

## The Pursuit of Elite High Schools and Colleges among Second-Generation Korean Americans\*

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*This study examines the educational achievements and attainments of 1.5 and second-generation Korean Americans. Drawing from the 1998 New York and the 2004 IIMMLA surveys as well as forty follow-up in-depth interviews (selected among the 1998 New York survey participants), the study finds that second-generation Korean Americans are attaining high levels of education similar to the educational attainments of their immigrant parents. A high proportion of second-generation Korean Americans also attend elite high schools and colleges, giving the impression of them as model minorities. Closer analysis, however, suggests a more complex dynamic at work, one that involves Korean immigrants' selective educational and occupational background and the particularities of adolescent life. School-related factors, especially teachers' expectations, peers, and degree of socializing, have considerable impact, both positive and negative, on the educational attainments of second-generation Korean Americans.*

**Keywords:** Educational attainment, Second-Generation Korean Americans, Elite high schools and colleges, socioeconomic status

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## Introduction

Asian American students have received a great deal of media and scholarly attention for their educational accolades. Researchers find that on average Asian American students receive higher grades (GPA) and score better in standardized math tests relative to other students (Hirschman and Wong 1986; Fejgin 1995; Steinberg 1996; Fuligni 1997; Goyette and Xie 1999; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Kao and Thompson 2003; Xie and Goyette 2003, 2004; Sakamoto and Xie 2006). Asian American students also frequently reach the top spots in the prestigious Westinghouse Science Talent Search (now known as the Intel Science Talent Search), and they are overrepresented in many prestigious college campuses across the nation (Brand 1987; Fong 2002).<sup>1</sup>

Mainstream media and the general public usually single out Asian (or Confucian) culture and strict parenting as the basis for Asian American academic prowess. In her recent best seller, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, Amy Chua's book has stirred a fierce controversy over the merits of strict upbringing in children's educational success. While the debate has been over the virtues of strict parenting, this paper, examining the educational achievements and attainments of second-generation Korean Americans, actually calls into question those cultural explanations of Korean American (and Asian American) educational success prevalent in mainstream media circles. Although parental pressure for elite high schools and colleges boosts the prospects of second-generation Korean academic success, the paper argues that this group's educational success springs from Korean immigrants' middle-class status and their determination to establish an academic environment for their children. Endowed with middle-class status, along with success in entrepreneurship, intact families, and emphasis on education, the chances for educational and occupational success for second-generation Korean Americans are significantly improved (Kasinitz et al. 2008). In addition, the paper scrutinizes the role that school-related factors, including time spent on homework, teachers' expectations, and peer groups, play in second-generation's educational achievements and attainments. I end the paper with a discussion of the costs of pressures for academic achievement on

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<sup>1</sup> In my discussion of second-generation Korean educational achievements and attainments, references to other Asian Americans are made since the educational attainments of Asian Americans and theories explaining their educational success also apply to Korean Americans.

these young adults, including mental health problems, suicide, and low self-esteem.

## Cultural and Structural Explanations of Asian American Educational Success

The most prominent explanation of Asian American educational achievement and attainment in popular discourse is the cultural explanation. This theoretical perspective claims that Asian American students excel academically because Asian culture, influenced by Confucianism, stresses hard work, respects authority, and values education. Asian culture is conducive to educational achievement because these Asian values, attitudes, beliefs, and practices fit well with middle-class American culture (Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore 1991; Sue and Okasaki 1995; Xie and Goyette 2004). Other variants of the cultural explanation contend that Asian American children also succeed in school because parents would lose face in the community and reflect badly on their parenting skills if the children fail academically (Caplan et al. 1991; Sung 1987; Pang 1990).

Without doubt, cultural explanations offer one account for the arguably impressive educational achievements of Asian American students, but they are weak in explaining variation and low achievement among Asian American students (Fong 2002; Lee 1996, p. 53). First and foremost, there is much *inter-ethnic* and *intra-ethnic* variation in academic performance among Asian American students, including considerable variation even in the same Asian countries where, presumably, Asian culture should exert the most influence (Steinberg 1981). Notwithstanding these limitations, however, cultural explanations strike a chord with popular notions of cultural difference and serve to blame racial minorities for their educational failures.

Stratification theorists, by contrast, argue that parents' socioeconomic status is behind the educational achievements and attainments of the children. Numerous studies have documented a strong association between parents' socioeconomic status, namely parents' education, occupation, and income, and children's educational achievements and attainments (Blau and Duncan 1967; Sewell and Hauser 1975; Sewell, Hauser, and Featherman 1976; Jencks 1977; Mare 1981; Kao and Thompson 2003). The Coleman report (2000, p. 162) found that family socioeconomic status was more influential

than school-related factors in children's educational achievements.<sup>2</sup> A number of studies have also found that children from low-income families perform less well academically than children from affluent ones (Persell 1977, p. 1). As Portes and Rumbaut (2001, p. 239) observe, there is a positive relationship between parents' socioeconomic status and second-generation's educational achievements. They found that children with high-status parents perform better in all measures of academic performance because immigrants who enter the United States with high levels of human capital are better able to capitalize on their class resources to support education in their children (Zhou and Bankston 1998, p. 142).

While this association between parents' socioeconomic status and children's educational achievements and attainments is found among native-born non-Hispanic whites, the predictive role of parents' socioeconomic status does not always bear out for Asian American students (Kao 1995; Zhou and Bankston 1998; Goyette and Xie 1999; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Kao and Thompson 2003). Research on Asian American students indicates that many Asian American students, even those from low socioeconomic status, attain high levels of education. As a result, researchers have considered other factors that might better account for the academic achievements and attainments of Asian American students, including blocked mobility, peer group effects, social capital, and student expectations and aspirations (Caplan et al. 1991; Kao 1995; Goyette and Xie 1999; Kao and Thompson 2003; Xie and Goyette 2003). Still, the role of parents' socioeconomic status should not be overlooked and its impact must be taken into account to tease out the effects of class, race, ethnicity, and gender on Asian American educational achievements and attainments.

## Peer groups, Socializing, and Academic Engagement

Among the factors associated with academic performance and educational attainment, school-related factors, such as peer groups and student engagement with schoolwork, have been found to play critical roles. First, peer groups serve as primary agents of socialization for youth, exerting pressures that significantly influence student engagement and participation

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<sup>2</sup> Coleman (1960) qualified this observation by stating that the quality of teachers did matter and students' academic performance was affected by other students' educational backgrounds and aspirations.

in schoolwork (Johnson, Crosnoe, and Elder, Jr. 2001; Steinberg 1996) as well as student achievement beliefs and behavior (Ryan 2001, p. 1135). In a large study of high school students, Steinberg (1996), found that Asian American students excelled because they were generally excluded from peer groups that were disengaged from academics. Ironically, exclusion from such peer groups worked in the favor of Asian American students because they were rejected from peer groups that prioritized being popular, which encouraged socializing with fellow Asian Americans who believed in education and hard work (Gibson 1988; Steinberg 1996).

