

Diverse Asian American Families and Communities: Culture, Structure, and Education (Part 1: Why They Differ)

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Abstract

Based on 11 diverse Asian American (AA) communities, this article discusses the similarities and differences across East, South, and Southeast Asians. Of two parts in this journal issue, Part 1 presents a review of literature and census data to understand the cultural and structural factors of different types of coethnic communities (strong, weak, or dispersed). Culturally, Asian families differ in culture, language, and religion. Structurally, class, education, and job skills also differ for diverse Asian families. Taken together, the article proposes a combined cultural–structural framework to understand unique characteristics in distinctive communities. The key findings from the literature and census data revealed differences in the types of communities and their resources. Lower achieving AA subgroups tend to have weaker communities with fewer resources and opportunities in general. Higher achieving AA subgroups have stronger coethnic networks with more resources and opportunities. This article challenges the monolithic view of AA students and finds more differences when comparing these communities. Educators and other practitioners need cultural and structural awareness to know how to best support AA students. Stakeholders and school officials can work together by building partnerships to support struggling AA families and communities.

Key Words: Asian American immigrants, families, communities, culture, structure, education, coethnic, subgroups, cultural–structural framework

Introduction and Significance of Topic

The Asian American (AA) immigrant population has recently been identified as the fastest growing racial population, surpassing the number of newly arrived Hispanic immigrants (Pew Research Center, 2012). Today, they comprise nearly 6% of the U.S. population and have been described as “the best-educated” and “highest-income” racial group in the country (Pew Research Center, 2012, p. 3). While census data shows many AAs have become successful in the U.S., this overgeneralized description of the model minority stereotype often creates the misleading belief that AAs are monolithic. More research is emerging to show a wide disparity exists in educational and economic outcomes among these groups (Paik, Kula, Saito, Rahman, & Witenstein, 2014). For example, about 70% of Indians age 25 and older have college degrees, but only about 11% of Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotians are college graduates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). While East Asian, South Asian, and Southeast Asian groups have similarities that distinguish them from other racial groups, they differ in many ways. They differ in immigration experiences, ethnic language, cultural values and beliefs, religion, income, education, and occupational skills.

There is also great diversity in their “coethnic communities,” a term defined by Portes and Rumbaut (1990, 2001) as ethnic communities composed mostly of professional, entrepreneurial, or working-class labor. For example, although Koreans, Indians, and Filipinos are all from the same racial group, they have different ethnic origins with varying educational outcomes and occupational skills. These ethnic communities are either highly concentrated or dispersed throughout the U.S. Based on their modes of incorporation upon immigrant arrival, the characteristics of ethnic in-roads differ based on the resources and opportunities available to AA immigrants (Paik et al., 2014). Consequently, there are differences in the types of coethnic communities that have been established since the initial waves of immigration from the late 1800s to emerging communities in the 21st century. East, South, and Southeast Asian communities in the U.S. vary in terms of their social, cultural, and human capital.

Many researchers take either a cultural or structural view to explain the economic and educational success of ethnic minority groups. Cultural theorists emphasize an ethnic group’s cultural values, beliefs, and behavioral patterns—formed in the homeland or developed in the process of immigration—and how these values and practices fit mainstream society. For example, Chinese and Korean successes have been attributed to their cultural values and practices (Braxton, 1999; Schneider & Lee, 1990; Wu, 2008; Wu & Hertberg-Davis, 2009; Zhou & Kim, 2006). Because of their Confucian beliefs, they appear to be more education-focused and have high respect for authority, family

honor, and discipline. The same theorists have used the cultural deficit model to explain the lack of success for some ethnic groups, such as lower achieving Latino, African American, Asian, or other groups (Ogbu, 1995; Ong, 1996). Structural theorists, on the other hand, emphasize the role of societal stratification, in which family income and socioeconomic status are factors commonly used to explain the opportunities and constraints for ethnic minority groups. These structural factors also include immigration context, immigration selectivity, residential patterns, and labor market conditions. In this case, structural theorists could argue that immigration selectivity influenced Chinese and Korean success as they arrived with higher than average education levels and more financial capital than other immigrant groups.

While cultural and structural arguments have been used separately to explain immigrant success, Zhou and Kim (2006) proposed an alternative framework that combines both of these arguments. They posited that cultural characteristics need to be supported by structural factors to generate resources for upward mobility. Zhou and Kim regarded the ethnic community as a particular site in which culture and structure interact. It contains social institutions and interpersonal networks that have been established and maintained by group members. Within these coethnic networks, “community forces” also help shape their orientation towards upward mobility (Ogbu, 1974). These community forces are cultural beliefs and coping strategies that have been adopted and embedded within an ethnic community as a protective mechanism against hostile environments. Community forces help mediate the process of social capital formation in an ethnic community.

Within these coethnic communities, “ethnic social structures” allow space for the formation of social capital (Zhou & Kim, 2006). Ranging from civic, educational, social, cultural, or religious organizations, there are many forms of ethnic social structures housed within a coethnic community. Cultural and structural factors not only converge, but they are naturally manifested in these tangible ethnic social structures, such as ethnic afterschool programs and language schools (Zhou & Kim, 2006). Moreover, these ethnic programs produce “ethnic social capital” and reinforce cultural continuity (Zhou & Kim, 2006). Ethnic social capital includes resources and opportunities from coethnic communities that support upward mobility in terms of economic and educational outcomes. AA communities have been identified as important resources of ethnic social capital that contribute to the adaptation of immigrant children in school and life (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Zhou & Bankston, 1994; Zhou & Kim, 2006).

Purpose and Research Questions

This research proposes a cultural–structural lens to understand diverse AA communities in two parts: Part 1 (this article) is based on an extensive review of literature and census data on diverse AA families and communities to help explain *why* they differ. Part 1 also proposes a new theoretical framework to understand cultural and structural factors within coethnic communities. Part 2 (Paik, Rahman, Kula, Saito, & Witenstein, 2017), a follow-up study published in the same journal issue, presents a qualitative study on 135 ethnic programs to show *how* AA communities differ. While Part 1 addresses the importance of coethnic communities, culture, structure, and education, Part 2 discusses tangible ethnic social structures within these communities and their link to resources, opportunities, and educational outcomes. In summary, this article (Part 1) is theoretical and focuses on diverse AA families and communities (see Figure 1, outer and inner sections), while Part 2 is about its application and focuses on ethnic programs within these communities (see Figure 1, middle section). Both Parts 1 and 2 will provide a comparative look at higher and lower achieving AA communities.

