mr. XX's [a private math tutor] summer class for math (SAT) II?"

Stella's mother: "Sorry. We're already in a different class. You can try asking so-and-so [i.e., asking another student to form a class]."

Mother of Stella's friend: We don't want to ask so-and-so because I only want my son in a class with somebody who is better than him. So, it will push him to do better, too.

This conversation revealed three points. First, through the Asian moms' gossip over time, the Asian moms had developed an imagined academic hierarchy in their minds. This Asian mom thus positioned Stella as better than her son in math. Secondly, she turned down the opportunity of joining another class with the other student whom she positioned as not good enough to motivate her son to do better. Thirdly, she viewed Stella as a "good" model for her son to follow. This was the reason why she wanted to form a class that involved Stella. By Asian moms' identifying the "good student" examples and motivating their children to follow, the sociohistorical pattern of model minority got downloaded and (re)activated in the community through Asian moms' gossip over time.

In terms of Asian moms' social practice of comparing children with the "good" students in the community, Sophia Chou's mother reminded me that "if your child is not good enough, these Asian moms will not compare their child with yours." Mrs. Chou's comment reaffirmed Stella's previous description of the above-mentioned Asian mom who turned down Mrs. Ma's suggestion "ask so-and-so." In other words, "if your child is not good enough," they would not position your child as "their children's competitor." And thus, they would not make an effort to "dig out" any information about what your child was doing and how your child performed, because your child was not qualified to be on their radar screen. As Alex Shui commented on his observation of Asian moms' gossip over his K-12 schooling years,

It's kind of like you want to be friendly with your fellow Chinese or Taiwanese families. . . . But at the same time, you want your child kind of to beat them in a way so that you can brag about your kid something like that. "Oh, my child goes to Harvard or Princeton whatever." But . . . in the end, it's all just very competitive. People want their children to go to the highest-tier schools, stuff like that.

Finally, Kyle Lin's mother used Asian moms' gossip as her approach to understanding how Kyle performed at school, compared to Kyle's peer students. As Mrs. Lin commented, "If you learn that your child's performance is similar to other children's in the community, then you can let go. . . . You do not

need to worry about how your child performs at school.” Specifically speaking, Mrs. Lin defined “if your child’s performance is similar to other children’s” as the taking of the same classes as other students (such as AP courses), having similar SAT scores to other students (within the 2200 to 2400 range), having similar GPAs (above 3.8), and working as hard as the other students in the community. Mrs. Lin’s notion of “let go” reflected on the way that many of my parent participants described their parenting style after their children entered high school: “I didn’t push my child. I am a relaxed parent.”

The Shui and the Chou families: Café Night and the email from a Harvard Alumnus.

One evening in the year of my data collection, I followed Sophia Chou’s mother to Reagan High North’s Café Night. This was a musical night performed by choir and instrument students for fundraising for their senior trip. After we arrived at the school, Mrs. Chou said hello to many Asian moms on the way into the auditorium where there was a platform in the front and rows of chairs and tables in the back. She said to me “I have known these parents for more than ten years.” She explained,

Our children went to Chinese language school when they were young. We met every Saturday.

Their parents also volunteered their time at Chinese school. Then, those children who attended that Chinese school, they all attended this high school. . . . We have met each other at other different social settings repeatedly over the years.

Mrs. Chou then directed my attention to an Asian mom. To emphasize how well she knew these people in this community, she said: “I even know this person’s housekeeper.” At that moment, I also noticed some of my parent participants were there. I greeted them when I had a chance. Soon, Mrs. Chou and her friends (including me) gathered as a small group. Mrs. Chou identified a table and located this group by saying “let’s sit here.” We, including some of my parent participants, sat down together and they started chatting. They exchanged information about their children’s musical performance. For instance, “my daughter’s choir had a lot of rehearsal recently, and I had to drive her here and there for many times in a day . . .” Then, they talked about what activities their children were taking: “My son organized a band and performed at a nursing home.” They then started talking about other Asian moms’ children. Below are two examples.

Did you see that Indian girl? (who sat at another table near us in the front) She is smart and pretty. She took SAT only once, and she got 2400. She took the SAT in October. My child took it in December.” (Sophia Chou’s mother)

There was a girl from Taiwan who immigrated to the U.S. in her 11th grade. [“Ah, that’s so-and-so’s daughter,” another Asian mom added] She went to Cornell, School of [Mechanical and] Aerospace Engineering. Every weekend, her parents drove all the way to visit her and helped review her schoolwork. This girl was under a huge pressure and had the tendency to commit suicide . . . She studied there for five years. Her parents paid her tuition for five years, but at the end, she still did not finish her school. Then, she transferred to another school . . . [They] paid their daughter’s tuition for five years and got nothing. (One Asian mom at the table)

The two examples indicated a classic conversation in Asian moms’ gossip. This group of Asian moms first shared information about their children with other Asian moms that served as an update.

Furthermore, they talked about what happened in other families such as the Indian girl who got 2400, a full score on her SAT, and a Taiwanese girl who went to Cornell. She spent five years on her undergraduate studies but still could not graduate. Later, I heard this case of the Taiwanese girl who went to Cornell from three parent participants in the interviews. In reality, I was surprised at the fact that these Asian moms knew in which month the Indian girl took her SAT, but I did not get a chance to ask Mrs. Chou because the topics in the conversation immediately changed. Mrs. Chou turned to Alex Shui’s mother and below was the conversation.

Mrs. Chou: My daughter got an email from Harvard. In that email, it said a Harvard representative would be here (i.e., at Reagan High North) tomorrow morning. My daughter will go.

Mrs. Shui: (Mrs. Shui looked surprised and said) My son didn’t tell me.

Mrs. Chou: If your son applied to this school, he should get this email.

Mrs. Chou implied that Sophia’s getting an email from Harvard suggested an increased likelihood of being accepted by Harvard. Also, Mrs. Chou positioned Mrs. Shui’s son, Alex, as if Alex not receiving an

email from Harvard might suggest that Alex's chance of getting in this school would be lower than Sophia's. Mrs. Shui thus became anxious and pressured by what she learned from Mrs. Chou; she became worried that Alex might not have a good chance of getting into this Ivy League school.

The reason why I knew Mrs. Shui became anxious was because I had my second interview with Alex the next day and Alex mentioned it. The conversation started with my question in the middle of the interview: "Let's talk about parents' gossip in the community. What was your experience?" Alex immediately mentioned this Café Night. "Parents gossip a lot. Actually yesterday, it was back to school, a Café night." I told Alex that I was there and he said "Oh, right. I didn't see you there, but my mom mentioned it." Alex continued,

My mom heard from one of my friends' mother that there was a Harvard alumnus information session today at Reagan High North. Right after she heard it, she kind of pulled me aside and asking me about it. I said "I didn't know what's going on. I'd ask the student myself."

Alex's narrative showed that after learning the information from Mrs. Chou, some minutes later, Mrs. Shui left the table, found Alex and pulled him aside. Mrs. Shui asked Alex whether he got an email from Harvard about this information session. Alex did not know what happened. He then found Sophia and asked her for more details. Sophia said (in Alex's words), "Oh. It's like an information session within the alumni. That will go over the college application and talk about the college and stuff."

Alex continued and asked Sophia if she was able to get a one-on-one interview from Harvard, which Alex had obtained. Alex learned that Sophia did not get the one-on-one interview. Alex viewed obtaining a one-on-one interview as having a higher chance of being accepted by Harvard, compared to getting none. Alex reached his conclusion: "this might be the replacement for that [the one-on-one interview]." After being updated by Alex, Mrs. Shui "automatically assumed it was because this girl was not as qualified as [Alex]," Alex commented. As Alex recalled, his mother interpreted the reason why Sophia got this email instead of getting a one-on-one interview as "she is not as good as [Alex]. So, she did not get a one-on-one interview from Harvard."

Interestingly, Mrs. Shui's positioning practice did not end with the conclusion she made. Mrs. Shui kept thinking about this incident and tried to figure out where Alex stood in relations to Sophia and other students after they went home. According to Alex,

When we got home, my mom was just kind of talking to me a lot about other students, what's mostly going on about their lives . . . she kept bringing on about . . . the email from the Harvard alumni. . . . She kept asking me about it . . . I told her that it was probably [that] she wasn't able to get a one-on-one interview with the alumni. And then my mom went on for about two or three hours [reasoning] how . . . like, "it's probably she [i.e., Sophia] isn't as qualified . . ." She just kept bringing up on and on, [saying] "Oh, I am actually a good student because there are so many people at my school who are less qualified to get into these schools," stuff like that. I don't know. I just really didn't care.

Mrs. Shui's and Mrs. Chou's practices of social comparison and positioning their children's academic performance were not explicitly shown in their conversation. However, college-application-related information provided abundant resources that carried symbolic meanings, such as Harvard being a prestigious school, for them to position their children. In this case, Sophia Chou's mother used the Harvard alumnus email to position Sophia as having a better chance to get into Harvard than Alex. Through the information exchange, Mrs. Chou's interpretation made Mrs. Shui nervous and worried that Alex might have a lower chance because he did not get this email.

After pushing her son to gather more information, Mrs. Shui used more specific resources (i.e., Alex's school performance in relation to Sophia's within her imagined academic hierarchy) to interpret why Alex did not receive an email from Harvard about the alumni information session. Mrs. Shui thus positioned her son as "actually a good student" in her figured worlds, better than Sophia and other students. That was why Alex got a one-on-one interview opportunity from a Harvard alumnus, which suggested that Alex had a greater chance of getting into Harvard. With this conclusion in mind, Mrs. Shui's pressure was relieved, after some hours of processing the information that she gathered from gossip and Alex.

What was Alex's interpretation of his mother's acts of bringing information home and comparing him to his peer students? Alex was under pressure because his mother frequently compared him to his peer friends. "I really hated it when I was compared to other kids," Alex claimed. Alex continued,

There's always a pressure from my parents, telling me "oh, so-and-so is doing so well in math and they got a full scholarship to blah blah blah school." There's definitely a pressure there because although my parents don't want to say that they are comparing me to other kids, they kind of are. [But] there's definitely a pressure that you want to make your parents happy . . . So you study harder to . . . try to be the best of everything so your parents can brag to other people, I guess.