Although this may be a plausible explanation for why Asian American students seem more engaged with school work, Steinberg assumes that all Asian American peer groups equally stress education and doing well in school. As Lee's study (1996) has found, there were varied levels of engagement and academic performance among Asian American students, in part dependent on the ethnic identities of these Asian American students. In addition, which peer groups are accorded status may vary from school to school so that in schools where the most academically competent dominate the status groups, exclusion from such status peer groups may actually impair rather than support academic achievement. As Lee (1996) underscored, Asian American students are not a monolithic group and belonging to Asian American peer groups did not always guarantee placement into an academically oriented track. The "new wavers," the working-class Chinese and Southeast Asian students in her study, for example, emphasized merely getting by in schools, and membership in this peer group led to poor academic performance (see Lee 1996).

## Voluntary Immigrants and Blocked Mobility

Much research has shown that Asian American parents and students put a lot of investment and trust in education as a means of securing upward mobility (Fong 2002). Among other things, Asian immigrants may bring greater motivation to the table, including a positive view of schools and education which gets transmitted to the children, because they are self-selected and migrate voluntarily to the United States unlike involuntary minorities (Ogbu 1991; Xie and Goyette 2004). Although self-selection and voluntary migration may be important, it should be pointed out that Asian immigrants' marginal status in society, particularly immigrant parents' experience with and perceptions of blocked mobility or discrimination, may

also signal Asian American parents to see education as one of the few viable options for upward mobility (Lee 1996; Sue and Okazaki 1995; Xie and Goyette 2003). Xie and Goyette (2003) synthesize this as strategic adaptation, namely that academic achievement is the outcome of Asian cultural values and, more importantly, the social position of Asian Americans in U.S. society. Because Asian Americans have been historically excluded from countless social institutions, they have sought out alternative strategies for labor market success, particularly skill development through education. Sue and Okazaki (1995) observe that if Asian Americans have greater success in obtaining education-based careers, non-educational areas are less likely to be emphasized by parents, especially when those groups have a cultural orientation toward education and have attained academic success. Therefore, what we commonly associate with “good” behaviors from Asian American students (“compliance, perseverance, and docility”), Suzuki (1980, p. 173) argues, may be less a cultural orientation than a response to blocked pathways.

Although the theory of blocked mobility helps to explain why Asian immigrant parents stress education in the children, it is still weak in explaining low achievement among Asian Americans as well as the academic obstacles of Black Americans and other racial minorities who consistently face discrimination and blocked mobility (Lee 1996; Zhou and Bankston 1998, p. 148) Despite these limitations, this view can help explain the overzealous pursuit of education by Korean immigrant parents.

## Data Sources

This study draws upon multiple data sources to examine the educational achievements and attainments of second-generation Korean Americans, including a publically released data set, a survey coordinated by the author, and follow up in-depth interviews. The 2004 Immigration and Intergenerational Mobility in the Metropolitan Los Angeles (hereafter the 2004 IIMMLA) survey is a publically released data set that contains detailed information on many facets of 1.5 and second-generation life in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, including those of Korean Americans. The entire data set is comprised of 6 second-generation immigrant (Mexicans, Vietnamese, Filipinos, Koreans, Chinese, and Central Americans from Guatemala and El Salvador) and 3 native-born (non-Hispanic whites, Blacks, and third- or later-generation Mexican Americans) groups in the

metropolitan Los Angeles area (see 2004 IIMMLA codebook). For the purposes of this paper, the Korean portion of the data set has been selected for analysis, which contains four hundred 1.5 and second-generation Korean Americans aged between 20 and 40. Because the purpose of the survey was to capture the mobility paths and outcomes of second-generation immigrants, questions regarding educational achievements and attainments are only a small feature of the survey instrument. Still, in light of the paucity of survey data on second-generation Koreans (and Korean immigrants in general), the 2004 IIMMLA is arguably one of the most comprehensive publicly-available data sets that hold substantial numbers of second-generation Korean Americans.

The second data source used for this study is the 1998 New York Second-Generation Korean American survey (hereafter the 1998 New York survey), a data set which was collected by the author from the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area. The 30 minute telephone survey was conducted from June 1998 through November 1998 with two hundred 1.5 and second-generation Korean Americans aged between 23 and 35. To generate the final sample of 200 respondents, approximately 24,500 households with Korean surnames were first identified from published telephone directories, followed by a telephone screening of 2,631 randomly selected households to locate eligible second-generation Korean Americans. Although this data set is dated and has issues of comparability with the 2004 IIMMLA, the 1998 New York survey is almost identical in sampling procedure as the 2004 IIMMLA and actually employs the same survey instrument used in that survey. This is because both the 1998 New York and the 2004 IIMMLA surveys are based on the same survey instrument preceding the 2004 IIMMLA- the New York Second-Generation Survey, 1998-2000 (see Kasinitz et al. 2008).

Finally, to understand why respondents think the way they do, forty follow up, face-to-face interviews were conducted with a subsample of the 1998 New York survey participants, asking interviewees to expand on the responses they gave during the telephone survey. These semi-structured, open-ended interviews lasted from one to three hours, were tape recorded, and later transcribed. Because the interview guide expands on the questions from the survey instrument, it covers a range of topics, including family, immigration, neighborhood, schooling, work, religion, politics, and identity. Although the data from these in-depth interviews are again dated and are only available for the New York region, they still offer second-generation Koreans' views of education as well as efforts from parents to structure and demand educational excellence by stressing and pursuing elite high schools

and colleges.

## Second-Generation Educational Attainment

Similar to the strong academic showing of Asian American students, second-generation Korean Americans, fare exceptionally well on various measures of educational attainment, including high school and college completion, high school grades, and honors classes during high school (Hirschman and Wong 1986; Fejgin 1995; Fuligni 1997; Goyette and Xie 1999; Kao and Thompson 2003; Xie and Goyette 2003, 2004; Sakamoto and Xie 2006). For instance, 97% of 1.5-generation and U.S.-born Korean Americans aged between 23 and 35 graduated from high school compared to 90.8% of native-born, non-Hispanic white counterparts according to the 2005-2007 American Community Survey (hereafter the ACS 2005-2007). Likewise, all but one and two 1.5 and second-generation Korean New Yorkers (the 1998 New York survey) and Angelenos (the 2004 IIMMLA) respectively graduated from high school.

The rates of college completion were equally remarkable for this group. Close to two-thirds (65.9%) of U.S.-born Koreans graduated from college compared to 30.7% of whites (ACS 2005-2007). In the 1998 New York survey second-generation college completion was a whopping 88.2% while 60.6% of Korean Angelenos completed college. Comparisons of college completion between second-generation Korean Angelenos and other second-generation immigrants in the 2004 IIMMLA also indicate that Korean Americans were second to the Chinese (63.1%) in graduating from college, followed by the Vietnamese (48.1%), Whites (44.2%), Filipinos (43.4%), Blacks (24%), Salvadorans/Guatemalans (21.3%), and Mexicans (18%) respectively.

Regarding high school grades and honors classes, nearly three-fourths (73.8%) of second-generation Korean New Yorkers and half (49.9%) of Korean Angelenos received mostly A's in high school. The latter figure is second to the Chinese (50.5%), a proportion that is substantially higher even among the Asian groups (around 35%) but much higher compared to the Latino groups and Black Americans (around 14%) in the 2004 IIMMLA. The proportion having taken honors classes in high school (missing in the New York survey) varies substantially by race and ethnicity. Again, second-generation Koreans (78.1%) were second to the Chinese (79.6%) in having taken honors classes, a figure that is almost twice as many as those of the Latino groups and Black Americans (around 42%).