This article, comprising Part 1 of the study, will do the following three things: (1) Describe various types and characteristics of coethnic communities of diverse AA populations. Although Zhou and Kim (2006) acknowledge the centrality of ethnic communities, their work does not address various types and characteristics. In general, there is relatively little research that describes the types of diverse AA communities (Paik et al., 2014). (2) Examine cultural and structural factors to understand the nature of coethnic communities. While culture and structure can be defined generally, these factors play distinctive roles in diverse communities. (3) Challenge the model minority stereotype that AA groups are monolithic in education, culture, structure, and other factors. Researchers have typically focused on high-achieving groups (e.g., Chinese, Koreans), but generally less is known about other AA groups. To explore these issues, we asked the following questions:

1. What are the *key cultural and structural factors* of diverse AA families and communities?
2. What are the various *types* of AA communities (where cultural and structural factors converge)?
3. What are *key characteristics* of higher and lower achieving AA communities?
4. Based on the types of coethnic communities, what can we learn about the *resources and opportunities (ethnic social capital)* in higher and lower achieving AA communities?

The article begins by presenting our proposed theoretical framework. To understand the context of diverse AA populations, brief demographic trends are provided followed by key cultural and structural characteristics of the major Asian groups in the U.S. Within the cultural and structural interactions, ethnic social capital and educational outcomes are discussed in regards to specific AA communities. The article concludes with recommendations for educational practice and policy in regards to diverse AA families and communities.

Given the dearth of literature on some AA groups, this article will only include major AA groups and larger U.S. subgroups: *East Asians* (Chinese, Korean, Japanese); *South Asians* (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi); *Southeast Asians* (Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian); and *Filipinos*. Although Filipinos are also generally classified as Southeast Asians, they will be described separately since their experiences are unique compared to Southeast Asian refugees. The authors believe that detailed information is important; however, due to the number of groups described here, it was not possible to include comprehensive information for each group within the scope of this article (see Part 2 for additional information; Paik et al., 2017). Some key factors are discussed in this section to help illustrate the diversity across AA populations.

Theoretical Framework: Cultural and Structural Coethnic Model

The proposed theoretical framework, “Cultural and Structural Coethnic Model,” is based on the earlier works of Paik et al. (2014) on diverse coethnic communities, Portes and Rumbaut’s (1990, 2001) theory on modes of incorporation, Zhou and Kim’s (2006) cultural and structural lens on ethnic social structures (as described earlier), and Coleman’s (1990) theory to understand social capital within ethnic communities. The types of coethnic communities and ethnic social structures produce varying degrees of ethnic social capital for immigrant groups; they all eventually impact employment and educational opportunities (Coleman, 1990; Paik et al., 2014; Portes & Rumbaut, 1990, 2001; Zhou & Kim, 2006). As described earlier, *cultural factors* (e.g., values, beliefs, and behaviors from the homeland) interact with *structural factors* (e.g., socioeconomic and educational levels, immigration context, immigration selectivity) in ethnic social structures (see Figure 1).

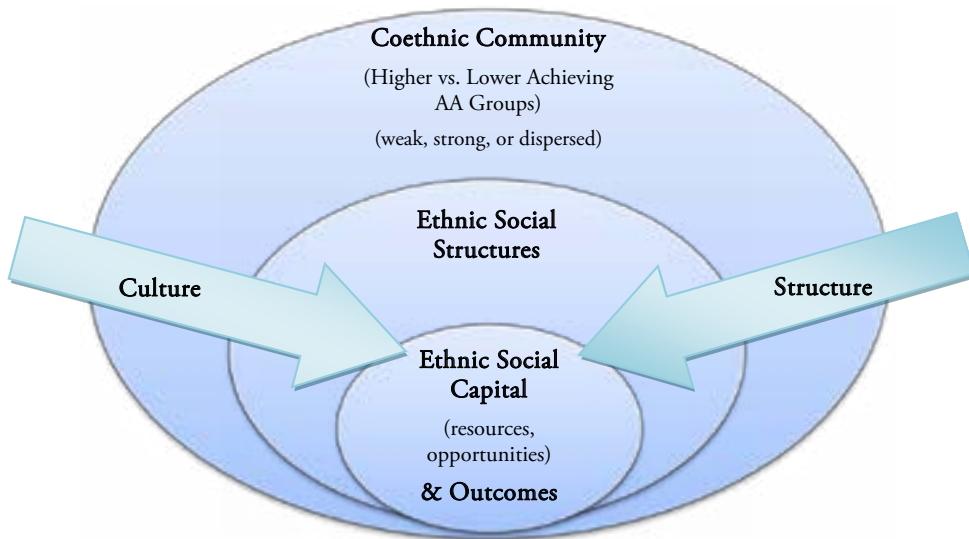


Figure 1. Cultural and Structural Coethnic Model.

Note: To help illustrate the key concepts in the model, Figure 1 was developed by the authors in this study. Within each type of coethnic community (strong, weak, or dispersed), cultural and structural factors converge within ethnic social structures (e.g., ethnic programs, schools, organizations, faith-based institutions, etc.), producing varying ethnic social capital (resources, opportunities), which inevitably reinforce educational outcomes in higher and lower achieving AA communities.

Coethnic Communities: Types of Networks

Portes and Rumbaut (1990, 2001) used the term *modes of incorporation* to discuss how the different receptions accorded to immigrants upon arrival impact their current immigrant group outcomes in the U.S. They identified receptions by three layers of American society: (1) government policy as receptive, indifferent, or hostile to immigration for ethnic groups; (2) societal reception as prejudiced or nonprejudiced upon their entry into the U.S.; and (3) how the type of coethnic community can offer opportunities for social, cultural, and human capital to new immigrants. All three modes of incorporation are important to understand the experiences and outcomes of immigrant groups; however, for the scope of this article, coethnic communities will be a central focus since they provide the infrastructure and support for existing ethnic social structures (Paik et al., 2014; Zhou & Kim, 2006).

