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The “Model Minority” and Their Discontent: Examining Peer Discrimination and Harassment of Chinese American Immigrant Youth

Desiree Baolian Qin, Niobe Way, Meenal Rana

Abstract

Using an ecological framework, the authors explore the reasons for peer discrimination and harassment reported by many Chinese American youth. They draw on longitudinal data collected on 120 first- and second-generation Chinese American students from two studies conducted in Boston and New York. Our analyses suggested that reasons for these experiences of harassment lay with the beliefs about academic ability, the students’ immigrant status and language barriers, within-group conflicts, and their physical appearance that made them different from other ethnic minority or majority students. Implications and future research are also discussed. © 2008 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

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Eighteen-year-old Chen Tsu was waiting on a Brooklyn subway platform after school when four high school classmates approached him and demanded cash. He showed them his empty pockets, but they attacked him anyway, taking turns pummeling his face. He was scared and injured—bruised and swollen for several days—but hardly surprised. At his school, Lafayette High in Brooklyn, Chinese immigrant students like him are harassed and bullied so routinely that school officials in June agreed to a Department of Justice consent decree to curb alleged “severe and pervasive harassment directed at Asian-American students by their classmates.” . . . Nationwide, Asian students say they’re often beaten, threatened and called ethnic slurs by other young people, and school safety data suggest that the problem may be worsening. Youth advocates say these Asian teens, stereotyped as high-achieving students who rarely fight back, have for years borne the brunt of ethnic tension as Asian communities expand and neighborhoods become more racially diverse.

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Racism has been part of the Asian American experience since the beginning of Asian American history. Despite considerable progress that Asian Americans have made in various domains, most notably in education, they continue to experience discrimination and unfair treatment (Young & Takeuchi, 1998). Recent research shows that Asian American youth consistently report higher levels of peer discrimination and harassment in and out of school than their non-Asian peers (Kohatsu et al., 2000; Qin, Way, & Mukherjee, 2008; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Way, Santos, Niwa, & Kim, in press). Negative peer experiences have detrimental effects on students' psychological and social well-being (Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006). However, limited research to date has been conducted to examine why such high levels of peer discrimination and harassment happen to Asian American students. In this chapter, we draw from two qualitative studies conducted in Boston and New York to explore the reasons for these frequent reports of peer discrimination and harassment among Chinese American first- and second-generation youth. Findings from this study can help researchers and practitioners understand why peer discrimination happens and inform schools and other social agencies in their efforts to intervene and protect students from harassment and victimization.

Peer Context and Adolescent Development

The peer context is considered a critical ecological context in adolescent development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Developmental research has consistently documented that peer relations have a significant impact on adolescent psychological well-being (Jones, Newman, & Bautista, 2005). High-quality peer relations protect adolescents from social anxieties (La Greca & Harrison, 2005), enhance social competence and interpersonal

sensitivity, and are linked to positive psychological adjustment (Greene et al., 2006; Way & Pahl, 2001). Negative peer relations (e.g., peer discrimination and victimization) has been found to be related to low self-esteem, depressive symptoms, and social anxiety in adolescents (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006; Gee, Spencer, Chen, & Takeuchi, 2007; La Greca & Harrison, 2005; Noh, Kaspa, & Wichrama, 2007; Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004). Recent studies conducted by Way and her research team suggest that peer discrimination based on race or ethnicity by non-Asian peers is a major challenge for many Asian American youth across the United States (e.g., Greene et al., 2006; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). In one of their studies, peer ethnic/race discrimination, or the extent to which students experienced racial or ethnic discrimination by their peers was more influential in the prediction of psychological well-being than peer support (Greene et al., 2006).