Alex's reflection on his mother's act of bringing the "good" student model (e.g., "doing so well in math" or "got a full scholarship") home and comparing him to other 'good' students brought about three important points. First, by bringing the "good" student model to Alex and indicating that Alex should match that model, Mrs. Shui localized the image of the model minority stereotype in her family. The artifact of the "good" student model served as connecting itself to Alex's figured worlds of normal Asians in his school context, her mother's figured worlds of Asian moms in the community, and their figured worlds of "getting ahead" in the family context. The resources of the "good students" also begot add-on resources for Alex to position himself relative to other students across the school and family contexts.

Secondly, Alex made the decision to work harder to please his parents, even though Alex felt it "annoying." In Alex's words, it was "more about irritating than upsetting that my parents wanted me to "be the best at everything" and "beat them" (the 'good' students in the community). "I know that they just want the best for me and want me to be able to stand out . . . and be able to be better than other kids while I am out (of school) and look for a job or whatever." Alex accepted his parents' expectations, which were based on what they saw in the community: to beat the "good" students. Alex's decision of "study(ing) harder . . . to try to be the best of everything" and the outcome provided Alex's mother further resources for her to use (or brag about) when she gossiped. More importantly, this process thickened Alex's learning identity: to work harder. As Alex stated,

I wouldn't say that I do whatever my parents want me to do. Because actually I do a lot of things that my parents don't want me to do. But in terms of academics or music stuff like that, I understand that they are really important. I do them not so much because my parents want me to. They add the pressure for me to do well. But I also do it because I know that I need to do well.

Alex was finally accepted into an Ivy League school, and this news was soon widely spread in the community. Alex was depicted as an add-on resource in the "good student" model portrayed by the community members. Furthermore, Alex accepted the invitations to share his experience of how he succeeded. By sharing his experience of how he achieved his high academic status and was admitted to an Ivy League school, Alex helped localize, circulate, and reproduce the sociohistorical pattern of the model minority stereotype. Below, I conclude this section by using Alex's description of how he was "interrogated" (in Alex's word) by other parents who wanted to learn from Alex about how he successfully got into an Ivy League school and how they could help their child who was a rising sophomore in that year.

At the time that I was able to say that I am an Ivy League student, all of sudden, I have like three or four students that want me to teach them stuff. . . . A lot of the kids that I tutored, their parents talked with me about how I got to that position, what clubs that I did, how I went about the college application process, stuff like that. . . . Actually, I tutored the kid across the street. One day, his parents kind of sat me down. [They said] "I want my son to get into this school as well. But he's not performing well in math. We took a few SAT practices, but his SAT score isn't that high. What do you think would be a good score to get in order to secure and in order to be competitive in the pool for applicants who wish to go to an Ivy League school?" . . . Like "when you're waitlisted, what did you do in order for that school to accept you? What kind of things did you have on your applications that made you stand out the most?" . . . Stuff like that. I felt that they were definitely interrogating me, to figure out what kind of things they can add to their child's arsenal when it comes to their child's college application year.

Conclusion

Novice Asian moms' knowledge acquisition of concerning how to be a "successful" parent in the U.S. and how to help their children succeed in a U.S. school were two sides of the same coin. When inexperienced Asian moms sent their children to a Chinese language school, they immediately walked into the overlapping figured worlds of Asian moms and the "good" students. Attending the Chinese school with their children on a weekly basis over the years allowed novice Asian moms to form a circle of friends within which they could help each other, learn from the 'successful' families and navigate the American education system together.

Asian moms' learning and social identification were mediated by social interaction with other Asian moms in the Chinese immigrant community: The Asian moms' gossip. Such social interaction comprised Asian moms' everyday update and gossip; social comparison as social positioning via children's school-related artifacts. Both Asian moms and their children were contributors to making this mechanism of Asian moms' gossip function through two major social interactions: parent-parent in the community and parent-child interactions at home.

First, through parent-parent daily updates, Asian moms shared information about their own children's school performance with each other and about what they heard about others' children. The information functioned as a cultural resource for Asian moms' acts of comparing their child to other children. Secondly, Asian moms brought information home and shared it with their children for two purposes. One was to double check with their children regarding the accuracy of the information. The other was to motivate their children to follow the "good" student model, due to their concern that their children might fall behind the "good" students. Thirdly, students cross-checked the information with other students to verify the accuracy of the information, which allowed the artifacts about the "good" student model to travel across the community, family, and school settings. These steps over students' K-12 years allowed Asian parents to establish an imagined academic hierarchy in their figured worlds and learned where each child in this community was located. As Gloria Kung's mother shared, "I watched these children grew up. I know everything about their educational performance and activities."

More importantly, the mechanism of Asian moms' gossip produced four consequences. First, it shaped one's family educational practices by Asian moms' act of "hopping on the bandwagon." Secondly, it allowed the information regarding how each student in the community performed to be being widely circulated in the community, which resulted in "everyone was all over to everyone's business." By "everyone," the meaning was parents and students. Thirdly, by bringing the "good" student model home to children, the mechanism of Asian moms' gossip interweaved and consolidated students' and parents' multiple figured worlds. These figured worlds were "normal Asians" in the school context, "getting ahead" in the family context, and "Asian moms and the good students" in the community context. And finally, by spreading the "good" student model and knowledge about how to become a "good" student, the Asian moms' gossip helped localize, reproduce, and circulate the sociohistorical pattern of the model minority across the community and home settings.

However, it is important to note that students rarely discussed with their friends about what their parents thought about their friends. For example, as Alex explained, "I obviously wouldn't tell my friend that my mom thinks that I am more qualified than my friend for college." Also, not every student was willing to share his or her school information with his or her parents, especially after students reached their adolescence. This usually occurred with a student who had "overbearing," "demanding," or "tiger mom-like" parents. Under this condition, the Asian moms' gossip became the major resource for the parents who had a broken relationship with their children, enabling them to receive parenting advice as well as to understand their children's school lives through their children's peer students.

Chapter Seven: Discussion and Conclusion

Asian Americans have been characterized as the “model minority” since the 1960s due to their extraordinary academic achievements, growing presence in well-paying white-collar professions (Louie, 2004) and the increasing mass of Asian-American suburbanization (Nicolaidis & Zarsadiaz, 2017). The corresponding model minority myth suggests that Asian Americans’ success in the United States can be attributed to immigrant family education and traditional family structures, as well as the ethnic and cultural values that Asian immigrant parents pass onto their children. For over a half century the model minority myth has persisted, affecting Asian American students’ social and learning identities, educational experiences, and well-being in seemingly positive but mostly negative ways (Hartlep, 2013; Lee, 2009; Li & Wang, 2008).

This study takes a nuanced approach to demystifying the educational experiences of Chinese-heritage immigrant families and deconstructing the model minority myth. I use the tool of interpretive ethnography to bring the sociocultural practices of Asian immigrant families to light: 15 months of fieldwork along with particular understandings of a localized culture and participants’ informal learning experiences within a group of Chinese-heritage immigrant families in the United States in the post-1965 immigration era. This study provides an innovative conceptual model: using an “identity-in-practice” model (i.e., figured worlds, social positioning, and re-authoring), that adds multiple timescales (i.e., K-12 schooling years) and three social spaces (i.e., family, school, and community) to examine how Asian immigrant parents interact with their children in ways that shape student identification in K-12 education.

This creative model affords a new approach to understanding how and why many of the second-generation students of Asian immigrants embrace and internalize the model minority stereotype. The majority of extant research treats the model minority stereotype as a long-existing, independent variable (or concept) that shapes Asian-American students’ racialized learning identities. This dissertation used a different approach by treating the sociohistorical pattern of the model minority myth as a dependent variable that is constructed, (re)produced, and maintained through a combination of complicated local factors in complex contexts (as I show in chapters four, five, and six). Thus, this study explains how a

generation of Asian model minority students is locally produced and maintains the circulation of the sociohistorical model of the model minority image. In other words, this research demonstrates how the cultural production of smart Asians who are good at math, hard-working, and high academic achievers helps to sustain the widely-circulated pattern of the model minority stereotype, which continues to affect the educational experiences and opportunities of high- and low-achieving Asian American students.

A simple way to summarize the findings of this interpretive study is that the interplay of Chinese-heritage immigrant parents' peer pressure in the community and Asian students' peer pressure at school generates a competitive phenomenon in which parents and students live and motivates their competitive behaviors. By competitiveness phenomenon, I mean the dynamic cultural phenomenon in which high-achieving Asian students share a strong desire to compete or succeed and to keep pace with their peers or outperform them academically. Such a competitiveness phenomenon eventually results in the cultural (re)production of the smart Asian who is good at math and achieving academic excellence stereotype at an individual as well as at a collective level throughout the years K-12 compulsory education.

My primary two aims in this dissertation have been first to carry out this unmasking: to make explicit the peer pressure among immigrant parents and students that shaped both parents' and students' social identification processes and their K-12 family learning practices in a predominantly Chinese-heritage suburban immigrant community. The second aim is to show how and why the hidden mechanisms of daily social interactions among immigrant parents and students, respectively, have such a powerful influence on the everyday lives of the people in the community and thus co-produce the competitiveness phenomenon throughout students' K-12 schooling years.

Ultimately, using a novel theoretical framework *figured worlds across time and space* allowed me to present three interlocking models that trace how school-related artifacts are employed and developed for immigrant parents' and children's everyday social positioning. This new theoretical framework also supported me to document how students and parents negotiate their identities as they engage in daily social interaction across home, school, and community. Informed by this framework, I conceptualize parents' and student discourses of struggles as spaces of reauthoring a new sense of self as a response to

their imagined worlds. In particular, this nuanced theory permits me to theorize how high-achieving Asian students internalize the racialized learning identity and how the three intermeshing figured worlds serve to co-produce a generation of model minority students in a suburban predominantly Chinese-heritage immigrant community on the East Coast in the era of post-1965 immigration.