All AA groups are collectivistic in nature and have a strong sense of community. However, coethnics can only help each other within the limits of their own community resources (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990, 2001). The type of coethnic community can influence the production of cultural, social, or human capital. Some coethnic communities may be more advantageous to newly

arriving immigrants as they may provide different types of information and resources to navigate a foreign culture and country. While Portes and Rumbaut (1990, 2001) focused on early immigrant communities and their influences, this article focuses on current coethnic communities and the role they play in ethnic social structures, ethnic social capital, and educational outcomes of diverse AA communities.

Table 1. Asian American Coethnic Communities and Educational Outcomes

AA Groups	Coethnic Community ^a <i>Strong (+)</i> <i>Weak (-)</i> <i>Dispersed (0)</i>	Current Educational Outcomes ^b <i>High (+)</i> <i>Low (-)</i> <i>Mixed (+/-)</i>
EAST		
Chinese	+	K-12: + H.Ed: +
Korean	+	K-12: + H.Ed: +
Japanese	0	K-12: + H.Ed: +
SOUTH		
Indian	0	K-12: + H.Ed: +
Pakistani	0/-	K-12: + H.Ed: +
Bangladeshi	0/-	K-12: + H.Ed: +
SOUTHEAST		
Vietnamese	+	K-12: +/- H.Ed: +/-
Cambodian	-	K-12: - H.Ed: -
Hmong	-	K-12: - H.Ed: -
Laotian	-	K-12: - H.Ed: -
FILIPINO		
	0	K-12: +/- H.Ed: +

^aCoethnic community types were determined by the authors' (2014) previous work, literature review, and census data.

^bHigher education outcomes were based on U.S. Census Bureau 2010 data. K-12 outcomes were based on literature, performance reports (e.g., Ed. Trust–West, 2010), and organizational reports (e.g., U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2007)

In Table 1, the types of coethnic networks are coded as “weak” (-), “strong” (+), or “dispersed” (0); these categories were based on literature, U.S. census data, and other key resources (Paik et al., 2014). The stronger the community, the more resources it has in its networks (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990, 2001).

- *“Weak” coethnic communities* involve highly concentrated areas of coethnics who are primarily laborers (e.g., Hmong, Cambodians, Laotians).
- *“Strong” coethnic communities* are highly concentrated coethnics with mostly professional and entrepreneurial skills (e.g., Koreans, Chinese). Unlike weak coethnic communities, strong coethnic communities can provide newcomers with more resources, information, and employment and educational opportunities.
- *“Dispersed” coethnic communities* are comprised of skilled professionals who have less reliance on their coethnic communities (e.g., Filipinos and Indians have more skills and opportunities in science-related fields). Since dispersed groups typically have more professional access to mainstream America, they are less dependent on their coethnics. Consequently, they have a weaker resource pool in terms of ethnic social capital for later newcomers compared to “stronger” coethnic communities. For these groups, resources and opportunities may not necessarily be embedded within the community.

Ethnic Social Structures and Ethnic Social Capital

Ethnic social structures are housed within a coethnic community; they may include civic, educational, social, cultural, or religious organizations. From these physical sites, social capital is generated and culture is transmitted. Coleman (1990) defines social capital as a network of relationships that promote cooperation among group members and that lead to productive outcomes for individuals and the group. This formation of social capital through ethnic social structures, in turn, creates a social environment supported by its structural and cultural factors. *Ethnic social capital* is generated from resources and opportunities provided by ethnic social structures and coethnic communities. Ethnic social capital encompasses various forms of capital (e.g., social, cultural, human capital) within coethnic networks. By virtue of membership, group members can access ethnic social capital and secure benefits within social structures (Coleman, 1990; Portes & Rumbaut, 1990, 2001; Zhou & Kim, 2006). Social capital, however, may vary depending on class, race, ethnicity, and other factors. Since community forces influence coping strategies, resources from social capital can facilitate or hinder upward mobility. In summary, the type of coethnic community and the type of ethnic social structures are seen to affect educational or economic outcomes through provision of structural support for social capital and cultural transmittance.

Diverse Asian American Families and Communities

Based on a review of literature and census data, this section describes key cultural and structural factors. Although culture is a complex construct, shared and distinctive cultural practices are briefly described for the major AA groups. As collectivistic groups, the family unit and parenting are central to all Asian families; however, some practices and expectations may differ in the home and community. Each group also has unique religions that influence cultural traditions; some of these characteristics will also be included in this section.

Key structural factors include occupational skills, socioeconomic status, and educational levels of diverse AA communities (see Figure 1, Tables 2 and 3). Of the three types of coethnic communities (strong, weak, dispersed), Portes and Rumbaut (1990, 2001) describe *strong* coethnic communities as producing the most ethnic social capital due to available resources and opportunities (refer to Table 1).

Table 2. Asian American 2010 Demographic Data

		Population	% of AA population*
East Asian	Chinese	4,010,114	23.2%
	Korean	1,706,822	9.9%
	Japanese	1,304,286	7.5%
South Asian	Indian	3,183,063	18.4%
	Pakistani	409,163	2.4%
	Bangladeshi	147,300	0.85%
Southeast Asian	Vietnamese	1,737,433	10.0%
	Cambodian	276,667	1.6%
	Hmong	260,073	1.5%
	Laotian	232,130	1.3%
	Filipino	3,416,840	19.7%

*Data is based on 2010 U.S. census and includes those who identified themselves as part of each ethnic group, both alone and in combination with other ethnicities.

Table 3. Asian American Academic Attainment by Percentage of Population Aged 25 and Over

		Less than HS diploma	HS grad or G.E.D.	Some college or A.A.	College degree	Graduate degree
East Asian	Chinese	17.9	15.7	15.7	25.3	25.3
	Korean	7.7	18.6	21.5	34.2	18.0
	Japanese	5.0	19.6	29.4	30.8	15.2
South Asian	Indian	9.5	9.9	11.7	31.4	37.5
	Pakistani	13.4	17.4	16.4	29.8	23.0
	Bangladeshi	16.9	17.2	18.1	25.5	22.2
South-east Asian	Vietnamese	30.2	21.5	22.8	18.6	6.9
	Cambodian	33.3	27.3	23.4	11.9	4.2
	Hmong	35.4	22.5	27.3	11.1	3.7
	Laotian	32.5	29.2	25.1	10.4	2.8
	Filipino	7.6	15.8	30.3	37.9	8.5

Note: All ethnic group percentages are based on one-year estimates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010)

Shared Cultural Practices and Traits: Collectivism, Parenting, and Education

As is often mentioned in the literature, all Asian groups have cultural values supporting educational achievement. These include the centrality of family through a culture of collectivism, the value of discipline and hard work, and high parent expectations regarding educational achievement (Hickey, 2006; Kitano, 1993; Leung, Boehnlein, & Kinzie, 1997). The Asian family structure is characterized as hierarchical and interdependent (Asian American Institute, 2011). Due to their collectivistic natures, all groups generally practice parental authority and family honor. Some of these practices and expectations may range and differ within communities, but in general, all groups uphold the family unit, parents play an important role, and education is understood as a means to social mobility (Boehnlein, Leung, & Kinzie, 1997; Moore, Keopraseuth, Leung, & Chao, 1997; Wong et al., 2011; Yang, 2003).