**Table 1.** Unweighed Percentage Distribution of Level of Education, Type of High School, and Grades Earned in High School: Second-Generation Korean-Americans in New York and Los Angeles

	Korean New Yorkers		Korean Angelenos	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
<b>Level of Education</b>				
Did not complete high school	1	.5	2	.5
High school	2	1.0	27	6.7
Vocational or trade school			5	1.2
Some college	21	10.2	124	30.9
College graduate	113	55.1	171	42.6
Graduate school	68	33.2	72	18.0
Total	205	100.0	401	100.0
<b>Type of High School</b>				
Public	164	80.8	366	91.3
Private/parochial	39	19.2	35	8.7
Total	203	100.0	401	100.0
<b>Level of Education—Fathers</b>				
Did not complete high school	7	3.5	13	3.4
High school	24	11.9	77	20.3
Vocational or trade school			9	2.4
Some college	8	4.0	36	9.5
College graduate	77	38.3	162	42.7
Graduate school	85	42.3	82	21.6
Total	201	100.0	379	100.0
<b>Grades Earned in High School</b>				
Mostly A's (includes A-/B+ for NY)	144	73.8	200	49.9
Mostly B's	35	17.9	161	40.1
Mostly C's (includes B-/C+ for NY)	16	8.2	40	10.0
Total	195	100.0	401	100.0

### *The Pursuit of Elite High Schools and Colleges*

A unique feature of the 1998 New York survey is that the data set not only provides information about educational attainments, but also specifies the institutional prestige of the high schools and colleges attended by second-generation Korean Americans. What is most remarkable about high school choice for this group is the significant graduation from suburban high

**Table 2. Unweighted Percentage Distribution and Sample Size of Level of Education, High School Grades, Type of High School, Honors, and Non-English Language After-School Program by Eight Main Ethnic Groups (2004 IIMMLA)**

	Mexican		Salvadoran/ Guatemalan		Chinese		Korean		Vietnamese		Filipino		White		Black	
	N	Pct	N	Pct	N	Pct	N	Pct	N	Pct	N	Pct	N	Pct	N	Pct
<b>Level of Education</b>																
Did not complete HS	154	12.4	29	7.7	0	0.0	2	0.5	4	1.0	5	1.2	20	2.8	28	6.3
High school	397	32.0	92	24.5	18	4.5	27	6.7	27	6.7	31	7.7	126	17.9	104	23.4
Vocational or trade school	67	5.4	18	4.8	3	0.8	5	1.2	7	1.7	11	2.7	15	2.1	21	4.7
Some college	401	32.3	157	41.8	126	31.7	124	30.9	170	42.4	180	44.9	232	33.0	185	41.6
College graduate	164	13.2	64	17.0	165	41.5	171	42.6	151	37.7	134	33.4	203	28.8	83	18.7
Graduate school	59	4.8	16	4.3	86	21.6	72	18.0	42	10.5	40	10.0	108	15.3	24	5.4
Total	1242	100.0	376	100.0	398	100.0	401	100.0	401	100.0	401	100.0	704	100.0	445	100.0
<b>HS Grades</b>																
Mostly A's	187	15.0	55	14.6	202	50.5	200	49.9	182	45.4	142	35.4	222	31.5	58	13.0
Mostly B's or less	1057	85.0	321	85.4	198	49.5	201	50.1	219	54.6	259	64.6	482	68.5	387	87.0
Total	1244	100.0	376	100.0	400	100.0	401	100.0	401	100.0	401	100.0	704	100.0	445	100.0
<b>Type of HS</b>																
Public	1102	91.1	345	93.5	367	92.2	366	91.3	388	96.8	302	75.3	607	86.8	399	90.1
Private	108	8.9	24	6.5	31	7.8	35	8.7	13	3.2	99	24.7	92	13.2	44	9.9
Total	1210	100.0	369	100.0	398	100.0	401	100.0	401	100.0	401	100.0	699	100.0	443	100.0

Table 2. (continued)

	Mexican		Salvadoran/ Guatemalan		Chinese		Korean		Vietnamese		Filipino		White		Black	
	N	Pct	N	Pct	N	Pct	N	Pct	N	Pct	N	Pct	N	Pct	N	Pct
<b>Honors in HS</b>																
Yes	463	38.8	160	43.5	313	79.6	311	78.1	279	69.9	251	63.1	364	52.4	193	43.9
No	731	61.2	208	56.5	80	20.4	87	21.9	120	30.1	147	36.9	330	47.6	247	56.1
Total	1194	100.0	368	100.0	393	100.0	398	100.0	399	100.0	398	100.0	694	100.0	440	100.0
<b>After-School Program</b>																
Yes	67	5.4	32	8.5	104	26.0	94	23.4	72	18.0	37	9.2	68	9.7	27	6.1
No	1177	94.6	344	91.5	296	74.0	307	76.6	328	82.0	364	90.8	636	90.3	418	93.9
Total	1244	100.0	376	100.0	400	100.0	401	100.0	400	100.0	401	100.0	704	100.0	445	100.0

Note: —Levels of education  $X^2 = 878.245$ ,  $df\ 35$ ,  $p < .001$  (2-sided); HS Grades  $X^2 = 451.655$ ,  $df\ 7$ ,  $p < .001$  (2-sided); type of HS  $X^2 = 129.536$ ,  $df\ 7$ ,  $p < .001$  (2-sided); honors in HS  $X^2 = 398.235$ ,  $df\ 7$ ,  $p < .001$  (2-sided); after-school non-English language program  $X^2 = 222.336$ ,  $df\ 7$ ,  $p < .001$  (2-sided).

schools. About one-half (51%) of these Korean New Yorkers graduated from suburban public high schools while 14% attended New York City magnet public high schools (Stuyvesant, Bronx Science, and Brooklyn Tech), 19% graduated from private (including parochial) high schools, 16% attended New York City non-magnet public high schools, and 3% graduated from high schools abroad. In the 2004 IIMMLA, high school choice is broken down between public and private/parochial schools. A majority (91.3%) of Korean Angelenos graduated from public high schools while only 8.7% attended private/parochial schools.

These distributions in high school choice suggest that Korean immigrant parents are very strategic about school quality, namely selecting schools based on their reputation. The pursuit of elite schools was not limited to high schools but also extended to colleges and graduate schools. For example, second-generation attendance at National Universities Tier 1<sup>3</sup> (NU Tier 1)—the top 50 colleges in the United States—was 40% in the 1998 New York study.<sup>4</sup> This figure is almost twice the proportion of the Asian students that attended NU Tier 1 as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education report entitled, “Who goes to America’s Highly Ranked ‘National’ Universities?”<sup>5</sup> In that study 27% of Asian high school graduates, 12% of Hispanics, 7% of Blacks, and 10% of whites attended National Universities Tier 1 (NU Tier 1) (Owings, Madigan, and Daniel 1998).