This chapter begins with a summary of the findings presented in chapters four, five, and six. Then, I will present the study's theoretical and methodological contributions. Embedded in this chapter is a discussion of research in the field of anthropology of education by reviewing two prevailing theories on Asian Americans' academic success: cultural-ecological theory and segmented assimilation theory. In the following section I suggest possible directions for future research.

Summaries of Findings Chapters

Chapter four examines the cultural production of Asians who are “smart” and good at math through the re-authoring of academic identities across home and school settings. I explain why and how Asian students take up learning identities related to intelligence. I examine the interrelated effects of (a) immigrant parents' perspectives of American K-12 math education and their corresponding engagement of students in extra math learning, (b) the K-12 math tracking and the fast-paced Honors- and AP-curriculum, and (c) parent agency and student agency across the family and school settings. This chapter highlights students' academic identification process and the co-development of student agency in their lived worlds of “getting ahead” of their peer students. The analysis indicates that the K-12 math curriculum serves as a central cultural resource that triggers parents' figured worlds, a response to their perception of the U.S. elementary math curriculum as being “pretty slow paced.” With parents' engagement of their children in numerous math-related practices (i.e., memorizing the multiplication table and doing extra math practices), Asian students' learning identities are mediated by school symbolic artifacts (i.e., Asian students get good grades at school). They develop academic identities of feeling “smart” because elementary school is “easy” and they reach the top of the class. Being placed in Honors-track math in middle school becomes a “natural” and “normal” consequence for Asian students.

The challenging Honors- and AP-level math curriculum in high school discourages immigrant parents from continuing to engage themselves in children's math learning (mainly due to their language barriers); it also generates students' figured worlds of "getting ahead of peers" and "acting smart." Students' struggles in difficult courses like Algebra 2 serve as spaces of re-authoring (e.g., "try not to look stupid") that helps consolidate their figured worlds. "Not asking questions in class" and "working hard at home" become part of an inevitable approach that transforms Asian students' "being smart and good at math" from social position to disposition.

Chapter five demonstrates why and how Asian students work so hard and decide to live up to the racialized learning identities that involves "being a normal Asian who is smart, good at math and achieving academic success" in the school context. I also explain how the sociohistorical image of the model minority stereotype gets localized and reproduced. My findings suggest: The American curricular tracking creates "artifacts" (e.g., test scores, GPAs, and symbolic labels like Honors- or AP-track) that open up students' figured worlds of "normal Asians," and in turn, mediates students' racialized identification process and learning experiences. Three institutionalized effects of curricular differentiation combine to provide a unique social context for Asian students' cultural worlds. The three interactive structural effects are: students' imagined academic hierarchy which school places students into, Asianized friendship cliques (i.e., students befriend people who go to the same classes with them), and everyday social interaction (via the mechanism of the school's daily course schedule).

Throughout the secondary schooling years, the artifacts Asian students used for social positioning are advanced from being general (i.e., track-based resources) to specific (i.e. track- and race-related resources) and finally arrive at the Asianized discourse or the model minority stereotype (e.g., "Asians are supposed to be good at math."). Students' peer pressure to be a "normal Asian" and not "a failed Asian" is produced via their day-to-day social interaction and positioning. Students' struggle to avoid social punishment (i.e., losing one's Asian membership as a consequence of not living up to the Asian stereotype), thus propelling them to make the decision of living up to the model minority stereotype.

Asian students' acts of re-authoring (e.g., "don't be the ugly duckling in the Asian community") serve to localize the widely circulating model minority myth. Therefore, for an Honors-level (and above) track student of Asian descent, the choice of maintaining membership in the high-achieving Asian group at school indicated an unspoken rule: a commitment to keeping up with the Asian crowd by constantly working hard academically, "doing the Asian thing," and continuing to be a high- or over-achiever.

Chapter six illustrates the cultural production of a generation of the Asian model minority students through the mechanism of Asian moms' gossip across the community and home settings. Also, this chapter explains how and why Asian parents make decisions to enrich their children's after-school activities and how these decisions create a phenomenon whereby the students of the local community are engaged in similar after-school activities. Examples of these collective after-school activities are playing the piano, the violin, and tennis, attending science summer camps, taking SAT-prep tutoring courses, and doing similar volunteer work. This chapter further explains how the children-related artifacts (e.g., "how's your child's school going?") mediates Asian moms' social identification and educational involvement, which leads to the construction of the social phenomenon that students in the community attain a similarly high level of educational achievement.

The findings suggest that: the local Chinese language school provides the initial social space and context for forming a particular type of Asian moms' circle in which novice Asian parents (i.e., those who deem themselves as novice parents that have limited knowledge about the American K-12 education system) could learn from the experienced Asian parents in order to counter their disadvantages. A figured world of "Asian moms and the 'good' students" is thus generated. In this imaginary world, novice parents learn how to be an Asian parent through learning how to help their children navigate K-12 education by identifying and imitating the "successful" family models in the community. These parents view "successful" families as those comprised of children who are overachievers at school or go to Ivy League schools. By imitating other "successful" families' tactics, novice parents enroll their children in the same after-school programs in which the successful students have enrolled. This act of following the

“successful” models among a group of novice parents at a collective level generates a phenomenon of “hopping on the bandwagon” due to parental fear they will make their child fall behind other children if they do not do what most families do in the community.

From everyday social interaction to social comparison and thus social positioning via using children-related artifacts, Asian moms’ gossip circle is formed and functions as a mechanism that facilitates Asian moms’ ongoing learning about how to help their children succeed at school. This mechanism of Asian moms’ gossip mediates a complex relationship among Asian moms’ learning, social positioning, social identification, and their children’s educational practices. Further, the Asian moms’ gossip also helps produce parental peer pressure and dictates the parents’ style of engaging themselves in their children’s education. There are two reciprocal stages of Asian moms’ gossip that shape Asian students’ learning identities and practices: Asian moms’ social positioning in parent-parent interactions in the community and social positioning in parent-child interactions at home. Over time, Asian moms’ gossip serves to localize the widely-circulating pattern of the model minority stereotype in Asian immigrant families. Through Asian moms’ acts of bringing the “good” student model home to their children, they produce their expectations for their children: to work hard(er), achieve high(er) performance, and match (or surpass) “that good student.” Asian moms’ expectations eventually function as add-up resources for Asian students to thicken their racialized learning identities across home and school.

Theoretical and Methodological Innovations and Contributions

Based on the findings, I argue three points. First, the academic excellence that high-achieving East-Asian American students attain is merely a result of immigrant parents’ transmitting traditional family and cultural values to their children, which is the central argument of the model minority myth. Rather, Asian students’ academic success is a complex sociocultural product in which the larger socio-historical, economic structural contexts and human agency in the local contexts should be taken into account: post-1965 immigration, immigrant parents’ perspectives of the American K-12 schooling system, and the institutionalized effects of curriculum tracking system that shape immigrant parents’ and Asian students’

learning and social identification processes. The hidden broader sociohistorical and structural contexts that formulate immigrant parents' parental identities, educational aspiration and involvement should not be ignored in research on Asian immigrant family education.

This study adds nuance to our understanding of East-Asian immigrant families' K-12 educational experiences and practices in the post-1965 immigration era. It highlights parents' and students' engagement in social positioning and social identification (i.e., students' learning and racialized identification in particular), the related larger sociohistorical contexts, agency, and the interactional effects of these factors. In this section below, I will further elaborate on the study's two theoretical and methodological contributions. This study reviews two compelling schools of thought that offer explanations for academic performance of immigrant minority students' in K-12 schooling, particularly for the Asian American population: cultural-ecological theory and segmented assimilation theory. Finally, I will present why studying student success or "studying up" (i.e., to understand the processes "whereby power and responsibility are exercised in the United States" (Nader, 1969, p.284)) matters in gaining a better understanding of the ways in which the public education system reproduces racial inequalities in the U.S.

Incorporating the school-related symbolic artifacts, social positioning, and self-reauthoring into the contexts of Asian immigrant family and community across multiple timescales.

This study challenges John Ogbu's cultural-ecological explanation (Ogbu, 1987) for Asian American success and Portes and Zhou's model of segmented assimilation (1993) for explaining why Asian-American students consistently succeed. Their work ignores the importance of school-related symbolic artifacts in shaping students' and parents' identities and educational practices. Furthermore, these theories also fail to zoom in on parent-child interactions and the ways in which parent-children negotiations could shape and reshape their sense-making and educational practices. My work addresses this gap in three ways: (a) by adding school-related resources when examining how participants use the school's symbolic artifacts to make sense of self; (b) by incorporating the notion of social positioning when exploring how

students and parents use symbolic artifacts to make sense of their worlds; and (c) by introducing the concept of re-authoring for documenting how participants re-make sense of themselves through struggle-related narratives that later reshape children's expectations (or parents' aspirations for children) and educational engagement.

The cultural-ecological explanation attempts to integrate ethnic cultural and structural analyses by emphasizing the importance of immigrant groups' immigration history, ethnic community forces, and their sociocultural adaptations within the structural conditions of the host society (Zhou & Kim, 2006; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Ogbu, 1987; Warikoo & Carter, 2009). Ogbu's cultural-ecological explanation for minority student performance identified two immigrant groups—voluntary and involuntary minorities—each with distinctive cultural frames of reference and ways of responding to their migration history and to power relations with the dominant group in U.S. society (Ogbu, 1987). Ogbu (1987) claimed that voluntary minorities came to the U.S. based on their free will. They migrated to the U.S. in search of better economic opportunities. Thus, they treated cultural and language differences “as barriers to be overcome in order to achieve their long-range goals of future employment” (Ogbu, 1987, p. 327). Such an optimistic cultural frame of minority status generates positive community forces in response to upward social mobility. Community forces refer to “products of sociocultural adaptation and are located within the minority community” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 157). Examples of community forces include parents' and their community's high expectations for children, as well as strong involvement in their children's schooling. Accordingly, these voluntary minorities willingly adjusted and assimilated themselves into the dominant culture by working hard. As a consequence, the offspring of this voluntary minority group frequently do well in school.