Parenting expectations are generally high, but varying levels of expectation do exist for some groups (Goyette & Xie, 1999; Leung et al., 1997; Moua & Lamborn, 2010; Wong et al., 2011). Parenting practices also vary depending on the group, but most parenting styles are authoritarian (Farver, Xu, Bhadha, Narang, & Lieber, 2007; Inman, Howard, Beaumont, & Walker, 2007; Wu & Hertberg-Davis, 2009). Asian parents care strongly about education and often make sacrifices for their children’s education (Hickey, 2006; Mathews, 2000;

Tajima, 2010; Zhou & Bankston, 1994). Although Southeast Asian groups have fewer resources in general than East or South Asian families, they also stress education as a means towards upward social mobility (McNall, Dunningan, & Mortimer, 1994; Ngo, 2006).

East Asian Families and Communities

Demographics

East Asians include those descending from Japan, Korea, mainland China, Mongolia, Macau, Hong Kong, and Taiwan (United Nations, 2011). The three main East AA groups are Chinese (including the Chinese diaspora, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan), Korean, and Japanese (Jeong & You, 2008; Takaki, 1998). East Asians comprise about 40% of the total AA population; there are about 4 million Chinese, over 1.7 million Koreans, and about 1.3 million Japanese in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Cultural Factors

East Asian family structures are largely based upon Confucian, hierarchical beliefs which are believed to maintain not only families but society as a whole (Kitano, 1993). East Asians generally stress achieving success through effort and perseverance (Wu, 2008). Overall, parent expectations for their children's educational attainment are high for all East Asian groups (Goyette & Xie, 1999). Parenting practices for both Chinese and Korean Americans are generally authoritarian based on Confucian beliefs of filial piety; for Japanese Americans, little research was found in this area (Wu & Hertberg-Davis, 2009). Although "Issei" (first-generation Japanese Americans) were more aligned with the tight-knit traditional family structure, more recent generations have become more acculturated in the dominant society (Fugita & O'Brien, 1991; Kitano, 1993; Takezawa, 1996).

The role of religion varies widely among East Asians in the U.S.; Korean Americans report the highest rates of religiosity (mainly Christianity) compared to other AA groups, except for Filipino Americans (Lien & Carnes, 2004). In sharp contrast, the majority of Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans have no religious identification. Other major religions practiced by East Asians have included Buddhism, Shintoism, and Taoism.

Structural Factors

East Asian Americans are largely middle and upper class, and many are professional, managerial, and entrepreneurial. The majority of Japanese Americans hold professional, managerial, or sales/office occupations (Shinagawa, Wang, Lee, & Chen, 2011). However, one-fourth are employed in the U.S. government; they are the largest Asian subgroup and third largest ethnic

group working in the public sector. Occupations generally vary by nativity for Chinese Americans: Taiwanese immigrants mostly hold professional and managerial positions (57.2%), Hong Kong or Chinese Diasporan immigrants are split between white- and blue-collar workers, while those from mainland China are majority working class (NCCA & AAST, 2011; Shinagawa & Kim, 2008). Almost 50% of Korean Americans are found in managerial and professional occupations. Over one-third are self-employed, making them the largest AA group and second largest immigrant group to own businesses (Masuo & Malroux, 2009).

Overall, East Asian K–12 achievement and postsecondary attainment are high, with differences based upon generational status. With each successive generation, Chinese Americans have shown increased rates of college attainment (Shinagawa & Kim, 2008). In contrast, Japanese American college attainment peaked at the 1.5 generation; they have lower college attainment compared to the largest AA subgroups excluding Vietnamese Americans (Shinagawa et al., 2011). Korean Americans are highly successful with more than 50% earning a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

Type of Networks and Ethnic Social Capital: “Strong and Dispersed”

The initial immigrant gateways in the late 1800s for East Asians served as a social network, providing resources, employment, and support for recent arrivals. Today, the coethnic communities, particularly for Chinese and Korean Americans, are *strong*, while Japanese American coethnic communities have become more *dispersed* (Paik et al., 2014). Large, concentrated numbers of Chinese and Korean entrepreneurs and professionals have maintained ethnic enclaves in urban areas; their coethnic solidarity through businesses and other professions have been a major support system for coethnics. The growing Chinese and Korean populations have expanded into suburban areas or “ethnoburbs,” which provide additional commerce and services (Li, 1998). Chinatowns, Koreatowns, and respective ethnoburbs are scattered across the U.S. in large metropolitan areas (e.g., San Gabriel Valley, Koreatown in Los Angeles). Both Chinese and Korean coethnic communities and social capital remain *strong* due to the numerous resources and employment accessible within their community, including family-owned businesses, churches, and educational services (Danico, 2004; Min & Kim, 2010; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Yu, 1983; Zhou, Tseng, & Kim, 2008).

Japanese American ethnic towns are slowly diminishing due to the overall decline of new Japanese immigrants, limiting overall ethnic social capital. With their English-speaking abilities, professional skills, and job access to mainstream America, Japanese American families are *dispersed* throughout the U.S., creating fewer coethnic resources and opportunities for newly arrived immigrants

(Paik et al., 2014). Their integration into the U.S., several generations later, is reflected with the majority being U.S.-born and one-third being of mixed descent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

South Asian Families and Communities

Demographics

South Asians come from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives (Sandhu & Madathil, 2008). Over the past decade, South Asians had the highest growth rate and comprise nearly 3.5 million, or about 22%, of the AA population. Indians (almost 3.2 million), Pakistanis (over 409,000), and Bangladeshis (over 147,000) are the largest subgroups (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2011). Consisting of more recent immigrants, over three-quarters arrived since the 1980s (SAALT, 2012).