Recent research also corroborates this propensity of Korean American students to seek Tier 1 colleges (Karen 2002; Kasinitz et al. 2008; Teranishi et al. 2004). For example, Xie and Goyette (2004) found that slightly over two-fifths (42%) of Korean American students attended Tier 1 national universities (top 50 National Universities) compared to 9% of whites, 18% of Japanese, 22% of South Asians, and 44% of the Chinese. In an analysis of college students in California, Teranishi et al. (2004) found that being Korean and Chinese, especially those from high-income families, significantly raised the odds of attending highly selective institutions relative to other Asian

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<sup>3</sup> Colleges were coded according to the rankings established by the 1998 *U.S. News and World Report*.

<sup>4</sup> The 2004 IIMMLA survey did not ask for the names of the colleges attended by 1.5 and second-generation Korean Angelenos, which prevents coding and analyzing colleges on the basis of their selectivity. Thus, it is unclear to what extent Korean Angelenos were pursuing elite colleges as was the case in the New York survey.

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that Asian Americans comprised only 6% of the total number of students enrolled in higher education institutions in 1995. Also given that the samples are different, the comparison may not be a valid one.

Americans.

## Selectivity of Korean Immigration and Children's Educational Achievements and Attainments

In line with numerous studies that find a strong association between parents' socioeconomic status and children's educational achievements and attainments (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 2006; Hauser and Sewell 1986), the selective migration of Korean immigrants is a major determinant of second-generation's educational achievements and attainments. For example, close to two-fifths (80.6%) of the fathers of second-generation Korean New Yorkers were college graduates, and the proportion of professionals among these fathers was 43.4%. And even among the entrepreneurs, more than 72.8% had completed college. Fathers of the second generation in the Los Angeles sample were equally well educated. Roughly two-thirds (64.3%) of Korean fathers were college graduates, and Koreans were second to the Filipinos (66.2%) in rates of college completion among fathers, followed by the Chinese (61.3%), Whites (44.2%), Vietnamese (32%), Blacks (27%), Salvadorans/Guatemalans (15.3%), and Mexicans (9.9%) respectively. Following the status attainment of their parents, middle-class groups such as second-generation Koreans and Chinese graduate from college in higher proportions, receive mostly A's in high school, and are more likely to take honors classes than working-class groups such as Mexicans, Salvadorans/Guatemalans, and Black Americans (see table 2).<sup>6</sup>

To examine the impact of family socioeconomic status on children's educational attainments, a binary logistic regression was conducted using the 1998 New York and the 2004 IIMMLA data sets (see table A, appendix).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> There were two groups in the 2004 IIMMLA, second-generation Vietnamese and Filipinos, that did not particularly fit the status attainment model. For example, two-thirds (66.2%) of Filipino fathers were college graduates, a proportion that is slightly higher than figures for Korean fathers, but second-generation Filipinos (43.4%) trailed slightly behind the Vietnamese (48.1%) in college completion. Likewise, while only a third (32.0%) of Vietnamese fathers were college graduates, a figure that is only half of those of the Koreans and the Chinese, second-generation Vietnamese managed to graduate from college as well as receive higher GPA and take honors classes in high school in higher proportions than second-generation Filipinos.

<sup>7</sup> For ease of interpretation in case of logistic regressions, odds ratios (instead of the coefficients) are presented. Each of the three regression analyses (having attended Tier 1 college and having received A average in the 1998 New York and the 2004 IIMMLA surveys) had two specifications. The first specification included demographic characteristics, while the second specification included

While both data sets contain valuable second-generation educational outcome variables, a major limitation in using these two data sets is that critical educational variables such as college selectivity (missing in the 2004 IIMMLA), number of hours spent on homework (missing in both data sets),<sup>8</sup> and honors classes (missing in the New York survey), as well as variables regarding educational aspirations and expectations, to name a few, are unavailable, making systematic analyses of the determinants of educational outcomes incomplete. Still, despite these data limitations, multivariate analyses are conducted to tease out the effects of demographic/socioeconomic and school-related variables on second-generation educational attainments.

Using college selectivity (the likelihood of having attended Tier 1 college) and high school GPA (the likelihood of having received an A GPA) as proxies for educational attainment in the 1998 New York survey, the results indicate that there was no statistically significant relationship between demographic/socioeconomic variables (such as father's education) and college selectivity in the first specification. With the addition of school-related variables in the second specification, only high school GPA was statistically significantly associated with having attended Tier 1 College while school-related variables (high school type and part-time job in high school) had no statistically significant relationship with high school GPA. This suggests that, all else being equal, the odds of attending Tier 1 college were more than ten times greater for those who received A's in high school relative to those who received B's or lower. Regarding high school GPA, women (relative to men) and children of professionals (relative to children of entrepreneurs) had higher odds of receiving A's in high school, and this relationship held with the addition of school-related variables in Model 2. The magnitude of this likelihood also increased slightly (from the log odds of 2.678 to 2.814 for women and from 2.588 to 2.746 for professionals) with the addition of controls. Thus, relative to men and children of entrepreneurs, the odds of receiving A's in high school were two times greater for women and children of professionals respectively.

In the 2004 IIMMLA, because there was no parallel information about college selectivity as in the 1998 New York survey, a binary logistic regression

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school-related variables such as school type, part-time job in high school, high school GPA, honors and ESL classes, after-school language program, and so forth. The values of the log likelihood in the second specifications show improvements in the explanatory power of the models.

<sup>8</sup> In both the 1998 New York and the 2004 IIMMLA surveys, question regarding the number of hours spent on homework has not been asked and is therefore missing in the analyses. Research has consistently shown that hours spent on homework have an impact on high school GPA.

examining the factors associated with high school GPA was conducted. In the first specification, only gender was statistically significantly associated with high school GPA, similar to the results from the New York survey. With the addition of school-related variables in Model 2, however, gender was no longer statistically significantly associated with high school GPA, while those who took honor's and non-English language after-school classes in high school relative to those who did not had greater odds of receiving mostly A's in high school. This means that all else being equal, having taken honors classes in high school, in particular, raised the odds of receiving A's by more than 10 times while having taken a non-English language after-school classes raised the odds of receiving A's by almost two times (see table A, appendix).

Thus, it appears from the results of the logistic regression that family socioeconomic status has an indirect impact on college selectivity, with father's occupation (in the New York survey) raising the odds of receiving an A GPA, which in turn raises the odds of attending Tier 1 college. In the 2004 IIMMLA, there was no statistically significant relationship between socioeconomic status and high school grades; rather, achieved characteristics such as honors classes and non-English language classes, i.e. after-school Korean-language classes, were statistically significantly associated with high GPA. This suggests that family socioeconomic status for these two samples affects second-generation educational attainments through direct and indirect means, especially by shaping this group's educational environments via strategic residential choices that take the quality of schools into account. It is to these efforts from Korean parents to secure admission into elite high schools by seeking neighborhoods known for its school systems that the next section examines.