Peer Discrimination and Harassment

A number of recent studies show that Asian American students report higher levels of ethnic/race-based peer discrimination than students from other minority groups (Alvarez, Juang, & Liang, 2006; Choi, Meininger, & Roberts, 2006; Fisher et al., 2000; Goto, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2002; Greene et al., 2006; Grossman & Liang, 2008; Kohatsu et al., 2000; Rivas, Hughes, & Way, in press; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Way et al., in press). Alvarez and colleagues' (2006) study of Asian American college students found that 98% reported experiencing at least one racial micro-aggression such as being treated rudely in the past year. Fisher and colleagues (2000) found that Chinese and Korean students reported higher levels of distress from peer discrimination than their African American, Hispanic, and White peers. More specifically, over 80% of Chinese and Korean American students reported being called names, and close to 50% reported being excluded from social activities or threatened as a result of their race. Rivas-Drake, Hughes, and Way (2008) found that Chinese American early adolescents reported higher levels of peer teasing and harassment than their African American peers. Similarly, Way and her colleagues found in their 4–5 year longitudinal study of discrimination among Black, Latino, and Asian American high school students that Chinese American youth from predominantly immigrant families reported the highest levels of peer discrimination. Further, they found that Chinese American students' levels of perceived peer discrimination remained consistently high through high school years (Greene et al., 2006; Way et al., in press). In addition, they found that African Americans and Latino Americans reported discrimination by their teachers and other adults, whereas the Chinese American youth reported physical as well as verbal harassment by their non-Asian peers (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Qin et al., 2008). These patterns were particularly salient for those Chinese

Americans who were first-generation immigrants. Other studies have found that Asian Americans were frequently teased and bullied by non-Asian peers (e.g., Huang, 2000; Louie, 2004).

Drawing on Mead's symbolic interactionism framework, Grossman and Liang (2008) describe mechanisms through which an individual is influenced by the images mirrored back from others to the self through a process where these evaluative feedbacks are internalized in one's identity and sense of self-worth. Suárez-Orozco (2000) illustrates a similar process where "negative social mirroring" can lead an immigrant youth to develop negative self-perceptions. These negative self-perceptions, in turn, are likely to be associated with poor psychological adjustment outcomes (Alvarez & Helms, 2001). Adolescents are particularly attuned to external messages about themselves (Phinney, 2000). Indeed, research shows that experiences of discrimination and negative appraisals about one's ethnic group are often internalized in the adolescents' sense of self and may reduce feelings of control in adolescence and foster feelings of helplessness, frustration, and depressive moods over time (Greene et al., 2006). Among Asian American youths and adolescents, ethnic/race-based peer discrimination and harassment have been linked to increases in depression and declines in self-esteem (Alvarez & Helms, 2001; Green et al., 2006; Grossman & Liang, 2008; Lee, 2005; Qin et al., 2008; Rivas-Drake, Hughes, & Way, 2008).

Although research has documented high prevalence of peer discrimination experienced by Asian American youths and their negative impact on these students' psychological adjustment, few studies have closely examined why such high levels of discrimination happen in the first place to Asian American youths. Some scholars have pointed out that the underlying reasons for discrimination may be different for Asian Americans than African Americans (Fisher et al., 2000; Grossman & Liang, 2008). Although discrimination against African Americans may be related to competence, discrimination against Asians is more likely associated with their "perpetual foreigner" status (Cheryan & Morin, 2005). Examining why Asian American adolescents experience peer discrimination can help inform school-based intervention efforts that aim to protect students from perpetual harassment and victimization and improve their psychological and social adjustment. Drawing on qualitative in-depth data from two longitudinal studies of first- and second-generation Chinese American youth that took place from 1996 to 2001, our investigation aims to explore the reasons Chinese American youth from immigrant families report such high levels of peer discrimination and harassment. We focus on the experiences of Chinese adolescents from immigrant families for two reasons. First, Chinese Americans constitute one of the largest subgroups among Asian Americans. Second, research has shown that peer discrimination distress is particularly pronounced in Asian American youths, including Chinese American youth, from immigrant backgrounds (Qin et al., 2008; Tsai, 2006).

Method

Sample. Our sample consists of 120 adolescents from two qualitative studies of Chinese American students in public schools in metropolitan areas. One study was conducted in the Boston area and had a sample of 80 Chinese American students and the second study was conducted in New York City and had a sample of 40 Chinese American students. Of the participants, the great majority (88%) were first-generation immigrant students, born in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, or Macau, and immigrated to the United States before age 10. The rest were second-generation immigrants, whose parents emigrated from mainland China. The adolescents in the study conducted in New York City were recruited from mainstream English classrooms and were fluent English speakers. The adolescents in the study conducted in Boston were recruited mostly from English as Second Language classrooms in urban schools. Some students (about 20%) were recruited from mainstream English classrooms in middle-class, mostly White neighborhoods. The sample was fairly balanced in terms of gender: 55% ($n = 66$) of the participants were girls and 45% were boys ($n = 54$). The average age of the adolescents was 13 years at the beginning of the study ($SD = 1.70$). Students in our sample came from mixed socioeconomic families. Roughly a quarter of the parents attained elementary education; a quarter of the parents attained middle or high school level education; and close to a quarter of the parents had some college or beyond college education. Overall, our sample was loosely representative of the Chinese American population in the United States, particularly in terms of education level. The large range in years of education and professional experiences in our sample was consistent with census data that Chinese immigrants were overrepresented at both high and low ends of the educational spectrum and form a bimodal distribution in terms of education (U.S. Census, 2003).