Ogbu highlighted the interaction of community forces and system forces (e.g., systematic discriminations) (Foster, 2004) in shaping the high academic aspirations and success of Asian Americans. Ogbu further emphasized that Asian Americans, particularly Chinese Americans, are voluntary minorities who chose to migrate to the United States for better economic opportunities and a better life than in their home countries (Kao & Thompson, 2003; Louie, 2001; Sun, 1998). With optimistic immigration beliefs,

Asian Americans view cultural and linguistic differences as inevitable obstacles to be overcome in the path to adopting mainstream “white” ways and thus they do not worry about losing their language or group identity. The theory posits that their positive beliefs provide Asian immigrants with motivations to work hard to succeed.

Ogbu further explained that although children of immigrants may not have experienced limited opportunities or resources in the home countries (i.e., parent’s homeland), they acquire a similar positive attitude toward U.S. society and institutions from their parents or adults in their community (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). By focusing on the importance of community forces, Ogbu claimed that Asian-American students also tend to believe that achieving occupational mobility through high educational attainment is feasible. Consequently, they frequently perform well at school (Kao & Thompson, 2003; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Zhou & Kim, 2006).

In their critique of Ogbu’s (1987) theory, Portes and Zhou (1993) claim that Ogbu failed to acknowledge differences of modes of assimilating into the host culture and society (Portes & MacLeod, 1999). Ogbu’s work primarily focuses on minorities’ interpretation and responses to their immigration history within the racial structure of the host society and the upward assimilation trajectory for Asian Americans. Portes and Zhou (1993) further proposed a *segmented assimilation theory* to emphasize how the sector of U.S. society into which the children of immigrants are incorporated will determine their children’s life trajectories. Portes and Zhou (1993) identified three possible patterns of adaptation within immigrant families: (a) integrating into the white middle-class majority, which will lead to upward mobility and assimilation, (b) incorporating into the inner-city underclass which will result in downward assimilation and mobility, and (c) joining their own ethnic immigrant communities, which will contribute to upward mobility and enhance ethnic awareness.

According to scholars of segmented assimilation theories, Asian American educational success is derived from Asian ethnic communities which provide rich economic resources and ethnic networks. Parents can get together to exchange information about the American education system and to obtain resources for their next generation regarding achieving academic success and upward social mobility.

Such resources include specific ethnic structures such as ethnic-language schools or private after-school programs (Louie, 2004; Zhou & Kim, 2006).

However, using either a cultural-ecological lens or a segmented assimilation lens, many analyses have ignored the social interactional process and identification process that influence participants' (including parents and students) motivations and decisions in taking after-school programs. Furthermore, what resources do parents and children use when negotiating with each other or making sense of themselves? In general, the cultural-ecological theorists and the segmented assimilation theorists neglect the need to trace why and how immigrant parents and their children make decisions and with what consequences. Additionally, they fail to take *time* into consideration and document the accumulating effects of each round of decisions on participants' social identification processes.

My study addresses the research gap by incorporating an analysis of school-related symbolic artifacts, social positioning and self-reauthoring in Asian immigrant families across multiple timescales. My dissertation is the first to show three social processes (i.e., parent-child interaction, parents-parent interaction, and student-student interaction across home, community, and school settings) and document their reciprocal effects that co-produce a generation of the model minority students whose educational achievements are almost identically high. Specifically, these three social processes demonstrate: (a) Asian students' math-learning trajectories from parents' idea of getting ahead of the elementary math curriculum in the family context to students' idea of getting ahead of their peer students in the school context; (b) Asian students' racialized learning experiences and practices regarding "how to be a normal Asian" at school; and (c) immigrant parents' learning experiences and practices regarding "how to be an Asian parent in the U.S." and "how to raise a successful child" across community and home settings. These three interactive social processes bring about two compelling and complicated socioculturally-produced phenomena: parent peer pressure that results in parents' high expectations for children and student peer pressure that motivates students to work hard and keep pace with high-achieving peers. The findings show how parent and student peer pressure are intimately interconnected and influence each

other across home, school, and community, which ultimately produces a generation of Asian model minority students who are smart, good at math, and achieve academic excellence.

Furthermore, the cultural-ecological theorists and the segmented assimilation theorists overlook school-related resources as important mediators in the production of social pressures during immigrant parents' and students' everyday social interactions. This study started by treating family and community as the sites of research. But surprisingly, the findings indicate that the U.S. K-12 public education system (i.e., the curricular tracking and its symbolic values) plays the essential role in shaping immigrant parents' and students' everyday social positioning, struggles and their identification processes. In unlocking the East-Asian immigrant family myth and understanding their intergenerational educational experiences, this study employs the identity-in-practice perspective to bring the following elements together: the structural indicators (i.e., the post-1965 immigration era, the American tracking system, and the sociohistorical pattern of model minority stereotype), the locally-produced cultural practices (e.g., memorizing the multiplication tables, working hard, or taking SAT tutoring lessons), and human agency (e.g., local struggles).

Ogbu claimed that the interaction of ethnic immigrant community forces and *system forces* (e.g., racism and discriminations in U.S. society) shaped Asian American's high academic aspirations and academic success. Ogbu referred community forces to Chinese immigrant parents' responses to their perspective of U.S. racism and discrimination. As an anti-racism strategy, Chinese immigrant parents thus collectively generated resources in the community and had high expectations for children and strong involvement in children's education to help their children succeed at school and enroll at "good" colleges. Ogbu claimed that the reason why Asian American students acquired a similar positive attitude toward U.S. society and a positive belief in upward mobility through U.S. education was through their parents or adults in their community.

In fact, Ogbu and his colleagues oversimplified the context of community forces as collective responses to the structural barriers in U.S. society. Ogbu and Simons (1998) assumed that community forces served as a smooth cultural transmission approach within an immigrant family. They presumed that

Chinese immigrant parents indoctrinated their children with their family values and attitudes towards learning dominant white ways and their high educational aspiration for their children. What followed was that children heard parents' homeland and immigration experiences and believed in their better chances of succeeding in the U.S. by the agency of education. Therefore, children of Chinese immigrants were motivated to work hard and perform well at school. Generally speaking, Ogbu and Simons overlooked the dynamics within the Asian immigrant families and community and forgot multiple aspects of student agency behind parents' achievement discourses.

By examining how parents and children talked about U.S. school-related artifacts in discourses of struggles and during social interaction with community members, this study demonstrates how the processes through which children and parents develop educational expectations are far more complicated than Ogbu or Simons suggested. My work thus challenges the cultural transmission model inherent to the model minority myth, as well as Ogbu's theory, by demonstrating that students are not passive carriers of culture whose identities and educational practices are managed by their parents.

Furthermore, Ogbu argued that observations of racism and discrimination in U.S. society served as a motivation for immigrant parents to promote their children to succeed at school. My work challenges Ogbu's theory by showing how immigrant parents' motivations to involve themselves in their children's education were driven by their understanding of the American math education and the recognition that they lacked knowledge about the U.S. K-12 education system. In order to overcome their unfamiliarity with the U.S. education system, they sought help and learned from experienced immigrant parents about how to help their children succeed at school and collaborated to navigate the U.S. education system. In summary, my work advances Ogbu's work by using Holland et. al.'s (1998) notions of figured worlds, social positioning, and re-authoring to present how immigrant parents and students struggled and re-gained a sense of self that later reshaped their educational practices. Informed by this identity-in-practice approach, this study highlights the complexity of students' and parents' social identification processes and their K-12 family educational practices. These processes of identification and participation in everyday routine practices are shaped by social contexts that include parents' perceptions of the U.S.

math curriculum and the U.S. K-12 education system, as well as students' perceptions of racialized worlds at school and of the symbolic meanings within curricular tracking.

Ogbu's notion of community forces, which indicated a smooth cultural transmission approach within an immigrant family, has been rejected by many scholars. Numerous studies have reported intense intergenerational tensions in the assimilation or acculturation process within Asian immigrant families (Bankston, 2004; Buriel & De Ment, 1997; Zhou, 1997). Constant issues of intergenerational conflict include age expectation of autonomy (Buriel & De Ment, 1997), time and effort spent on schoolwork (Zhou, 1997), gender role difference (Buriel & Ment, 1997), language use at home (Zhou, 1997), authoritarian parenting behavior (Zhang, 2008), expectations for daily activities (Gorman, 1998), and value differences in educational aspirations and attainment (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998; Tang, 2008; Yang, 2004; Zhang, 2008).

Significant scenarios of intergenerational tensions can be found in sociologist Min Zhou's research on Chinese immigrant family communities in New York and California across almost three decades. Zhou (2006) illustrated a vivid generation gap between Chinese immigrant parents and children in her studies. The Chinese immigrant parents constructed their lives based on three primary goals: "To live in your own house, to be your own boss, and to send to your children to the Ivy League" (Zhou, 2006, p. 323). However, their U.S.-born children wanted to be American like everyone else, such as they want to be "looking cool, going to the ball games..., taking family vacations, having fun... feeling free to do whatever you like rather than what your parents tell you to do" (Zhou, 2006, p. 323). Zhou (2006) argues that children growing up in Chinese immigrant families have constantly found themselves "[straddling] two socio-cultural worlds – Chinese versus American, which is at the core of head-on intergenerational conflicts within the Chinese immigrant family" (p. 325).

But still, Zhou's series of work (Zhou & Li, 2003; Zhou & Lin, 2005; Zhou & Kim, 2006; Lee & Zhou, 2015) does not thoroughly explain the complex and multifaceted ways in which Chinese immigrant parents and their American-born children become engaged in the American K-12 education system. For example, Zhou and many other scholars of Asian American studies emphasize the importance of ethnic

social structures (i.e., ethnic language schools and ethnic supplementary after-school education) in the post-1965 Chinese (and Korean) suburban immigrant communities when explaining the extraordinary Asian-American student achievement. In particular, Zhou (2006) drew data from multiple case studies on several immigrant communities in Los Angeles to point out that, among those entrepreneur-rich Asian immigrant groups, Chinese and Korean immigrant communities are particularly illustrative. The typical actions of children-oriented enterprises in both ethnic communities are conducive to educational achievement. For instance, private after-school programs, run by and for co-ethnics, offer weekend Chinese or Korean language schools, exam cram schools, math or English enhancement classes, advanced after-school training that match formal school curricula, college-prep schools, or music/dance/sports studios (Kao & Thompson, 2003; Zhou, 2006; Zhou & Kim, 2006).