### Parents' Efforts to Enhance Children's Academic Competitiveness: Residential Changes and *Hagwons*

Research shows that middle-class parents exhibit far more commitment to and involvement in children's education than working-class parents (Lareau 2005). Not only are working-class parents constrained in shoring up critical resources (like time and information), but they are also more likely to place greater trust in school authority such as teachers (Lareau 2005). By contrast, middle-class parents see teachers as equals and participate more actively in their children's education. Although research finds that Korean immigrant parents are less involved in school activities such as PTA

meetings, Korean parents nonetheless draw upon their middle-class resources to support an educational environment for their children. For example, many Korean parents not only stress elite schools to their children but also they put their energy into securing admission into those schools (Abelmann and Lie 1995, p. 106).<sup>9</sup> A major reason why Korean parents seek entry into elite high schools stems from a widespread belief that such schools are more likely to raise the prospects of gaining admission into prestigious colleges. Toward that end, Korean parents seek out residential areas with quality schools, including Jewish neighborhoods, another immigrant population with high educational achievement, in the belief that outstanding schools are to be found there. Lesser (2000) found that even Korean parents in Brazil often enrolled their children in Jewish schools in the hopes that their children would receive a “better” education than in Brazilian schools. The narratives that follow illustrate the great lengths that Korean parents go to secure admission into elite high schools and colleges by relocating to residential areas, or even out of state, known for its school system.

When Jeeun’s parents were looking for a home to purchase, they were very strategic about their neighborhood choice.<sup>10</sup> As Jeeun explained, her parents purposefully bought their new home in a wealthy suburb in Los Angeles because they wanted to send her to a prestigious high school in that district. Jeeun said, “*We were at the edge of Beverly Hills, barely in Beverly Hills, just so that we could go to that school.*” Some parents even relocated to a different state hoping to enhance their daughter’s chances for admission to a prestigious music school by attending a high school in New York. Immediately after junior high school, Hanna’s parents made their trek from the Midwest to live in New York. Hanna, a twenty-nine-year-old composer and pianist, said, “*Being Korean [parents] we moved to New York to go to study*

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<sup>9</sup> Korean immigrant parents, like other middle-class parents, make their residential choices based on the reputation of schools. Although other considerations do drive the residential choices of Korean immigrants such as the middle-class dream of purchasing homes in the suburbs, in-depth interviews indicate that many of them had initially resided in the New York City boroughs before moving to the suburbs. Families had to undergo a period of economic and social adjustment in the new setting before they could seek out middle-class suburbs known for its schools on Long Island, in Westchester County or northern New Jersey counties. While this pattern of urban to suburban residential shift was the norm in the past, the new pattern for many newcomers today, especially for those who are well off and networked, is to settle directly in the suburbs known for its school systems (Min 1998; Fong 2002).

<sup>10</sup> This section of the paper draws from the qualitative portion of the 1998 New York second-generation study, namely 40 in-depth interviews with a subsample of survey participants. All names are pseudonyms. They have been altered to maintain the confidentiality of the interviewees.

*with someone from Big Apple School of Music [pseudonym].*” Although the great lengths to which Korean parents go to relocate or even sacrifice their financial well being for the sake of their children’s education may seem excessive, research indicates that such practices are not uncommon among Korean and Asian American parents. A Chicago study found that eight out of 10 Asian American parents, compared to three out of 10 white parents, were willing to forego their financial security by selling their home to support their children’s education (Fong 2002, p. 94).

In addition to changing residence to place their children in well-known schools, another common practice among Korean parents seeking to boost their children’s academic competitiveness is to make use of cram schools. Some Korean parents perceive that in order to augment their children’s academic competitiveness, additional schooling at *hagwons* or cram schools is needed to supplement regular school curriculum.<sup>11</sup> *Hagwons*, which have its origins in South Korea, have become visible educational institutions within the Korean community in New York and elsewhere (Johnston 2000). Promising admission into magnet public high schools and Ivy League colleges, newspaper and radio advertisements are filled with ads for *hagwons*. At the *hagwons*, an array of after-school programs focusing on subjects ranging from English, math, computing to PSAT and SAT preparation courses is offered. As an ethnic enclave firm that caters toward Korean immigrants, *hagwons* have become ubiquitous institutions in Korean communities across the country.<sup>12</sup>

Interestingly although anecdotal evidence points to increased usage of *hagwons* among Korean parents, few in the 1998 New York study were sent to these ethnic institutions. Probably during the period when second-generation Korean New Yorkers were raised in the suburbs in the 1980s, *hagwons* were few and far between as they were just beginning to appear and getting established. Ethnoburbs, or suburban ethnic enclaves, a visible

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<sup>11</sup> *Hagwons* may play an additional role for immigrant parents besides providing extra schooling for their children. Because many self-employed Korean parents often work long hours in small businesses, *hagwons* may also serve an unintended function of providing an ethnic space for Korean youth to interact with and befriend other co-ethnics.

<sup>12</sup> *Hagwons* play a much more prominent role in South Korea because the competition for admission into elite colleges is fierce, which forces many high school students to spend hours and hours preparing for college examinations both within and outside of the school. Given the feverish nature of competition for college admission, making it into a four-year university in Seoul today is considered a milestone for high school students. Not surprisingly, more and more families in South Korea spend a greater share of their monthly income on private education, including after school tutoring and *hagwons*, to raise their children’s chances of admission into selective colleges.

phenomenon today, began to flourish only after the heavy influx of Korean immigration in the 1980s and 1990s. As a result, most of the New York study participants had very little direct experience with *hagwons* growing up while their younger siblings had often attended such institutions. Among the minority who had attended *hagwons* such as Joseph, most did so to prepare for the New York City magnet public high schools' entrance exams. As Joseph, a twenty-four-year-old who worked in the family grocery store, recalled, "*My parents decided basically, for me. I went to hagwon to pick these schools. [To] take the test.*"

It becomes clear from these responses that Korean immigrant parents, like other middle-class parents, have actively employed their middle-class and ethnic resources to purchase homes in suburban neighborhoods known for its school districts, enrolled their children in *hagwons*, or even relocated to a different state to enhance their children's education. The energy that middle-class Korean immigrants expend to structure an academic environment for their children demonstrates not only their resourcefulness but also their single-minded focus on education. The zealous pursuit of elite high schools and additional schooling underscores Korean parents' belief that academic environments have to be created and sustained. If parents deemed that their children were falling behind in school and that their prospects for attending elite schools were slim, they readily invested in after-school tutoring to raise their scores on high-school entrance exams or the SATs.

In light of the fact that many Korean immigrants today migrate for their children's education as much as for economic reasons, it comes as no surprise that their residential decisions in the United States are strongly shaped by educational goals (SBS Documentary 2000). This willingness to sacrifice their financial well-being to provide an academically oriented environment, such as relocating to a different state to facilitate their children's education, points to a collectivist strategy of family success and the degree of trust Korean parents place on education. These efforts greatly boost the educational prospects of this group, and given the convergence of human and social capital with active pursuit of additional schooling, the educational achievements of 1.5 and second-generation Korean Americans should come as no surprise.

## Parental Pressures to Pursue Elite High Schools and Colleges

Asian American parents are often highly praised in media circles for

their so-called emphasis on and dedication to their children's education. Fong (2002, p. 94) observes that Asian American parents impose strict rules and apply pressure on their children because children's academic achievements are seen as a reflection of their parenting skills. Kim's study (1993, p. 229) echoes the educational and occupational pressures that Korean immigrant parents place upon their children. According to her research, Korean parents defined success in narrow terms that emphasized a combination of financial well-being and educational achievement (229). Korean parents believed that success could be achieved by studying hard, by attending elite high schools and colleges, and by pursuing professional careers (Xie and Goyette 2003). She (1993) also found that 1.5 and second-generation Korean Americans in her study measured their self-worth through a narrow criteria of success defined by the Korean community, namely attending elite high schools and colleges and doing well in school. As parents and the Korean community promote and reinforce a fixed idea of success, the significance and desirability of elite high schools and colleges have become a stock knowledge in the community (Kim 1993).