Cultural Factors

South Asian families practice various religions; however, Hinduism is the predominant religion for Indians and Islam for Bangladeshis and Pakistanis (Asian American Institute, 2011). Some unique customs between the South Asian groups are related to religion. For example, Hinduism embraces the concept of *Dharma*, a belief in “duty” or obligation to some entity larger than the individual (generally family; Gupta & Tracey, 2005). In Bangladesh and Pakistan, Islam permeates the educational system, and Islamic schools are common alternatives to regular private and public schools (Ahmad, 2004).

South Asian parenting practices are typically authoritarian (Farver et al., 2007; Inman et al., 2007), and parents have notably high educational expectations for their children compared to Whites and other Asians (Asher, 2002; Bhattacharya & Schoppelrey, 2004; Goyette & Xie, 1999; Gupta & Tracey, 2005). The Pew Research Center (2012) found that, compared to other Asians, Indian parents placed the highest importance on parenting.

Structural Factors

Indian Americans have generally achieved professional and economic success. The majority (64%) work in management or professional occupations and often lead other ethnic groups in household, median, and per capita income levels (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2011). Pakistanis and Bangladeshis have much lower incomes with occupations split between management/professional and sales/office (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Degrees from Bangladesh and Pakistan are often not accepted in the U.S., forcing new arrivals into jobs such as taxi driving or restaurant, hotel, and gas station work (NAPACDDC, 2005). Among AAs, Bangladeshis have the second highest poverty rates (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2011).

South Asians have high academic achievement in both K–12 and higher education. South Asians in K–12 have high grades compared to Whites and other Asians, and their standardized test scores are comparable to Whites and average among Asian subgroups (Education Trust–West, 2010; Kao, 1995; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2007). In postsecondary education, all three South Asian groups have higher graduate degree attainment than Whites, Asians, and the general population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). However, some studies indicate the children of recent working-class immigrants experience more educational barriers (Bhattacharya & Schoppelrey, 2004; NAPACDDC, 2005; Saran, 2007; Verma, 2008).

Type of Networks and Ethnic Social Capital: “Dispersed and Weak”

Early Punjab Indian immigrants arriving in the late 1800s and early 1900s formed their own ethnic enclaves (Leonard, 1997). After 1965, South Asian immigrants came from all over India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. This wave came with more education, professional degrees (e.g., doctors, scientists, engineers, etc.), and the ability to speak English (Rahman & Paik, 2017). They often did not need to rely on their own coethnic communities or ethnic social capital for employment or other resources and, consequently, assimilated into middle-class, mostly White suburbs (Bhattacharya & Schoppelrey, 2004; Leonard, 1997; Purkayastha, 2005). Despite their *dispersed* settlement, they still maintained strong ties for cultural continuity (Purkayastha, 2005).

Since the 1980s, a rising subgroup of newer, working-class immigrants began settling in urban ethnic enclaves (Leonard, 1997; Verma, 2008). Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis have settled near each other to form ethnically populated areas (e.g., Little Bangladesh in Los Angeles, Little India in Chicago; Ingram, 2007; Maira, 2004; Purkayastha, 2005). Most Indians are upper-class professionals, and they tend to have *dispersed* settlements in suburban areas. Several Bangladeshi and Pakistani immigrants with generally less skilled professions and fewer resources comprise a mix of *dispersed* and *weak* communities in both suburban and urban areas (Bhattacharya & Schoppelrey, 2004; NAPACDDC, 2005; Rahman & Paik, 2017; Verma, 2008).

Southeast Asian Families and Communities

Demographics

Southeast Asians comprise of those from Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Most Southeast Asian immigrant groups are recent arrivals as refugees from the Vietnam War. The 2010 census counted approximately 2.5 million Southeast Asians, reflecting about 15% of AAs (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The four

largest groups include about 1.7 million Vietnamese, 277,000 Cambodians, 260,000 Hmong, and 232,000 Laotians (Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Shahid, 2012).

Cultural Factors

Vietnamese traditions are heavily influenced by Confucianism and Mahayana Buddhism, which stress family and community (Leung et al., 1997). Children are also taught that their successes, including educational excellence, will bring honor (vs. shame) to their family (Leung et al., 1997; Wong et al., 2011).

The Hmong generally hold to an animistic or shamanistic religion; however, many Hmong and Vietnamese in the U.S. have embraced Christianity (Moua & Lamborn, 2010). Having lived as a largely preliterate society in their homelands, a strong oral history tradition is in place (Ma, 2005). As a tribal culture, large kin networks are typical of Hmong Americans and mark the family structure (Lee, 1997; Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990). Hmong parents have also been described as controlling and generally not emotionally expressive (Supple & Small, 2006; Yang, 2003). Early marriage is also part of the culture (Culhane-Pera & Xiong, 2003; Peng & Solheim, 2015; Vang & Bogenschutz, 2014), but that is slowly changing with the second generation (Peng & Solheim, 2015; Yang, 2003).

Traditional Cambodian culture stresses respect of elders and ancestors, including strict obedience, and control of children is often enforced through discipline and physical punishment (Boehnlein et al., 1997; Tajima, 2010). Khmer traditions have also allowed early marriage, which may affect young teens; however, this is also slowly changing (Smith-Hefner, 1993). Both Cambodian and Laotian traditions were influenced by Hinduism and Brahmanism, and later by Theravada Buddhism, which emphasizes harmony with nature and others (Boehnlein et al., 1997; Moore et al., 1997).

Laotians have been noted for a family power structure that is very hierarchical and patriarchal. Filial piety is stressed, and children are taught parental subordination (Moore et al., 1997). Parents tend to be more permissive when children are young and gradually become strict with children's age (Moore et al., 1997). Emphasis on harmony is expressed educationally with a strong deference to teachers and schools rather than active participation in schools (Phommasasouvanh, 1997). However, Laotian parents do advocate education (Ngo, 2006).

Structural Factors

Many Vietnamese Americans are middle class who hold professional and managerial positions or own businesses; most other Southeast Asian groups

are considered to be generally working class (Niedzwiecki & Duong, 2011). Cambodians and Laotians most often work in production and transportation; management and business are also common career choices. Hmong Americans most commonly work in production, transportation, or sales/office positions (Niedzwiecki & Duong, 2011).