Zhou et al. (2006) argues that these ethnic supplementary after-school programs and ethnic networks serve not only to create an advantageous social environment conducive to promoting high academic achievement, but also to facilitate access for parents to share information about schooling and strategies for college preparation (Louie, 2008; Zhou & Kim, 2006). In these ethnic settings, parents can meet with other parents to share concerns and problems about their children's schooling and then to develop strategies to promote their children's education (Zhou, 2006). Israel et al. (2001) further conclude that "the most distinctive property of community social capital is that adults' involvement creates a 'caring community' (Lerner 1995) . . . , where a social support system is a place for local youths and where adults seek to maximize youths' development" (p. 48).

However, questions still remain, such as what exactly happens when immigrant parents come together to share concerns and problems about their children's education? What occurs during parents' social interactions and how does it influence parents' perceptions of self and the ways in which they become engaged in their children's education? What resources do they use to navigate the U.S. education system and why? What cultural resources do they use? What are the accumulating effects of students' elementary, middle, and high schooling on students and parents' experiences and identification processes? My work addresses answers to the questions mentioned above in Chapter six.

Moreover, while Zhou emphasizes the second-generation's voice, Zhou and many other scholars of Asian American studies leave out the voice of the first-generation regarding how they struggle in the process of learning about how to be a parent in the U.S. or how to help their children succeed with other immigrant parents. Zhou also pays little attention to exploring the developmental impacts of parent-parent social interactions on how immigrant parents struggle and re-negotiate themselves as they develop strategies to help children succeed. Adding *multiple timescales*, as my work has shown, highlights immigrant parents' and children's identity trajectories and documents the consequence of parent-parent interactions for parents' learning which, in turn, shapes and reshapes family educational practices and students' learning experiences over time.

Generally speaking, scholars of cultural-ecological and segmented assimilation theories do not acknowledge how social interaction and positioning can shape a person's identities and motivate one's behavior. This dissertation fills these research gaps by exploring the social processes among parent-child, parent-parent, and student-student social interactions in order to understand the hidden phenomena that influence parents' and children's decisions to get involved in local enrichment programs. As my findings in Chapter six show, Chinese language school serves as an initial social space for immigrant parents to get together, learn and exchange information about how to help their children succeed at school, which confirms Zhou's work. However, my work provides a deeper understanding of the significance of this social space and explains why parents make the decision to use the ethnic after-school enrichment programs as a primary method for engaging themselves in children's education. The answer lies in the complex phenomenon of parents' peer pressure, which acts as a phantom voice that informs Asian moms' daily decisions.

One of the important aspects of this study is the contribution of the voices of parents and the voices of students. By focusing on these voices, this study revealed struggle-related discourses of how parents and students use school-related artifacts to express their struggles and redefine who they are and who they want to be. Their life stories, struggle-related discourses, and solutions for their struggles told by participants bring to the confluence the forces that ignite and consolidate the multiple figured worlds in

which they live. Their participations in these overlapping imaginary worlds of getting ahead, normal Asians, and Asian moms and the “good” students across family, school, and community contexts illuminate: their senses of self, what they respond to, and how they respond; which, in turn, affected their degrees of participation, perceptions of themselves, and educational practices. Listening to the voices of parents and students highlights the social production of competitiveness and the merging of two interacting social forces that have been ignored in many analyses on Asian-American success: parent peer pressure and student peer pressure.

Finally, this study emphasizes the importance of symbolic artifacts legitimated by the U.S. K-12 schooling system in participants’ acts of social comparisons and positioning. By treating these symbolic artifacts as sociocultural resources that mediate participants’ identity negotiation, this ethnographic study demonstrates how students or parents use school-related artifacts to negotiate their positions and further re-author their social identities across overlapping institutionalized contexts. Sociologists Lee and Zhou’s latest work (Lee & Zhou, 2015), *The Asian American Achievement Paradox*, identifies that Chinese immigrant parents push a specific *success* model, which they strictly define as achieving high performance at school, going to an elite university and getting a good job for their second-generation children and view it as an anti-racism strategy. Lee and Zhou (2015) further connect institutional resources (e.g., the Honors- and AP- programs) to account for Asian students’ extraordinary achievement and attainment. Lee and Zhou term institutional resources “symbolic capital in U.S. schools” (e.g., teachers’ positive attitude toward them, being placed in higher-track courses and/or a positive stereotype “if you’re Asian, you do well...” (p. 127)). Lee et al. (2015) argue that Asian students obtain significant benefits from the school-related symbolic capital and institutional resources, which allow them to reach an exceptional academic outcome.

Lee and Zhou (2015) recognize how the interplay of strong parental involvement and school institutional resources contributes to Asian students’ exceptional academic achievement and attainment. However, they still could not describe the processes through which students and immigrant parents use school-related resources or the ways in which their identity negotiations relate to these processes. How

and why do Asian students internalize the model minority stereotype (e.g., “if you’re Asian, you are supposed to do well.”) that dictates their behavior such as to work hard or work harder? Lee and her colleague (2015) also fail to provide detailed explanations for how and why immigrant parents reinforce a specific model of success that pushes their children to succeed, how children respond to parents’ indoctrination, and how issues of identities are involved in the processes.

My work provides answers to the questions above by introducing the mechanism of Asian moms’ gossip to demonstrate Asian students’ and their immigrant parents’ social identification processes and educational practices, as shown in Chapter six. My study therefore provides a new way of understanding and explaining the exceptional academic achievement of East-Asian American students and parents’ engagement in K-12 schooling in the United States. Employing a nuanced theoretical framework “figured worlds across time and space” helps to focus the analysis of this groundbreaking study.

Adding positional identities, math curricular tracking, the institutionalized effects of tracking and reauthoring in examining Asian American students’ racialized schooling experiences.

This study uniquely navigates a special social process that facilitates the construction of a racialized learning identity among Asian American students at school. The social process involves social interactions during which Asian students constantly compare their academic performance to each other in school, particularly during their secondary education. The uniqueness of this study also applies to its documentation of how institutional symbolic values (e.g., GAPs, SAT score, honors-track, or AP-track) become developed, used, interpreted, and transmitted among participants in their overlapping multiple figured worlds.

I, therefore, identified two intrinsic structural forces that rule students’ social life at school: the role of curricular tracking (particularly in math) and its institutionalized effects. Curricular tracking and its institutionalized effects were critical to shaping Asian American students’ learning, social participation, and identity construction and reconstruction. I apply the examples of “getting ahead” in chapter four and “don’t be a dumb Asian” in chapter five to illustrate how the tracking system and its institutionalized

effects function as a larger fabric of racialized identification formation. In turn, this system mediates the localization of socio-historical imageries of the model minority stereotype, both for high-achieving and low-achieving Asian American students.

Given many analyses of U.S. schools and their tracking systems as important sites for race formation, constructions of achievement and the reproduction of social inequalities, many scholars of race, immigration, and education assert that the school or classroom serve as racialized spaces for students to learn who they are (Abu El-Haj, 2015; Lee, Park, & Wong, 2016; Nasir, 2012; Rubin, 2001). The school as a racialized space also applies to Asian-American students of immigrants when they make sense of themselves and thus influences their academic performance. In anthropologist Stacy Lee's (2016) latest work *Racialization, Schooling, and Becoming Americans: Asian American Experiences*, Lee et al. (2016) highlight the role of schooling as a site for the (re)production of race, racial categories, and racial inequalities. Lee and her colleagues (2016) provide an extensive literature review on research that focuses on how the role of schooling shapes the racialized learning experiences of Asian-American children of immigrants and how they respond to forces of racialization, and Lee et al. (2016) describe Asian students' racialized experiences at school as relational and hierarchical. By conceptualizing forces of racialization as relational and hierarchical, Lee et al., (2016) draw on Kim's (1999) notion of "racial triangulation" (i.e., Asian Americans' racial position as 'racial triangulation' in relation to Whites and African Americans). Lee et al. (2016) claim that the model minority stereotype "that positions some of Asian Americans as the 'right' way to be a person of color-quiet, diligent, and uncomplaining about White supremacy" (Lee et al., 2016, p.3) became one of the racial projects that has served to support white supremacy and racism within a racialized hierarchy, particularly in the post-1965 immigration era.

Lee et al. (2016) assert that the model minority stereotype serves not only as a tool of racial oppression for Asian students but it also functions as Asian students' (including their immigrant parents') strategy for resistance to the racism and discriminations at school. Scholars who work on Asian American students' educational experiences in the school context emphasize that the sociohistorical pattern of model minority stereotype is decisive in shaping Asian students' identities and learning experiences at school. For

example, school teachers use the model minority discourse to discipline students of non-Asians (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). School teachers and administrators favor Asian students, which help to circulate the model minority myth because the high-achieving performance of Asian students make teachers and the school look good (Lee, 2009).

Further, Lee and her colleagues (2016) argue that Asian students are not passive victims in this racialized process of being positioned as model minority students. They claim that the reason why Asian students (and their immigrant parents) embrace the racial-hierarchy model minority stereotype is, in essence, is to protect them from racism (also see Louie, 2004; Lee & Zhou, 2015; Lew, 2007). Seeking to overcome the racism they may face, some specific ethnic groups of students of Asian descent thus work hard to achieve academic success.