I also found similar responses of parental pressures for elite schools from these young adults, highlighting the widespread diffusion of such notions of success within the Korean community. As Connie, a twenty-four-year-old working in the fashion industry, put it, elite high schools and colleges were higher on the list among Korean parents and the larger Korean community. Explaining that her parents had clear expectations of her attending a prominent New York City public high school, she said, "*That's where Korean parents force you. It was between that and Stuyvesant and I didn't make it to Stuyvesant.*" The same was also true for Sungsoo, whose parents, while rarely voicing their preference for elite colleges, made it implicitly known to him that he was to attend a selective university, i.e. Ivy League university. Sungsoo, a twenty-three-year-old man working as an analyst for a consulting firm, remarked, "*They only know Ivy [League Schools].*" By contrast, Jonathan's parents were rather blunt about their partiality for elite colleges and expressed disappointment at Jonathan's decision to attend a state university in New Jersey. Jonathan, a twenty-seven-year-old working for an accounting firm, explained:

Even my brother he went to Penn, and they wanted him to apply to Harvard and Cornell. He didn't apply to either one of them because he didn't want to go there. But I remember my dad didn't really like that. They are like enamored by Harvard.

In light of the fervor with which parents emphasize elite high schools and colleges, most assume and take for granted high school completion as a rite of passage in preparation for college. Thus, what is at stake for children of Korean immigrants is less about graduating from high school and attending college than which elite college they get admission into. As Hyun, a twenty-seven-year-old woman working for a non-profit arbitration organization, and Jeeun, a twenty-nine-year-old woman in the hotel industry, observed, college was never an option that they could entertain not following through.

Hence, what may be construed as an educational success story for one community, i.e. graduating from high school and attending college, becomes for another an expected rite of passage where educational success is measured not by educational attainment but by the rank and institutional prestige of the college or graduate program attended, raising the educational bar for children of Korean immigrants.

## Korean Community Pressures for Elite High Schools and Colleges

The zealous pursuit of elite schools from Korean parents and the larger community has its roots in the “education fever” in South Korea (Seth 2002). Korean immigrant parents are embedded within the cultural norms of the Korean community that define and reinforce such models of educational success, namely elite schools and status occupations (Kim 1993, p. 232). Additionally, numerous media outlets, including Korean-language newspapers and radio and television stations, reinforce and promote such narrow definitions of educational success by actively covering and transmitting norms and information about education (Kim 1993, p. 233). For example, news stories of Korean high school valedictorians as well as reports of school rankings and school districts, and the success stories of famous Korean Americans with exceptional educational credentials are routinely featured in Korean-language newspapers. Newspaper advertisements also list the credentials of doctors, dentists, and lawyers, particularly the names of the colleges and medical or law schools attended.

A key community institution which shapes second-generation values and outlooks toward education is the ethnic church. Providing both religious and social functions for Korean immigrants, the church serves as a conduit for disseminating not only educational information but also values and outlooks toward education to church members. In fact, many parents easily

obtain valuable information about the location, costs, and rankings of prestigious high schools and colleges through social networks developed at church. Parents also join in informal conversations about their own as well as their fellow congregationists' children's educational achievements and attainments, which are then used by parents to chastise (and discipline) their children for failing to live up to these model academic students.<sup>13</sup> As Joseph, introduced earlier, recalled, "*Back then, especially through church influence, everyone said, 'Your son has to go to one of those [specialized high] schools.'*"

Korean parents' emphasis on elite schools is embedded within the larger community's orientation toward education, which transmits and reinforces educational norms and expectations, constituting an important form of social capital that informs second-generation activities and outlooks toward education.<sup>14</sup> Yet, as important as these parental and community pressures are in transmitting educational values and providing information about elite schools, these expectations in and of themselves do not guarantee second-generation engagement with schoolwork and successful academic outcomes. In the next section, I explore the other side to parental pressures, namely second-generation engagement with school through homework and favorable reception from teachers.

## Homework and Teachers' Expectations

In an analysis of the High School and Beyond data set, Wong (1995) found that ascriptive characteristics and achieved characteristics (time spent on homework) contributed significantly to educational success. Portes and Rumbaut (2001, p. 249) also note that parents' socioeconomic status was consistently a strong predictor of academic achievement as reflected by standardized math and reading scores as well as high school GPA. Steinberg (1996) contended that what explained the academic performance of Asian American students was their greater engagement with schoolwork,

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<sup>13</sup> It is not uncommon to hear from Korean and Asian American teens how irritated they get after hearing their parents make unfair comparisons and for scolding them for not doing better than or as well as their siblings or friends.

<sup>14</sup> Coleman observes that human capital and individual efforts alone may not be enough to shape children's academic performance (Coleman and Hoffer 2000). Social capital, the critical social networks that reside in *relations* between persons, is equally important. In Coleman's view, the intervention of the community and the degree of parents' (and children's) embeddedness in community networks and norms, all critical aspects of social capital, are essential in children's academic achievement (Zhou and Bankston 1998; Coleman and Hoffer 2000).

particularly the greater time spent on homework, than higher levels of intelligence or significant cultural differences (Fejgin 1995; Fuligni 1997). When asked about what these young adults considered to be the biggest factor in doing well in school, most put timely completion of homework as being most significant. Joonshik, a thirty-year-old financial analyst, observed that he received an A average in high school because of the effort and time he put into homework. He explained, "*I did my homework. I studied for tests. I guess that's why. Doing homework.*"

Although there was an agreement of homework being a major determinant of good grades, when queried about the actual number of hours spent on homework, responses varied from none to 1 hour to 3 hours a day. Contrary to a model minority image of Asian American students completing homework on time, some were doing their homework during lunch time or in between breaks in school. As Horace, a twenty-six-year-old restaurant manager, observed, the habit of doing homework waned with time in the United States, particularly as he became an adolescent and acculturated into the American culture. Whereas his mother had instilled the habit of doing homework into his daily routine in Korea, he was no longer driven by guilt and did not feel compelled to finish homework on time. Horace said:

I felt guilty not doing my homework, but I realized that because slowly it [the guilt] went away and a few years into schooling here, I didn't do homework.... Now, looking back on it, I only did it 'cuz of the guilt. It was something I never questioned. You had to do it before you go to sleep.... And the guilt association is because the person who programmed me was my mother. So that's where the guilt comes in.

