

# PORTRAITS OF CULTURAL SOCIALIZATION AND GRATITUDE IN ASIAN AMERICAN YOUTH

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## Background

- Stereotypical images of Asian Americans as model minorities (Lee & Zhou, 2015) **disregard socioeconomic challenges, language and cultural barriers, and marginalization** (Suzuki, 2002) of Asian American families as well as neglecting particular **contexts that inform and shape families' cultural socialization**.
- Cultural socialization- messages parents transmit to youth about the meaning and significance of their racial and ethnic group (Reynold & Gonzales-Backen, 2017)- helps youth navigate through challenges associated with sociohistorical context or racism (James et al., 2018).
- Two tenets of **CRT** (i.e. racial realism and interest convergence) that map on the three principles of **Asian Crit** (i.e. Asianization, Intersectionality, and Strategic Anti-Essentialism) complement the groundwork of the study. It conceptualizes how the notion of Asians as model minority is a myth, a paradigm used to perpetuate white, middle class, hegemonic notions of merit which dismisses educational disparities and experiences (Buenavista, Jayakuma, & Misa-Escalante, 2009) and ignores the struggle with structural barriers (Lee, 2015).
- The present study was designed to answer two research questions. First, how does cultural socialization of Asian American families help youth navigate the differences they may have between home and school (community/neighborhood)? Second, in what ways do their perceptions of ethnic identity, cultural values shape a sense of gratitude among Asian American youth?

## Methods

### Research paradigm

- Qualitative methods allow to discover, represent, and interpret social realities from the perspective of the researched (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and examine social relations of power in which they are constructed (Ladson-Billings, 2003).

### Participants

- Semi-structured interviews (N=12, including phone interviews). A total of eight 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Asian American youths, ages 12-25, and four 1<sup>st</sup> generation Asian parents participated in the study.

### Procedure

- *Open-ended questions* for youth include 1) ways of family cultural socialization, 2) how they navigate similarities and differences, 3) how they feel about cultural similarities and differences, 4) whether their feelings toward both cultures changed over time, and 5) the level of gratitude toward family.
- *Parent questions* include 1) the ways they portray their child in the U.S. society, 2) how they support navigation of two cultures, 3) what the most important facet of culture they are teaching, 3) how their own experiences of racism or discrimination affect their family's cultural socialization.

### Data Analysis

- Interviews were transcribed, coded, and themes were identified. The most common themes were analyzed across youth and parent interviews.

## Results

### Theme 1: Asian identity vs American identity

- Ethnic identities were closely intertwined with the home culture, language, and values. It was also context dependent:

*"I am used to saying that I am Korean with Korean adults, but with friends in school, I am Korean American" –M, 12*

### Theme 2: Biculturalism

- All youth participants perceived being bicultural. Most youths were capable of and comfortable with switching on and off from home culture to U.S. culture; for some it took time to become comfortable straddling two cultures.

*"I feel proud of my differences more than similarities to other people outside home" –S, 16*

*"I felt embarrassed and disappointed about everything different from home. As time passed, I began to understand a reason to adapt to a new environment and culture" –K, 23*

### Theme 3: Cultural socialization and family support

- Variances exist in the extent and depth of cultural socialization for both youths and parents. Youth participants reported that their identity is greatly shaped by parents' instilling the importance of home language, enjoying cultural food together, and their teaching traditional norms and values. Not all parents acknowledged that their teachings were cultural socialization or had not intended their daily routines to have influenced their children.

*"For me, I think my parents taught me that I should be social to people and communicate efficiently. They taught me to know the differences between people, and accept those differences" –B, 23*

*"My parents stress the importance of speaking Korean at home. We enjoy cooking Korean meals and watch Korean TV shows together" – M, 12*

*"I think a mix of pride in Korean culture and language helps my kids to feel stronger internally, and be more resilient. As parents, we teach them to be thankful for our roots, family, and culture" E, 43 (parent)*

### Theme 4: Sense of gratitude

- All youth participants felt grateful for their home culture, language, and values taught by parents. They mentioned that a sense of gratitude shaped who they are today.

*"This sense of gratitude shapes me by showing thanks to my parents every day and I show gratitude and respect toward my culture and language" S, 16*

*"I feel thankful to my parents because they teach the Korean side of me, and I am proud" – M, 12*

### Theme 5: Racism and discrimination

- Questions were only asked to parents whether their experiences were reflected in their cultural socialization. Three of the four parents pointed out that they did experience racism, but not all mentioned it reflected their ways of socializing children.

*"Both my husband and I experienced racism or discrimination when applying for jobs. We remember having less opportunities even for an interview with a Korean first and last name, so we named our child with both an English and Korean name" N, 44*

## Discussion

- Youth participants took **different forms and paces in defining their Asian American identities and integrating their generational roots**. Findings align with the argument that immigrant youth may gain an advantage by selectively integrating, adapting to their school environment while retaining values and beliefs from their culture of origin (Rumbaut, 1990).
- Parents' values and experiences were reflected in cultural socialization, most of the participants depicted a very close connection to and gratitude toward their ethnic and cultural background, and perceived it as an **asset and a protective factor** in their lives.
- **Variances in cultural socialization** can be explained by differing place of residence, neighborhood and school context, and individual experiences. Intragroup identity processes centrally entail drawing distinctions among group members along generational lines, and **marking differences within ethnic groups** (Jimenez, 2018).
- Youth participants noted that **gratitude towards their parents and culture played a significant role in their lives, shaped their life path, and personality**. Youth with gratitude had their own **coping strategies**; seeking out emotional and instrumental social support, reporting higher social integration skills (Froh et al., 2011), and reinterpretations of contexts and experiences (Liauw et al., 2018).

## Conclusions and Implications

- Findings the study serve as an organic reflection for families, communities, and scholars to unveil assumptions about Asian American youth and families
- Findings also provide a mutual learning about how different immigrant generations and ethnic backgrounds tailor cultural navigation that is also shaped by social systems and policy.
- Future work with a larger sample of Asian American youth may shed a new understanding on how the context of origin- its economic, political, cultural, social, and individual factors- carries over to the context of reception, including U.S policies, political climate, and media representations about immigrants (Chung et al., 2011) may bring significant perspectives.