However, this line of research does not clearly explain the relationship between the model minority stereotype and Asian students. For instance, how are the widely-circulating imageries of the model minority myth locally produced and maintained? And how do high-achieving Asian students take up and enact racialized academic identities such as “Asians are supposed to be good at math”? In other words, scholars of Asian American education treat the model minority stereotype as a magic stone or a spell everywhere in the school context. The moment an Asian student enters school, the model minority stereotype immediately exercises its magic effects on the student: propelling them to work hard constantly and to attain an extraordinary academic achievement. In fact, before the model minority stereotype becomes a rich resource for Asian students’ social positioning and identity negotiation, it takes a developmental process (through the practices of tracking in secondary schools) for Asian students to acknowledge the existence of the Asian stereotype and learn how to use it to position oneself and others, as my Chapter five demonstrates.

These scholars ignore parents’ and students’ roles in the construction of students’ racialized identities and trajectories. Additionally, many scholars fail to acknowledge and explore one of the core mechanisms that mediates the complex relationship between curricular tracking and the discourse of model minority myth in Asian students’ social identification process: the institutionalized effects of tracking. As I

mentioned before, the three institutionalized effects of tracking constitute a unique social context in which Asian students live every day at school. They are students' perceived academic hierarchy, Asianized friendship cliques, and everyday social interaction via the mechanism of school course schedule, as shown in Chapter five.

Hence, I argue that Asian-American students' racialized learning identification process in the school context is shaped by long-term interactive forces including math curricular tracking, the institutionalized effects of tracking, the fast-paced high school Honors- and AP-level curriculum, as well as the socio-historical pattern of the model minority stereotype. That is, school is a racialized social space for Asian students where they learn to use tracking-related symbolic artifacts to make sense of themselves. The students learn to define who they are by positioning themselves in relation to others. The symbolic artifacts that students use to position each other are developed from the general (e.g., test scores, Honors class) to the specific (e.g., "Asians are supposed to get straight A's") due to the overwhelming high school Honors- and AP-track curriculum. The discourses surrounding the Asian model minority standards serve as a refined final product of students' K-12 schooling years.

My study thus problematizes the model minority myth by taking a different angle from Stacy Lee's (2009) powerful work *Unraveling the "Model Minority" Stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth* in three ways. First, I emphasize the institutionalized effects of math curriculum tracking and the challenging high school curriculum in Honors- and AP-tracks that create a specific racialized social space for the social interaction, positioning, and identification within Asian groups that occurs every day at school. Furthermore, my work differs from Lee's work in the way that I explore the social process through which the socio-historical pattern of the model minority myth is localized and inscribed upon Asian students. High-achieving Asian students take up the model minority identity as their racialized learning identity is not "an eternity in a moment." The model minority identity does not function like a magic stone that makes high-achieving Asian students immediately want to work hard and reach academic success. Rather, my findings suggest that Asian students internalize the model minority identity through a thickening process, layer by layer through students' numerous rounds of social positioning and

reauthoring every day in their social life throughout their middle and high schooling years. Lastly, my study incorporates multiple timescales and self-reauthoring factors in the analysis of how students struggle over time and the developmental process through which the model minority stereotype is locally produced in ways that dictate the Asian students' educational practices.

Lee (2009) conducted her fieldwork during the 1988-1989 school year at Academic High School in Philadelphia. Academic High School was an urban public high school which had 2,050 students with a racial makeup of white (45%), African American (35%), Asian American (18%), and others (2%). This school accepted students throughout the city based on students' standardized test scores and grades. Students at this school were labeled by other community members in the city as "smarter" and "nicer," compared to students at other schools in the city (p. 17). At this school, there were 356 Asian-American students, a diverse population in social class (from merchant/middle-class, working-class to poor) and ethnicity (from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korean or refugees from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, and a few American-born Asians). Lee used a cultural-ecological theoretical lens to examine four self-defined groups within this Asian population: Korean-identified students, Asian-identified students, Asian new wave-identified, and Asian American-identified students.

Lee (2009) explores the impact of the model minority stereotype on Asian-American students' identities and academic performance. She explains how school actors (i.e., Asian students, non-Asian students, school teachers, and administrators) co-used the discourse of the model minority stereotype to co-sustain the racial hierarchy in U.S. society: white supremacy and interracial tensions between Asian and black students. Lee claims in her research that both high-achieving and low-achieving Asian-American students were all affected by the stereotype that Asian Americans are high-achieving model minorities, as perceived by school teachers and non-Asian peer students. Meanwhile, except for the Asian new wave-identified students who were low achievers and had anti-school attitudes, Lee found that most Asian-identified students at Academic High School were like the model minority students: "quiet, respectful of authority, and hardworking" (p. 40). These Asian-identified students also thought that all Asian students should live up to the model minority standard in order to earn respect from white

Americans. That is, the widely-circulated model minority stereotype served as a rich cultural resource available locally for Asian students to position themselves in their perceived racial hierarchy at school, where white was at the top of the hierarchy. Students' identities influenced their attitudes toward schooling, their achievement, and their perceptions of upward mobility opportunities.

In terms of identifying the contributing factors to the production of students' model minority identity and achievement, Lee (2009) analyzed such components as social class, parental influences, perceptions of whites, and non-Asian perceptions of Asian students at school. Lee (2009) identified the tracking system at Academic High School as a racialized practice where the majority of the top-ranked students were white and Asian. However, she overlooked the ways in which the tracking system (particularly in math) and the fast-paced Honors- and AP- track curriculum influence Asian students' attitudes toward learning. In other words, Lee ignored the intricate, dynamic relationship between the secondary math curriculum, the tracking system, and Asian students' racialized learning identities. My work examines how the curricular tracking system influences Asian students' racialized learning identities. I thus recognize three important institutionalized effects of curricular tracking (i.e., academic hierarchy, Asianized friendship cliques, and everyday social interaction due to daily school schedule) that serve as the core mechanism of producing Asian students' peer pressure: from everyday social interaction to social comparison/positioning and peer pressure over time. Working hard(er) to keep up with other high-achieving students becomes a collective social practice for Asian students in response to their perceived peer pressure.

The findings of this study differ from Lee's findings regarding the reasons why Asian-identified students lived up to the model minority standards (i.e., to earn respect from white Americans). My study shows that the key reason for existence of the high-achieving Asian cohort is the goal of claiming their clique membership to their "normal" Asian community at school. The students in my study rarely mentioned racial hierarchy in shaping their identity and achievement. They even viewed whites as academically inferior to Asians, as Alex Shui mentioned in chapter five: "They (i.e., Asians) are mostly white if they don't get super high scores." This difference might be explained by the possibility that, in

my study the Asian student population is the dominant group at the school (i.e., the racial makeup at Reagan High North was white (18%), Asian American (69%), black (8%), and Hispanic (4%)). An additional consideration worth mentioning here is that students in this study claimed that they rarely had non-Asian friends, particularly in their high school life. The major explanation for the lack of non-Asian friends is that the academic tracking system limits their social opportunities to interact with non-Asian students (i.e., their Honors- and AP- classes are mostly Asians, especially in math and science courses) and school course schedule (see “Asianized friendship cliques” in chapter five for more information).

Moreover, instead of taking up the model minority standard in order to earn respect from their white peer students or to fight against racism, as Lee (2009) suggested in her study, my work shows a different perspective. I found that Asian students have the desire to fit into the model minority category to avoid three possible social punishments if they constantly receive “bad” grades: (a) falling to the Level-One track and not being able to return back to Honors-track because of the fast-paced Honors-/AP- track curriculum design, (b) being unable to go to a “good” college, and (c) being excluded from the “normal” Asian community, which means “you are no more an Asian.” I also found that Asian students use the model minority standard to motivate each other to work hard and achieve high collectively. Their incentive is to avoid one of the negative consequences of the institutionalized effects of tracking: they do not want to lose childhood friendships that had developed over several years. That is, if one student fails to maintain “good” grades and drops to the Level-One track, he or she would gradually lose friendship with his or her peer students in the Honors track. As chapter five shows, the reason lies in the different school schedules between Honors- track and Level-One track. Students who drop to a Level-One course would no longer have similar conversation topics with friends who are in Honors.

I examine Asian students’ identities within the high-achieving Asian group and identify an important social phenomenon (i.e., students’ peer pressure), produced by students’ everyday social interaction and positioning over their secondary schooling years. Recognizing the institutionalized effects of curricular tracking allows me to provide a new way of understanding high-achieving Asian students’ educational experiences and Asian students’ reasons for taking up the model minority identity. That is, in addition to

showing how the model minority stereotype manipulates Asian students' identity and educational behaviors, as Lee (2009) does, this study contributes further understanding of the cultural production of a generation of model minority students. I present this sociocultural production by displaying students' racialized identification process and identity trajectories, which are shaped by the racialized achievement ideology (i.e., Asians are supposed to be smart and good at math) and that facilitates the success of Asian students who became able to proceed to prestigious universities.

Without a consideration of time and self-reauthoring, Lee's (2009) analysis overlooks how students struggle in their fast-paced highest-track classes, particularly in math courses, and the ways in which these struggles are critical to Asian students' identity negotiation and development. By considering time and self-reauthoring, this study provides an understanding of the ways in which students use symbolic artifacts derived from the tracking system to make and remake a sense of themselves as they seek to fulfill the expectations of the model minority identity. Hence, one of the contributions of this work is to trace back how high-achieving Asian students developed their learning identity of being "smartness and good at math," and thus offers an explanation for the sociocultural process through which students learn to embody the identity as a "smart Asian" who is good at math and performs well in school.

Further, my work demonstrates the identity negotiation of how high-achieving Asian students use the model minority stereotype as an advanced artifact for their social positioning in relation to others. However, it is important to stress one point: that students in this study kept reminding me that it is not the best or the smartest student they want to become; it is the "failed Asian" that they want to avoid. In other words, this work displays Asian students' racialized learning identification "smart Asians who are good at math, work hard, and achieve high." But, to some extent, it offers an explanation as to why "you can't be a dumb Asian," which serves as a decisive factor to propel high-achieving Asian students to work hard. As one student put it, the process is like "there is always a monster chasing after them." The explanations are due to the institutionalized effects of tracking discussed in chapter five.