Southeast Asian groups generally have low academic achievement. Vietnamese American grades are higher than their other Southeast Asian counterparts, but lower than East or South Asian students (Rumbaut, 2008). Slightly less than one-third of Vietnamese Americans but well over one-third of Cambodian, Hmong, and Laotian Americans have less than a high school diploma (Niedzwiecki & Duong, 2011). Bachelor's degree attainment for Vietnamese is slightly over that of the U.S. overall at over 18% but does not reach the overall Asian rate of almost 30%, while the Cambodian, Hmong, and Laotian rates lag behind; however, they are much higher than in past decades, indicating an upward trend (Niedzwiecki & Duong, 2004, 2011).

Type of Networks and Ethnic Social Capital: "Strong and Weak"

Southeast Asians are the most recent group to enter the U.S. in large numbers. The first wave of refugees, who arrived between 1975 and 1978, were primarily urban, wealthy, and educated Vietnamese immigrants (Kula & Paik, 2016). They were later followed by four groups: a second wave of Vietnamese, often referred to as "Boat People" who were largely rural, poor, and uneducated; Hmong, who came from a tribal culture with limited access to education or modern society; other Laotian groups who came with little education; and Cambodian refugees fleeing from the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge regime who also arrived uneducated, poor, and suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder at greater rates than their counterparts in other groups (Hinton, Rasmussen, Nou, Pollack, & Good, 2009; Kelly, 1986; Kula & Paik, 2016; Rumbaut, 2000; Takaki, 1998). The literature consistently categorizes Hmong, Cambodian, and Laotian coethnic communities and their social capital as generally *weaker*, while the Vietnamese coethnic community is generally categorized as *strong* (Kula & Paik, 2016).

The refugees' limited English proficiency, lack of job skills, and other barriers made their assimilation very difficult (Kelly, 1986; Trueba et al., 1990). Often, refugees relocated to be closer with family and/or coethnics in emerging enclaves. Both first generation refugees and their children were hampered by low human capital, resources, or other limited opportunities (Portes, Fernandez-Kelly, & Haller, 2009). Vietnamese Americans were the exception; the greater human capital of the initial wave of Vietnamese refugees enabled them to quickly create *stronger* ethnic enclaves with entrepreneurial backing.

These enclaves provided crucial inroads as they integrated into U.S. society (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990; Rumbaut, 2000).

Most Southeast Asians live in urban communities, though some have moved into the suburbs (Chhuon, Hudley, Brenner, & Macias, 2010; Lieu, 2011; Liu & Geron, 2008). “Little Saigon,” “Cambodia Town,” and “Little Mekong” are located in designated U.S. metropolitan areas. Laotian Americans do not have official ethnic towns but have created their own enclaves (Liu & Geron, 2008). Some literature indicates Hmong, Laotian, and Cambodian coethnic communities may be growing stronger, with an increase in entrepreneurship and political participation (Lai & Arguelles, 2004; Lor, 2010); however, for the most part, these communities do not provide the economic and educational opportunities that significantly elevate opportunity for newcomers or subsequent generations (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

Filipino Families and Communities

Demographics

Filipinos are now the second largest AA group. The 2010 U.S. census shows a marked 44% population increase over a decade to roughly 3.4 million Filipinos, reflecting about 20% of AAs (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2011).

Cultural Factors

A major distinction for Filipino families is that many practice Catholicism (Tuason, Taylor, Rollings, Harris, & Martin, 2007). The importance of Catholicism often permeates the schooling experience, as large numbers of Filipino children are enrolled in parochial schools (Ogilvie, 2008). Unique to Filipinos is the concept of “compadrazgo” or godparent, an extended form of kinship to nonrelatives informally inviting them to become part of one’s family (Agbayani-Siewert, 1994; Restubog & Bordia, 2006).

Structural Factors

Filipino Americans tend to be middle- and upper-middle-class professionals (Paik, Choe, & Witenstein, 2016; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; Wolf, 1997). Many are in health professions, particularly in nursing (Rumbaut, 2011; Xu & Kwak, 2005; Zhou & Xiong, 2005). Many Filipinos have immigrated in order to fill employment shortages in healthcare and other fields (De Castro, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2008).

Achievement levels for Filipino Americans are generally high but mixed (Zhou & Xiong, 2005). More recent studies show bimodal and disparate results (Museus & Maramba, 2011; Ogilvie, 2008). They are overrepresented at two-year and lower-tier four-year institutions (Buenavista, Jayakumar, &

Misa-Escalante, 2009). However, they have similar bachelor's degree attainment to the overall AA population (43.8% vs. 44.1%) and significantly higher than the overall U.S. population (24.4%; Reeves & Bennett, 2004).

Type of Network and Ethnic Social Capital: "Dispersed"

Filipino immigrants before 1965 often lived in urban ethnic towns (e.g., Filipinotown in Los Angeles), while many post-1965 immigrants lived in ethnic enclaves or ethnoburbs (Logan, Zhang, & Alba, 2002; Nadal, 2009). In general, *dispersed* Filipinos are less dependent on their community for employment and other economic resources, affecting their overall ethnic social capital (Paik et al., 2016; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Wolf, 1997). They tend to have strong English fluency and education levels that have translated into professional skills in health or science-related professions (Espiritu, 1996). Although they have been characterized as a *dispersed* coethnic community, Filipino Americans have a strong network of cultural and social organizations (Espiritu, 2003; Reisch, 2008).

Discussion: Key Characteristics of Higher and Lower Achieving AA Communities

This section presents distinctive characteristics between higher and lower achieving AA communities (see Tables 1, 2, and 3). For the ease of the reader, this section highlights key points, which were gathered from literature and census data, for each of the groups. Resources and opportunities (ethnic social capital) also vary depending on the types of coethnic communities.

Higher Achieving AA Communities: Strong and Dispersed Networks

East Asian (EA) Communities (Chinese, Japanese, Korean)

- EAs comprise 40% of the overall AA population.
- Educational outcomes are high for EAs in K–12 and beyond.
- EAs have *strong* structural characteristics and tightly knit cultures, reinforcing their high achievement.
- Japanese are also high-achieving, but *dispersed* in nature as they rely less on their coethnic networks. (Note: Based on varying educational outcomes, the Japanese population was included in both higher achieving and mixed achievement groups; Japanese are generally high-achieving, but their achievement levels have lessened over time compared to their East Asian counterparts.)