Procedure. The data for both studies were collected from 1996 to 2001 (the first study from 1997–2001 and the second study from 1996–000), using semistructured and structured interviews with Chinese American adolescents from immigrant families. Five annual interviews were conducted with students in the Boston study and in the New York study. A team of trained researchers, including the authors, conducted interviews with the adolescents. In the student interviews, we asked questions about peer relationships (e.g., “How would you describe your relationships with peers at school?”). Given the English fluency of most of the adolescents in the New York-based study (they were more likely to come from second-generation immigrant families), all the interviews with these adolescents were conducted in English. For the Boston-based study, the majority of the interviews were conducted in Mandarin or Cantonese in the first 3 years and more than a third of the interviews were conducted in English in the final 2 years of the study (others were conducted in Mandarin or Cantonese). All interviews conducted were taped and translated into English (if conducted in other languages).

Data Analyses. We used a process of open coding (see Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to generate themes from the interview data from both studies. We first read each interview and created “narrative summaries” that condensed the interview material while retaining the essence of the stories being told by the adolescents (see Miller, 1991). Data analysts who looked for themes in the summaries read each narrative summary independently. A theme retained for further analysis had to be identified as a theme by at least two of the three authors independently, in any one year of the study. Once themes were generated and agreed upon, each data analyst returned to the original interviews and noted in what year in the project and where in the interview itself these themes emerged.

It is important to note that the findings presented below are limited by several methodological constraints. The sample was neither random nor representative. Our participants were first- or second-generation immigrant adolescents, all attending schools in urban areas in the northeastern United States. Some issues that we discuss, e.g., immigration status and language barriers, were salient issues for this groups of adolescents and were not likely to represent experiences of third-generation and beyond Chinese American adolescents. However, other issues related to physical size or the model minority perception may apply to a wider range of Chinese American students.

Results

Analyses of data show that more than half of students in our studies reported incidents of ethnic and racial tension and peer discrimination at school. The form of peer discrimination included physical harassment as well as verbal taunts and slurs. Students reported being “beaten,” “bullied,” “tripped,” “hit,” “pushed,” “kicked,” and “thrown things at” both inside the school (e.g., in the hallway, or in the bathroom) and outside (e.g., in a park, or on the school bus). For example, Lin, a 13-year-old girl, said, “I was beaten and bullied here in the U.S. . . . the Black and White students beat me and bullied me, like when I was in a park, they’d throw things at me for no reason . . . There are some Blacks here, and Whites as well, they bully us all the time.”

Similarly, when asked what the most difficult thing was after migration, 16-year-old Carl who came from Hong Kong responded,

The most difficult thing is being bullied by both Blacks and Whites. They bully Chinese and Vietnamese students. They walk by and push you deliberately. They use expletives . . . In Hong Kong, no one treats me like that . . . They are not targeting one individual student, they target the entire group of Chinese students.

Students also reported verbal harassment at schools, e.g., being “cursed,” called racial slurs like “Chino,” and “told to go back to China.” For example, 13-year-old Lin talked about being called names by her non-Chinese

peers at school, “They call us ‘girls from the country.’ They don’t respect us . . . [It happens] sometimes at the hallways, sometimes in the homeroom.” Michael, a 14-year-old boy, said about his non-Chinese peers at school: “They usually walk up to me [and go] ‘Hey Chino.’ They just insult me [and] my race.”

Besides these visible and audible forms of harassment and bullying, students also reported more subtle, nonverbal forms of poor treatment by some of their peers such as being ignored, socially ostracized, or being given certain “disgusted” “bad looks,” students occupying seats and not allowing Chinese students to sit, or students not wanting to sit next to Chinese students.

Factors Associated With Harassment and Discrimination by Peers.