It is worth noting that students in my study embrace a pan-ethnic identity as Asian especially in their discourse of achievement, no matter whether they are students of Chinese or Taiwanese descent. "Being a

Taiwanese American does not make me want to work hard,” as many students like Alex Shui and Victor Pan claimed. Students at Reagan High North asserted that when they talk about Asians, they refer to students’ immigrant parents who came from East Asia: Japan, Korea, China, and Taiwan only. This categorization of Asian does not include Southeast Asian or Indian. I challenged their logic of labeling by pointing out the geographic factor “the concept of Asia usually includes East Asia, Southeast Asia, India...” As Alex answered, “I know. But that’s the way we think.”

In my study, the local identity categories created by the students are divided by level of achievement: “normal” Asians and non-normal Asians (e.g., “failed Asians,” “DisgrAsian,” “dumb Asians,” “the ugly duckling of the Asian community.”) as shown in chapter five. Again, this lumping into the pan-ethnic Asian category signifies the powerful impact of the model minority stereotype on shaping these Asian students’ racialized learning identities and their educational practices. “Doing the Asian thing” at an individual and collective level serves to localize the model minority stereotype with the aim to avoid (a) losing his or her membership to the Asian community and (b) the possibility of having social shame.

My study contributes knowledge on issues of Asian-American students’ identity production—racialized, mathematical, STEM-related, and learning at school—and how these identities emerge and shape each other. This study also demonstrates how parents and students act as active agents who author and reauthor their identities in pursuit of the high academic expectations created by peer pressure. By adding positional identity, the overwhelming high school curriculum particularly in high-track math courses, the institutionalized effects of tracking, and re-authoring into my theoretical lens, this study provides a fresh perspective on Asian American students’ racialized learning experiences at school.

Ultimately, Asian American students’ racialized learning identities are practice-linked identities mediated by K-12 symbolic artifacts of tracking and the tracking system. It starts with “getting ahead of the elementary math curriculum” and students’ feeling smart at elementary school. After entering Honors-track (and above) math courses at secondary school, students begin to incorporate the “race” factor into their learning identities because they have observed many Asians in their class. Finally, through struggling in the challenging high-track math courses, high-achieving Asian students re-author a

racialized identity to avoid multiple social punishments: being a smart Asian who is good at math and hard-working.

This generation of model minority students serves as a product of a complex and continuing sociocultural construction that perpetuates the circulation of the sociohistorical imagery of the Asian model minority stereotype across domains of U.S. society in the 21st century. More importantly, analyzing how East-Asian American students internalize and circulate racialized learning identities (i.e., Asians are smart, good at math, hard-working, and achieve academic excellence) should not limit itself to the school context. It requires attention to how the widely circulating pattern of the model minority stereotype becomes localized through institutionalized practices of identification across home, school, and community, as well as attention on local timescales (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school) at specific social spaces.

Broadening questions about racial inequality by studying up, studying success.

This study asserts that Asian American high-achieving students' educational experiences of academic success should be more integrated into a broadening of questions about the racial inequality of the U.S. K-12 education system. The three towns (i.e., Apple Township, Delaware Township, and Lincoln Township) where my ten high-achieving Asian students and their immigrant parents lived were known as "middle-class communities of successful professionals." The high schools (i.e., Reagan High School North, Reagan High School South, Washington High School, and Madison High School) that students attended respectively were all well-known as "successful" schools with some national-level recognitions as shown in Chapter three. The life experiences of Asian middle-class immigrant families and students' in K-12 education in a suburban setting are rarely the focus of public debates about education, the achievement gap, and racial inequality. However, the experiences of middle-class Asian immigrant families and students shed light on the sociocultural and economic dynamics that shape racial inequality in the U.S. educational system.

Studying up is crucial for understanding the dynamics of an educational system in which "good"

schools and “bad” schools are aspects of the same cultural fact: the American culture that celebrates individual merit (Varenne, Goldman, & McDermott, 1998). Sadly, the “good” schools that usually have the majority of “successful” students tend to be white and Asian ethnic groups, and the “bad” schools that usually have most of the “failing” students seem to be African and Latino ethnic groups (Varenne et al., 1998). Thus, studying up is critical in that it helps to identify important pieces of the same puzzle, specifically why and how racial inequality in educational achievement persists over decades. Studies of success provide an understanding of how the American public education system functions to perpetuate racial inequality by offering a comparison to studies of failure.

Moreover, studying the process of how individuals take up identities of success provides an opportunity to uncover the invisible aspects of the reproduction of inequalities. As Varenne and his colleagues (1998) assert in their work *Racing in Place*, “analytically, success in America must be approached as a matter of identification in a complex social science. To approach it as a matter of personal identity is to fall victim to the very ideology that is the common condition” (p. 108). Over the decades, the myth of Asian American academic achievement has been attributed to an artifact of Asian culture: “Tiger moms” and their obedient and quiet children. Scholars have been treating Asian students’ identity of success as a fixed identity. Therefore, little attention has been given to this Asian-American population in relation to studies of other races because “the success of Asians is not a problem in need of a solution” (Kao, 1995, p. 122).

My work examines the social identification process of Asian students’ racialized learning identities “a smart Asian who is good at math, hardworking, and a high-achiever.” The “identity-in-practice” analysis allows this study to unmask how a suburban Chinese-heritage community cultivates a local cultural system of meanings and practices that construct and accumulate advantages on a daily basis. This locally-produced culture system involves immigrant parents’ perceptions of two mathematics K-12 curricula in the U.S. and East Asia, the American K-12 academic tracking system, and parent and student agency across multiple informal learning contexts that include home, school, and community. The findings reject

the static culture approach which claims that Asian immigrant parents' ethnic culture decides the content of parents' educational aspirations for their children. Rather, my findings suggest that parents build their educational aspirations based upon the "good student" model portrayed by the local community members as a response to their perceived peer pressure; and the symbolic values of tracking plays a crucial role in parents' recognizing and shaping this good student model. In other words, the American curricular tracking system and the institutionalized effects of tracking had powerful influences over the everyday lives of the people of the Chinese-heritage immigrant community.

As Laura Nader (1969/1972) argued in her powerful work *Up the Anthropologist-Perspectives gained from studying up*, "studying 'up' as well as 'down' would lead us to ask many 'common sense' questions in reverse;... and the consequences of not studying up as well as down are serious in terms of developing adequate theory and description" (p.289-290). Without incorporating high-achieving Asian-American students' educational experiences and how their families and community become involved in students' development into studies of the achievement gap, we exclude an important piece of the same puzzle. We could not fully understand the role of American public education in the perpetuation of racial inequality across racial and ethnic groups, which would prevent us from finding feasible solutions to racial inequality.

Recommendations for Future Research

This dissertation furthers our critiques and analyses of the myth that Asian Americans' high academic achievement is attributable to aspects of "Asian culture" (e.g., "Tiger moms" and their obedient and quiet children). Instead, my findings suggest that Asian-American students' academic excellence is the outcome of local productions of academic competition across time and contexts. These productions reflect a complex interaction between the locally generated peer pressure among parents in the community, as well as students' peer pressure at school. Further, in these social processes, "Asian moms' gossip" serves as a core mechanism to generate the social pressure among community members across the home, school, and community settings. I present four recommendations for future research that will improve upon the

continued research on the educational experiences of Asian immigrant families and the model minority stereotype, and on racial inequality in general.

First, this study was conducted at a predominantly Chinese-heritage immigrant community on the East Coast, and the Asian students were the majority group at their schools. In order to better understand the connections between the role of the model minority stereotype and the local production of students' peer pressure, studies should be conducted with Chinese-heritage immigrant families in different parts of the United States and students at institutions where Asians do not represent the majority of the student body. This study is only able to account for the experiences of East-Asian students who have grown up in a predominantly suburban Chinese immigrant community and attend a school where Asians are the dominant group. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the experiences of those who have grown up in a community where (high-achieving) Asian students are relatively a minority. These studies will provide additional insights on whether students' peer pressure or parents' peer pressure are produced in these communities and in what ways. If the answer is negative, then, why?

Secondly, this study only accounts for the educational experiences of suburban high schoolers of immigrant parents who came to the U.S. in the aftermath of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. To understand whether and how social class issues influence Asian students' and immigrant parents' identity construction and family educational experiences, studies should be conducted at schools where working-class Asian-American students are the majority of the student body. Research questions could focus on whether a phenomenon of students' peer pressure exists among a group of high-achieving working-class Asian students to propel them to work hard and achieve academic excellence. And how is the students' social pressure constructed? Moreover, it would be appealing to investigate how working-class immigrant parents interact with their children in terms of parent academic involvement and discover what resources are used in identity negotiations. Offering a comparison of studying working-class immigrant families could deepen our understanding of the myth of Asian Americans' high academic achievement.

Thirdly, my study documents the learning identification trajectories of high school seniors over their K-12 schooling course. A longer-term study that examines Asian students' learning identities (i.e., being smart and good at math) at the college-level and traces backward their K-16 learning identification could be beneficial for understanding whether Asian students encounter any identity crisis after they go to college, whether and how they reauthor new identities in college and what cultural resources they use to remake a sense of themselves. Specifically, these studies should particularly focus on Asian students who carry the "smartness" identity and go into STEM fields and investigate whether the role of the model minority stereotype remains influential in their identities, practices, and their social world.

Finally, even though I have a balanced sample by gender (five boys and five girls), I found that the phenomenon of students' peer pressure mainly existed in the discourse of achievement expressed by the male students. The female students talked less about feeling peer pressure and academic competitions in their social worlds. In the course of my data collection, I asked my student participants questions about whether girls experienced less competition or if they were less competitive at their school than boys. The answer was no. "There were many girls who are competitive as well," claimed by Kyle Lin. Therefore, with an aim to gain a comprehensive idea of whether and what role gender plays in Asian students' learning identification and influences their educational practices, it is imperative to study whether there are gender differences in the cultural production of the Asian model minority group and in what ways gender differences hold significance and why.