The case of Horace points to the corrosive power of acculturation on study habits, where youth begin to question or at worst, write off the significance of homework for academic success. As some studies have shown, the longer a child has been in America and the greater his/her acculturation, the worse his/her academic performance (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Zhou and Bankston 1998; Schmid 2001). Research indicates that foreign-born children of immigrants generally outperform their U.S.-born counterparts (Alba and Nee 2003). A consistent finding is that acculturation into the cultural mainstream, especially the anti-intellectualism and consumer culture common among youth today, may be harmful to children of immigrants (Portes and Zhou 1993; Zhou and Bankston 1998; Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

Acculturation and study habits are certainly related, but school engagement, and by extension grades, are also affected by teachers' positive or negative perceptions of students. According to Suzuki (1980), one reason for the strong academic performance of Asian American students is the positive assessment of them as model students from teachers (Gibson 1988; Kasinitz et al. 2008; Lee 1996; Sue and Okasaki 1995; Wong 1980). This is how Dongchul interpreted his dramatic grade improvement in senior high school. According to him, a thirty-three-year-old investment banker, he began to pick up his effort to improve his grades after one of his teachers had made an approving comment about his older brother and sister who had excelled in high school and thus, expected similar effort from him. Nancy, a thirty-year-old high school ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher, agreed that her grades were partly the result of hard work, but also positive evaluations of her from her teachers. As Eunjung, a twenty-eight-year-old female assistant for a Korean chiropractor, aptly put it, "*I was a very quiet student, but teachers loved me. The teachers really like the Asians. I guess because we are quiet. We are not troublemakers.*"

These responses underscore the role that teachers' expectations can have on students' achievements. The picture that emerges about second-generation engagement with schoolwork is not one of uniform commitment but of great variation, with some participating actively in school, to a few doing the minimum to pass a class, and to several skipping on schoolwork altogether. Although parents' active involvement in and expectations of academic excellence help the children to stay engaged with schoolwork, the level of compliance, particularly the intensity and duration of engagement with schoolwork, varied according to peer group influences and degrees of socializing. In the last section, the role of peer groups and socializing will be examined to assess their impact on second-generation engagement with schoolwork.

## Peer Groups, Socializing, and Academic Performance

The remarkable educational achievements and attainments of this group give the impression that the second generation is exceptionally committed to schoolwork. But as discussed in the previous section, notwithstanding parents' efforts to structure an academic environment and put pressure on achievement, these young adults showed varied levels of engagement with schoolwork. As it will be shown, peer group selection and levels of socializing

also affect second-generation engagement with schoolwork.

Peer groups are generally seen to wield a negative influence on youth, yet if peer groups are oriented toward academics, they can actually exert a positive influence on educational expectations (Gibson 1988; Johnson et al. 2001; Ryan 2001; Steinberg 1996). This was how Heesoo, introduced earlier in this article, viewed the role of peer groups:

I think that's very very important that you hang out with the right crowd. I think this is where my sisters went wrong. 'Cuz all my friends went to Yale and Harvard and Princeton and Stanford and UC [University of California] and University of Chicago. My sister's friends went to community college and look where she is. If all your friends are applying to Ivy League schools and all your friends have 4.0s, what are you gonna do? Be the slacker?

Tammy, a twenty-seven-year-old sophomore dean at an Ivy League University, extended Heesoo's argument by noting that parents' educational expectations and children's self-motivation affect second-generation academic engagement, but peer group selection is equally important. She said, "*I wanted to do well, and I always knew I was going to go to college. I didn't know what kind of college, but it's also all my friends. 99 percent of our graduating class went to college, whether it was in the Philippines or in Europe or in the United States. So it was kind of expected. We all worked really hard and there was a lot of competition too because our parents all knew each other and we all kind of knew each other, too.*"

To be sure, the picture painted above does not diminish the role that parents can play even though peers can often wield greater influence than parents. In fact, parents have the ability to limit peer group influence by shaping school selection as well as selection of friends. For instance, Lee (1996) found that parents of Korean-identified students stressed befriending middle- and upper-class white students who were academically oriented in school. Similarly, Annie recalled that she had been pushed by her parents to befriend only those peer groups who were considered academically inclined because her parents were worried about the negative influence of non-academic students. Annie, a twenty-seven-year-old marketing and graphic coordinator, explained, "*The only thing they kind of strayed me away from was friends, if they weren't making good grades or if they weren't going into a major that my parents approved of. Then they'd say, 'you better make new friends'.... So I think I lost a friend that way because she felt that my parents didn't approve of her. She wasn't a bad kid, but her grades were kind of shaky.*"

Another factor that seems to negatively impact school engagement and academic performance, as mentioned by a number of these young adults, is excessive socializing. According to his own assessment, Joseph's academic troubles began after attending an elite high school comprised heavily of Asian American students. During junior high school, Joseph was attending a predominantly white school, but after switching into a prominent New York City magnet public high school with a large Asian American student body, he began to do very poorly as a result of active socializing with fellow Asian American students there, overriding in many ways his parents' strategies of academic success through admission into an elite high school. Not only did his grades tumble but also as a result of those grades, he was barely able to graduate from high school. Joseph said, *"I'm thinking, had I gone to a normal school I would have done a lot better and maybe not hung out as much. In junior high school I did have my friends but I wasn't very social so I would study more, and it's a hard balance between a social life and academics."*

In Connie's case, also introduced earlier, her academic troubles also began ironically after attending the same magnet public high school that Joseph had attended. Again, minimal engagement with schoolwork from too much socializing led to precipitous drops in Connie's academic performance. According to her, she spent most of her time away from classes and instead socialized actively with her friends, watching movies, shooting pool, or frequenting clubs and parties. What is remarkable in her account about her troubles in school is that her parents had no suspicion of her academic troubles. For instance, Connie was able to keep her academic problems hidden from her parents' scrutiny by intercepting phone calls from school, by making fake report cards, and as a last resort, by lying to her parents if got caught. These examples of academic troubles suggest that Korean parents' strategy of enrolling their children into elite schools do not always bring about automatic academic success. Also the expectation of positive influence from academically-oriented students rests on false assumptions, although the proportion of the students falling through the cracks in elite schools is likely to be lower.

Another factor that affects student engagement and one that has received a great deal of attention and concern from parents is teen delinquency. This was the position Bill found himself in due to his acute involvement with gangs. Bill, a twenty-three-year-old manager for a family dry cleaners, was faced with a choice of going to court and spending time in jail or going abroad and salvaging his education. Bill's parents opted for the latter and sent their son away to a high school in Europe to break him clean from his gang

activities and reinstate into an academic course. This last recourse saved Bill from serving time in jail, a fate he avoided by leaving the country and being uprooted from a risky peer group.

The narratives depicted illustrate the role that peer group selection and active socializing can have on student engagement and academic performance (Zhou and Bankston 1998). Although parents may be able to curtail peer group influence by reducing their impact, peer groups can still have an effect independent from parents and exert strong influence on youth. This suggests that while parents and the immigrant community can attempt to reinforce educational values and goals, second-generation engagement with schoolwork will undoubtedly vary according to levels of socializing as well as involvement with risky peer groups. As Zhou and Bankston (1998) observe, levels of second-generation engagement interact with efforts from parents and the immigrant community, namely the degree of school attachment and parental attachment, producing both achievers as well as delinquents.