- Many EAs are largely middle and upper class with professional, managerial, or entrepreneurial skills.
- Confucianism and filial piety are strong cultural values in EA families.
- Christianity, Buddhism, Shintoism, and Taoism are some practiced religions.
- *Strong* Chinese and Korean communities have more coethnic opportunities, whereas *dispersed* Japanese generally have fewer coethnic resources in comparison.

South Asian (SA) Communities (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi)

- SAs comprise 22% of the overall AA population.
- Educational outcomes are the highest for SAs among AAs, Indians being the highest achievers in K–12 and beyond.
- SAs generally have a *dispersed* community with *strong* structural characteristics. Indians are typically *dispersed*, but Pakistanis and Bangladeshis may have *weaker* coethnic networks.
- Most Indians are upper-class professionals, whereas Bangladeshis and Pakistanis range in their skills and socioeconomic status.
- SA parents, particularly Indians, are considered to have the highest educational expectations for their children, reinforcing their high achievement.
- Hinduism (for Indians) and Islam (for Bangladeshis, Pakistanis) are common religions.
- Indian resources and opportunities are similar to the Japanese as they are both *dispersed* in nature. Pakistanis and Bangladeshis generally have fewer coethnic resources and opportunities compared to Indians.

Lower Achieving AA Communities: Weaker Networks

Southeast Asian (SEA) Communities (Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian)

- Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotians comprise less than 5% of the AA population. They are the smallest population among AAs.
- Educational outcomes are the lowest for SEAs, especially for Laotians, Hmong, and Cambodians.
- Cambodian, Hmong, and Laotian groups have *weak* coethnic networks due to their limited resources and opportunities.
- Many SEAs have working class skills in production, transportation, management, sales, or other business positions.
- Early marriage is still culturally practiced, especially for Hmong and Cambodians, but this is slowly changing with the second generation.
- Hinduism, Brahmanism, and Theravada Buddhism seem to have influenced Cambodian culture. Hmong culture has been influenced by animistic and

shamanistic religions; however, Christianity has become more widely accepted.

- Of all the groups, Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotian groups have the *weakest* communities due to their limited size and resources.

Mixed Achievement in AA Communities: Strong and Dispersed Networks

Filipino and Japanese Communities

- Filipinos comprise about 20% and Japanese about 8% of the total AA population. Census data shows that one-third of the Japanese are U.S.-born and of mixed descent.
- Educational outcomes are bimodal for Filipinos and Japanese.
- Generational status for Japanese and Filipinos has some bearing on their achievement; educational trends appear to worsen over time.
- Both Filipinos and Japanese are *dispersed*, speak English, and have job access, allowing them more access and easier acculturation in mainstream America.
- Filipinos and Japanese generally have high structural characteristics.
- Many Filipinos are middle- and upper-class professionals, particularly in the health professions or other science-related fields. Many Japanese have professional, managerial, or office/sales skills.
- Many Filipino families practice Catholicism and value extended family members (e.g., godparents). Many Japanese families do not have any religious identification.
- Due to their *dispersed* nature, Japanese and Filipino coethnic resources and opportunities are generally limited as they rely less on their coethnic communities for educational and economic opportunities.

Vietnamese Communities

- Vietnamese families comprise 10% of the AA population. They are the largest SEA group in the U.S.
- Educational outcomes are mixed for Vietnamese students but are higher than their SEA counterparts.
- They are generally characterized as a *strong* coethnic community.
- Many Vietnamese are middle class with professional or managerial skills, but skills and socioeconomic status also range in their community.
- Vietnamese families practice Confucianism, Mahayana Buddhism, and Catholicism. Their largely Confucian background makes them more collectivistic and similar to the EAs.

- *Strong* Vietnamese communities have more ethnic social capital than Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotians due to their *stronger* networks and resources.

Similarities and Differences Across Coethnic Communities

- Culturally, the shared importance of the family unit and parenting were dominant themes in the literature. However, all groups varied in terms of their culture, language, religion, traditions, and practices.
- Structurally, socioeconomic status, income levels, educational backgrounds, job access, and skills also varied across higher and lower achieving AA communities.
- Coethnic communities for higher and lower achieving AA groups vary in terms of their strength. Depending on the nature of the coethnic community, resources and opportunities can also vary for their coethnic members.

Conclusion and Implications

This study provides a cultural and structural lens to understand the nature of coethnic communities for both higher and lower achieving AA communities. The extensive literature review and census data revealed wide variation across major AA groups. Based on these findings, there are several important implications that can be drawn from this study.

First, all coethnic communities are different, and we can learn from all of them. While the study found some similarities, there were more differences when comparing AA coethnic communities, ethnic social capital, and educational outcomes. From the key findings, we know that all groups varied in terms of their culture, traditions, religion, and practices. Structurally, socioeconomic status, educational backgrounds, job access, and professional skills also varied significantly across AA communities. Together, they produce unique resources and opportunities in each respective community.

Coethnic communities vary in terms of their strength, often signaling similar strength in terms of their ethnic social capital (Coleman, 1990; Paik et al., 2014; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Zhou & Kim, 2006). As described earlier, coethnics can only help each other within the limits of their own community's resources and opportunities (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Ethnic social capital varies in strong, dispersed, or weak communities and provides unique resources for that community. *Strong* communities have more access to and support from coethnic resources and opportunities based on their structural and cultural factors. For example, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese have strong ethnic social structures (e.g., ethnic programs, businesses, churches, or other ethnic organizations) due to their sheer numbers as well as their entrepreneurial and labor

market skills. Based on Confucianism, their cultural beliefs allow them to view their institutional networks as family units, which reinforce their tightly knit cultures and coethnic support. Their strong family units and filial piety also appear to reinforce high expectations and accountability for their children in education and other areas. Based on the literature, ethnic programs play an important role for these groups (Zhou & Kim, 2006).

Dispersed communities, on the other hand, generate fewer forms of capital compared to strong communities just by their nature of being dispersed. For example, Indians, Japanese, and Filipinos are all dispersed and not as concentrated compared to *strong* communities. Many often live in non-ethnic middle-class neighborhoods. Their middle to highly skilled professions and their abilities to speak English upon arrival (or for those who have been here for generations) allow them to navigate mainstream America more easily than other groups. Their independence and assimilation have allowed them to become more dispersed and less reliant on their own coethnic communities for educational or economic opportunities.