In summary, this study aims to provide a dialogue between Asian American studies, immigration, and studies on the role of American education (i.e., curricular tracking) in race, class reproduction, and social inequality. What has been under exploration is the impacts of Asian students' peer pressure on students, the impacts of immigrant parents' peer pressure on themselves and their children, and gender issues. To ensure that Asian students have an opportunity to learn in a relatively healthy environment, special consideration must be given to the factors that affect their well-being and mental health, as well as immigrant parents' mental health. Educators and researchers, especially in the field of Asian American

studies and clinical psychology, need to develop and identify strategies to help students and their immigrant parents deal with perceived peer pressure and with negative identities.

Conclusion

The challenge of studying the college-preparation experiences of Asian immigrant families is to incorporate into an analysis of the fabric of Asian American educational experiences the presence of Asian immigrant parent agency, student agency, the social interaction and negotiations between parents and children, as well as parents' and students' re-authoring over K-12 learning years. By so doing, the story of Asian American (i.e., the second generation of immigrants) educational achievement and attainment could be told accurately. Without it, we are excluding the voices of a significant population of immigrant families. Thus, we need family (parent-child interaction) educational experiences to develop accurate understandings of Asian American identity construction in U.S. schools. By incorporating the concepts of school-related artifacts, social positioning, and reauthoring into analyses of Asian immigrant families and community across multiple timescales, scholars can provide a more nuanced understanding of identity construction. This study, using an innovative theoretical framework *figured worlds across time and space*, provides a fresh approach to examining the interactive effects of social contexts on students and parents in the community, school, and family.

The findings demonstrate the interdependent linkages between the following components of this particular cultural system in a predominantly Chinese-heritage immigrant community. They are: (a) post-1965 immigration to the U.S. (i.e. class issues), (b) the American curricular tracking system and the development of symbolic artifacts for Asian students' social positioning, (c) immigrant parents' perceptions of the American education system (particularly in math) that shape their educational involvement, and (d) students' racialized learning identification and practices at school. This cultural system facilitates the sociocultural production of parents' peer pressure, students' peer pressure, and consequently, the sociocultural production of the competitiveness phenomenon. In other words, it takes a whole village (i.e., the intimate dependency of family, school, and community in a predominantly

Chinese-heritage immigrant community) to produce a phenomenon of “competitiveness” and a generation of model minority students.

The competitiveness phenomenon within the village is a socioculturally-constructed product that emerges from the interweaving effects of multiple institutions (i.e., home, school, and community), numerous episodes of daily social positioning among members (i.e., student-student, parent-child, and parent-parent) due to the institutionalized effects (i.e., of the school tracking system and of the local Chinese school), and countless cycles of struggles and self-reauthoring throughout students’ K-12 schooling years. This competitiveness phenomenon eventually propels high-achieving Asian students as a group to work hard(er), achieve excellent performance, and not to fall behind their high-achieving peer friends. Thus, this study illuminates the cultural (re)production of a generation of ‘model minority’ students.

The cultural production of being a smart Asian who is good at math and achieving success (i.e., Asian students’ learning and racialized identities) is a result of an endless layer-by-layer deposition of the identification process and the re-authoring process throughout students’ K-12 schooling years. In the essence of the thickening process lie students’ countless everyday social interactions with parents, other Asian parents in the community, and other students at school and after school across their K-12 compulsory education. Every round of social positioning represents an episode in which an individual makes a claim to his or her social status or an episode of re-defining who he or she wants to be. The responding educational practices of making a claim serve as participants’ responses to their perceived peer pressure, which eventually produces the competitiveness phenomenon. For example, students’ working hard(er) to keep up with their peer students or parents based their educational aspiration on the “good” student model in the community for their children. In short, my work makes invisible social pressure (i.e., students’ peer pressure and parents’ peer pressure) visible.

Therefore, I argue that the K-12 college preparation practice is an intergenerational process of learning, teaching, development, struggles, and negotiations in the studied Asian immigrant families. To document the cultural production of smart Asians who are good at math, work hard and achieve academic

excellence, researchers have to recognize and analyze actual cultural/social practices at particular sites involving school, community, and home. Further, researchers should focus on two special domains: (a) the social interactions and positioning among parents and students and (b) the reciprocal effects of community, family, and school over the K-12 schooling years. That is, to unmask the complex educational experiences in Asian immigrant families, my innovative theoretical framework *figured worlds across time and space* provides a model for conducting a deep cultural analysis of the college-preparation process. By analyzing the taken-for-granted social practices (e.g., Asians students attend multiple after-school tutoring or enrichment programs) and hidden rules of certain cultural behaviors (e.g., Asians work hard) through the theoretical lens of “identity-in-practice”, this dissertation provides a deeper understanding of the sociocultural patterns of the educational achievements of the children of East-Asian immigrant parents—parents who came to the U.S. in the aftermath of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.

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Appendix A: Three rounds of student interview protocols

First-round of interview guide

- How will you describe yourself to a person who you meet for the first time?
- How 's your summer going? Have you started your college application yet?
- Overall, how will you describe yourself as a student? For example, what type of students?
- How did your parents share with you their immigration story? Can you share with me one story?
What messages do you think your parents try to tell you?
- How do you describe your parents' parenting style and your relationship with your parents?
- If I were to observe your interacting with your parents, what would I see? Could you give me an example about when your parents wanted you to do something but you did not want to do?
- What's your plan for your future? How do you think you will achieve your goal? How do you think your parents influence your aspirations? How do you respond to it?
- What criteria did you use when thinking about what schools to apply to? Can you walk me through one conversation you had with your parents about figuring out what colleges or programs to apply to?
- What is the likelihood that you will get accepted to your dream school/program? And what makes you think this way? In your opinion, what are your advantages or disadvantages about getting an offer from your dream school?
- Could you share with me some thoughts or reflections on this college preparation process?

Second-round of interview guide

- How did you prepare for your SAT test?
- What extracurricular activities did you participate in? What does your everyday after-school schedule look like? Can you pick a week and describe your schedule?
- How do you do your time-management and how do your parents influence you?

- How do you take care of your schoolwork, college-application, and after-school activities at the same time? What's your parents' perspective of seeing your time management?
- What are the courses (math, science, English, history) you took from Grade 9-12? How did you decide which level of courses to take?
- In terms of AP courses that you have taken, how many AP courses tests do you plan to take this upcoming May and why?
- What does your college list look like? What criteria did you use when thinking about what schools to apply to? Did you make any adjustment and why?
- Can you walk me through one conversation you had with your parents about what college or program to apply to?
- Is there any school that you wanted or didn't want to apply to but your parents persuaded you to do that?
- What is your strategy for applying to college? Any early decision or early action plans?
- Who did you discuss with in your application process—such as how to write your essay? Will you share information you're your parents in this process—such as how much you have done?
- How will you pay the tuition? Do you (or will you) apply to any national competitive scholarship?
- Can you share with me one essay you wrote? It will help me to understand you better and ask questions such as being an Asian American in this college-application process.

Third-round interview guide

- How did you and your parents come up with your matriculation decision? Can you walk me through a conversation you had with your parents?
- What do you look forward most to your college life?
- Did your parents discuss with you about their retirement plan?
- Do you think speaking Mandarin or Taiwanese important to you? And why?

- Would it be different if you and your parents did not live in a dominantly Chinese immigrant community? For example, would your K-12 educational experience and college-application results be different?
- Compared to the college-preparation experiences of other Chinese or Taiwanese families in the community, is yours similar or different from theirs? And in what ways?
- What lesson did you learn from this application process? What do you wish you would have known before you started the application process?

Appendix B: Three rounds of parent interview protocols

First-round interview guide

- How would you introduce yourself to a person who you meet for the first time?
- How do you describe your parenting style?
- What was your life like at the first few years in the U.S.? What has been the most difficult or most rewarding in your lived experiences in the U.S.?
- Can you walk me through a conversation that you shared your migration experience with your child? What do you want your children to learn from them? Do you remember how your children responded to it?
- How would you describe your relationship with your child?
- Would your parenting style be different if you lived in your homeland in East Asia? And why?
- When you have questions about your child's education, what do you usually do or who do you go for help?
- What is your educational and career aspiration for your child? How did you convey your values to your child? Do you remember how your child responded to it?
- What are your child's advantages or disadvantages about getting accepted to his or her dream school?
- Could you share with me some thoughts or reflections on the way you helped your child in his or her college preparation process?

Second-round interview guide

- These high school seniors seem very busy every day. They have to take care of their schoolwork, college-application, and after-school activities at the same time. Do you try to help your child in any way to reduce his or her pressure?
- What is your role in your child's college application process?

- According to your child's courses (math, science, English, history) that he or she has taken from Grade 9-12, how did you help in the process of deciding what level of courses your child was supposed to take?
- Can we talk about your K-16 educational experience in Taiwan or China?
- What made you decide to come to the U.S. for graduate studies and/or settle down here?
- What was the political atmosphere in your home country around the years prior to your decision of coming to the U.S.?
- What was the economic condition in your home country around the years prior to your decision of coming to the U.S.?
- What was the social atmosphere in your homeland toward going abroad for studying?
- What's your major at college when you were in Taiwan or China? Do you remember how you experienced your college-preparation process in your high school?
- What were your parents' expectations and how did you interact with your parents at that time?
Is the way you interact with your child similar to that you interacted with your parents?

Third-round interview guide

- How did you and your child come up with the matriculation decision? Can you walk me through a related conversation you and your child had?
- What do you think your kid looks forward most to his or her college life?
- We talked about your immigration story earlier. For the decision of staying in the U.S., would you say you did it for your child(ren)? Or is there any point that you really wanted to go back but then you decided to stay for your kids?
- After all of your children go to college or after they can support themselves, what's your plan? Do you plan to move back to Taiwan or China? And why?
- Do you think speaking Mandarin and/or Taiwanese important to your kids? And why?

- What would you think if you and your child did not live in this dominantly Chinese immigrant community, would your child's educational experience and the college-application results be different? Or would your ways of engaging in your child's education be different?
- Compared to the college-preparation experiences of other families in the community, is your family's experience similar or different from theirs? And in what ways?
- What lesson did you learn from your child's application process? What do you wish you would have known before your child started the application process?