## Conclusion

The prominent rates of second-generation college graduation and attendance at selective universities give the impression that this group is a “model minority.” Upon closer examination, however, the educational success of 1.5 and second-generation Korean Americans has its basis in Korean immigrant parents’ selective migration as well as intensive efforts to structure and insist upon educational excellence from their children. Stated differently, Korean immigrant parents not only bring their human and social capital to bear on their children’s education, but also apply their class and ethnic resources to enroll their children in the best school systems on top of demanding academic excellence. In light of these parents’ socioeconomic status, suburban high school education, and parental/community pressures and efforts, the educational achievements of this group come as no surprise.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, as the narratives reveal, parents’ educational efforts and pressures can go so far in producing second-generation engagement with schoolwork. In other words, efforts to structure an academically-oriented environment,

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<sup>15</sup> By no means am I belittling the efforts by parents and the young adults to achieve academic success. What I am suggesting is the role that class and factors associated with social class plays in the educational achievements and attainments of this group, underscoring the significance of such factors in the educational attainments of other racial and ethnic groups.

along with pressures to excel academically by gaining admission into elite high schools, did not always bring about educational success. In fact, some seemingly successful academic transitions—graduating from a suburban or magnet public high school and attending a selective college or university—were marred by academic troubles, including failed classes and setbacks from too much socializing with peer groups. These findings undoubtedly caution against homogenizing the academic achievements of Korean Americans in particular and Asian Americans in general. Future studies of educational determinants have to consider and measure the particularities of adolescent school life that have an effect independent from parents and schools.

Furthermore, as indicated by the theory of blocked mobility, one of the reasons for the enormous emphasis that Korean parents place on their children's education stems from Korean cultural values but also Korean immigrants' social position in the United States. Particularly, the concentration of Korean immigrants in entrepreneurship, which is a downgrade in status given their professional and urban backgrounds, may have turned these parents to stress education and recoup their status through their children (Abelmann and Lie 1995; Min 1984). In addition, the resolve to secure quality education for their children may have less to do with the Korean cultural values of hard work and family obligation than a class-based response to missed opportunities in Korea and the United States. In other words, in South Korea, educational credentials serve to maintain and legitimate the class position of the South Korean elite (Abelmann and Lie 1995, p. 72). Given this relationship to education, Cumings writes, "education in the old country taught several generations that entry to the best schools was essential to the future material well-being of the entire family, and a hard lesson about what happened to those who could not afford college or failed the entrance exams" (1997, p. 436).

Future research should consider the educational achievements and attainments of working-class 1.5 and second-generation Korean Americans. In a community that stresses and valorizes education, it remains to be seen how well children of working-class Koreans perform academically. Recent research from Lew's ethnographic study finds that working-class Korean Americans attend college but are more likely to attend less selective state and city universities compared to Korean Americans from middle-class backgrounds (Lee 2004; Lew 2004). This implies that rather than a qualitative difference in educational expectations between working-class and middle-class parents, who hold similar educational expectations for their children, what differentiates working-class Korean parents from middle-class parents

lack are the class-based educational knowledge and resources that reproduce class inequality in the educational system (Lew 2004).

The propensity to celebrate and credit Asian work ethic and culture in Asian American educational success in popular discourse not only distorts the diversity of Asian American educational experiences but also perpetuates the model minority stereotype. The danger of the model minority image is that those who are falling through the cracks are treated as anomalous or deemed as failures, producing low self-esteem and stigma in Korean American students (Kim 1993; Lee 1996). Juvenile delinquency, including the gang phenomenon as well as the academic problems of Korean American youth, are silenced or inadequately addressed until these make headlines. Only extreme forms of failure receive any attention, leading to overlooking or playing down, instead of adequately addressing, the academic troubles and pressures to succeed among Korean American students. Kim (1993) observes that such narrow definitions of success stigmatize those who fail to live up to such expectations and allow little room for this group to disclose their academic problems in fear of being seen as failures. Similarly, Lee (1996, p. 59) found that among the high-achieving Asian American students at Academic High, "any grade lower than an A was a failing grade." These pressures to succeed at all costs, as the narratives illustrate, have led some to not only lie to parents about grades, but also resort to cheating, cutting classes, cramming, and doing the minimum to pass classes. Furthermore, an increase in suicides and mental health problems has been accompanied with these pressures for educational success (Kim 1993; Lew 2004). In short, the demands of social acceptance in high school, including the sociability factor, identity issues, and socializing, often collide with the excessive demands for educational achievement from parents and the immigrant community.

Finally, praising the academic achievements of Korean and Asian Americans as models for other children of immigrants not only conceals serious costs involved in attaining "success," but also trivializes the difficulties and discrimination that Asian Americans face. In fact, Asian American students may not be as "exceptional" as they are often portrayed to be (Wu 2002). The costs of pressures and family sacrifices in education should be carefully evaluated in this quest for educational achievement. The model minority stereotype emerged in the 1960s to counter and reject Black American demands for group equality. Similarly, cultural explanations of Asian American educational "success" prominent in media and political circles today often blame racial minority students for their educational failures (Steinberg 1981; Wu 2002). Thus, instead of policies calling for

emulating Asian American work ethic and family values, a public policy addressing inequities in income distribution, residential segregation, and school disparities, along with a curriculum that affirms the histories, identities and subcultures of minority students is urgently needed to reduce educational inequalities.

## Appendix

**Table A.** Odds Ratio from Logistic Regression Contrasting the Likelihood of Having Attended Tier 1 College or Not, and Having Received A's in High School or Not

Variable	Whether Attended Tier 1 College (1998 NY Survey)		Whether Received A's in High School (1998 NY Survey)		Whether Received Mostly A's in High School (2004 IIMMLA)	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Demographic characteristics</i>						
Sex (0 = men, 1 = women)	1.231 (.339)	.874 (.383)	2.678* (.387)	2.814* (.393)	1.532* (.215)	1.554 (.235)
Generation (0 = 1.5 Generation, 1 = 2.0 Generation)	1.410 (.371)	1.879 (.429)	.568 (.451)	.590 (.453)	.738 (.228)	.719 (.256)
Father's education (0 = Some college or less, 1 = BA or higher)	2.452 (.577)	1.934 (.622)	2.247 (.594)	2.356 (.599)	1.158 (.262)	.982 (.285)
Father's occupation (0 = Entrepreneurs, 1 = Professionals)	1.933 (.349)	1.421 (.386)	2.588* (.430)	2.746* (.440)		
Mother's education (0 = Some college or less, 1 = BA or higher)	1.016 (.452)	.734 (.493)	1.332 (.525)	1.312 (.536)	1.462 (.258)	1.511 (.280)
Whether lived with parent (age 6 to 16) (0 = Yes, 1 = No)					.785 (.373)	.897 (.425)
Number of siblings	.945 (.166)	.908 (.186)			1.034 (.064)	1.060 (.070)
<i>School-Related Characteristics</i>						
High school type (0 = Public, 1 = Private/parochial)		2.584 (.511)		.600 (.478)		1.499 (.428)
High school part-time job (0 = Yes, 1 = No)		1.568 (.367)		1.243 (.394)		
High school grades (0 = B or less, 1 = A including A-)		10.937** (.519)				
Honors in HS (0 = No, 1 = Yes)						10.404** (.367)

Variable	Whether Attended Tier 1 College (1998 NY Survey)		Whether Received As in High School (1998 NY Survey)		Whether Received Mostly As in High School (2004 IIMMLA)	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
ESL in HS (0 = No, 1 = Yes)					1.374 (.392)	
Non-English language program after school (0 = No, 1 = Yes)					1.911* (.275)	
Number of observations (degrees of freedom)	168 (6)	168 (9)	175 (5)	175 (7)	361 (6)	361 (10)
Log likelihood	217.523	185.312	174.272	172.995	491.020	430.426
Adjusted R square (Cox & Snell)	.083	.243	.101	.107	.025	.176

*Note:* Standard errors are stated in brackets.

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

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