Weak communities, simply by nature of being weaker and smaller, have the least skills, education, and resources (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). For example, Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotians have the least amount of social, cultural, and human capital compared to other groups. Their post-war arrival as refugees bore major challenges in terms of their educational and economic mobility (Kula & Paik, 2016). Additionally, their limited ability to speak English upon arrival has further complicated their assimilation and access to jobs. As described earlier, as with all groups, Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotians have unique cultural traits and practices. One such unique practice is early marriage for girls as young as their early teens, particularly for Hmong and Cambodians (Culhane-Pera & Xiong, 2003; Smith-Hefner, 1993; Yang, 2003). Much of the literature expresses concerns regarding early (teen) marriage and subsequent pregnancy during the school years for these groups, linking the practice to lower socioeconomic outcomes among other factors (Vang & Bogenschutz, 2014). However, some scholars also call for caution and cultural understanding regarding early marriage and other non-Eurocentric practices (Peng & Solheim, 2015; Vang & Bogenschutz, 2014). Scholars also point out that negative outcomes are not universal for these women; for some, their cultural values including early marriage could help them to stay more focused and responsible in their own pursuit of education (Chhuon et al., 2010; Lee, 1997; Lee & Hawkins, 2008; Shah, 2007; Yang, 2003). With a new growing generation in the U.S., these practices are slowly changing, but more research is still needed to understand the impact of early marriage and pregnancy for these groups (Peng & Solheim, 2015; Vang & Bogenschutz, 2014). To better understand

the needs of Southeast Asian students and their families, educators and other stakeholders need to build bridges with their ethnic communities (Kula & Paik, 2016; Paik et al., 2014).

Second, based on the literature, parents are a tremendous resource for all groups (Stevens & Patel, 2015). All AA communities uphold the family unit; parents play a critical role, and education is seen as a means to economic and social mobility. The literature, however, consistently emphasizes parents' expectations and involvement in South Asian, East Asian, and Vietnamese students' education (Asian American Institute, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2012). It was harder to find research regarding parent involvement in Hmong, Cambodian, and Laotian families, but literature on these groups is limited in general. However, Adler's (2004) work is one exception on home-to-school connections in the Hmong community. South Asian parents, particularly Indian parents, appear to have the highest expectations for their children regarding education compared to any other AA group (Pew Research Center, 2012). The literature and census data confirm they have some of the highest achievement rates and the most schooling compared to any other AA group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). At the same time, many of these South Asian parents have structural factors in their favor. Many South Asian immigrants arrived with advanced degrees and professional skills as opposed to most Southeast Asians, making it more advantageous for their children.

Nevertheless, the overall literature on AA parents conveys the importance of their role, their involvement, and expectations. As children's first teachers, parental involvement and expectations are foundational to the success of their own children (Jeynes, 2010; Redding, Murphy, & Sheley, 2011; Walberg & Paik, 1997). Since children spend the most time at home and school in their early years (Walberg & Paik, 1997), parents and teachers need to collaborate toward student success. Schools can and should make a concerted effort to reach out to families to support student success, particularly in the case of struggling AA groups; teachers and schools can work together with parents, families, and their ethnic communities (Kula & Paik, 2016).

Third, key stakeholders need to develop healthy partnerships with culturally and linguistically diverse families, communities, and schools (Grant & Ray, 2010; Lim, 2012; Paik & Walberg, 2007; Tripses & Scroggs, 2009). Stakeholders include parents, students, teachers, school leaders, school counselors, social workers, and other practitioners (Bailey & Bradbury-Bailey, 2010; Grant & Ray, 2010). Research shows that family-school-community partnerships can help reinforce more stability and positive environments for students (Jeynes, 2007; Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding, & Walberg, 2005; Redding et al., 2011). Building bridges with ethnic communities can also be strategic as

they have a number of valuable resources that can enhance and further support children's learning and development (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001, 2004; Paik et al., 2014). Access to more educational resources and opportunities can only happen with collaborative efforts across schools and communities, particularly for lower achieving AA communities. Community empowerment and partnerships can help students to thrive from home to school to community (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001, 2004; Epstein, 2005; Kreider & Raghupathy, 2010).

Though parents support their children, they may not always know how to get involved in schools or even in their own communities. Language often serves as a barrier to these partnerships (Lim, 2012; Wang, 2008). For those communities where English is not their first language, language interpreters are key in establishing more communication and trust (Grant & Ray, 2010; Hiatt-Michael, 2008). Building trust is key for stakeholders to work effectively together (Kreider & Raghupathy, 2010; Lim, 2012; Tripses & Scroggs, 2009).

Teachers and community members can help bridge these opportunities (Martinez-Gonzales & Paik, 2005; Patrikakou et al., 2005). For struggling AA groups, it is important that schools reach out to families and communities, and vice versa. Building these partnerships can help educators understand the cultural and structural factors of diverse AA students (Lim, 2012; Wang, 2008). This article can further serve as a resource on cultural and structural knowledge for educators working with diverse AA populations. As noted, all Asian communities are not alike, and this knowledge base is important in better understanding and supporting diverse AA families and their communities. Schools can start by offering professional development to their teachers, preservice teachers, administrators, and school counselors about cultural diversity and awareness, specifically about diverse AA communities, their historical contexts, and their current needs. Educators and other stakeholders can build relationships and programs with Asian immigrant families and their ethnic communities.

Fourth, ethnic social structures are housed within coethnic communities. These physical buildings and institutions are important as they are all part of the community. Ethnic social structures are ethnic educational programs, organizations, churches, temples, mosques, businesses, and other ethnic institutions that reinforce culture, structure, and the community's values. While ethnic social capital in strong communities appears to be "stronger," it is important to note that all coethnic resources and opportunities, whether strong, weak, or dispersed, still help to serve the general needs of that community. Although it was not possible within the scope of this article, a study that discusses tangible ethnic social structures would provide further insights into how cultural and structural factors converge within these communities (see Part 2 of 2

in this issue for a follow-up study that applies our proposed cultural–structural framework and examines ethnic afterschool and language programs).

In summary, this work challenges the monolithic stereotype of Asian Americans. While this research systematically examined the similarities and differences across AA populations, more research needs to be conducted and disaggregated on these populations. As AA populations continue to grow in the U.S., it is important for educators to have cultural knowledge and awareness of these groups. By understanding the characteristics of diverse AA communities, educators can better understand access, resources, and opportunities. Moreover, parents, community members, and stakeholders can work together to stabilize the efforts of struggling AA communities.

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