The peer discrimination and harassment experienced by Chinese American youth have been previously reported (Greene et al., 2006; Qin et al., 2008; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Way et al., in press). What is often missing from these accounts, however, is a more thorough understanding of why these acts of discrimination and harassment are so frequent. Our research suggests there are five factors that motivate much of the discrimination and harassment experienced by Chinese American youth: (1) immigration status and language issues; (2) the higher levels of academic achievement among some of the Chinese American students in comparison to their non-Chinese peers; (3) the perceived preference for the Chinese American students by the teachers in the school; (4) differences in physical size between Chinese American students and non-Asian students; and (5) lack of group solidarity among the Chinese American students. Some of these themes have been discussed previously (see Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Way et al., in press).

Immigration Status and Language. Our analysis shows that first-generation immigrant students were the most likely to report verbal and physical bullying. During interviews, first-generation immigrant students talked about three main factors that often led to peer prejudice and bullying: (a) speaking Chinese; (b) their English accent; and (c) their immigrant status, i.e., being in bilingual classes.

For most first-generation Chinese American students who often relied on Chinese (e.g., Mandarin, Cantonese, or other dialects) for communication, speaking a different language was one thing that was often easily picked out by non-Chinese peers. For example, Sally, who had been in the United States for 6 years, described the situation when she first arrived: “When I was in sixth grade, people would always say that I was speaking Chinese with others. They would imitate what we said and laugh about it . . . They don’t know anything [about China], yet they think what I do is strange.”

Lack of English proficiency is another reason they got teased by their non-Chinese peers. For example, 16-year-old Tina remembered, “When I first came to the U.S., I did not speak that much English. Some people at school teased me, made fun of me, and spoke something in English that I did not understand.” Chinese students also reported being teased for having accents or making mistakes while speaking English. Tommy said after

3 years of being in the U.S., “the most difficult thing is English. My English is still not as good as my classmates’. If I make a mistake while I’m talking, they laugh at me.” Tommy and many other recently arrived Chinese students were often quite preoccupied with their lack of English proficiency, which was exacerbated by their native peers’ language policing and teasing. In fact, May, a second-generation Chinese girl, stated that there was a stereotype of “typical Chinese can’t speak good English” at her school:

They call you “Chino” and stuff like that. And then even more, they think that typical Chinese can’t speak good English . . . sometimes I get this feeling that, yeah, they’ll be thinking, like . . . Chinese kids, they learn to speak English, they speak, you know, broken English or something like that, you know? So, they’ll be making fun of you if you do.

Although the students often attributed the harassment to actual or perceived language barriers, language barriers are confounded with immigration status or being in bilingual classes so that those who were first-generation immigrants to the United States were more likely to feel harassed due to language barriers by peers. “We are bilingual, they are regular,” was a common sentiment for many first-generation immigrant students who experienced tension and harassment at school.

Academic Achievement and Its Discontent. Another common factor that students cited for being bullied is related to the “model minority” stereotype. In interviews, about 15% of our respondents talked about being treated poorly or bullied for “getting good grades,” “being too smart,” being “geeks,” “nerdy,” “studying too much,” and “not having fun.” For example, 14-year-old Lillian talked about being ostracized socially by her non-Chinese peers: “Sometimes people in my school do not consider me as their friend. They sometimes say things that hurt my feelings, but they are not aware of it. For example, when I asked them what they were talking about, they said, ‘none of your business.’ Later on, when they did not understand the homework, they came to ask me. Maybe I am of a different race . . . or maybe I am more hardworking than them . . . they always say I study too much or do too much work.” Academically Lillian felt validated because other students would come to her to get help; however, socially she felt isolated and shunned by her peers.

Students also talked about the resentment other students felt against the Chinese American students regarding academics. For example, Bobby said, “in school some Americans will bully Chinese and tease we’re too smart.” When asked to give advice to recently arrived immigrant students, Bobby said, “Expect what you wouldn’t expect. Everything is different. The way people here do things. The way school is. So consider things before doing them, the effects, etc. For example, most Chinese kids are very smart and raise hands all the time. People think you are a nerd and you are showing off.” The fear of being perceived as a “nerd” and the poor treatment from peers because of their “nerdy” image were discussed more often in the inter-

views by boys than by the girls. However, during interviews, some girls also mentioned resentment from peers because of their academic achievement. For example, Xue, shortly after arrival in her American school, related that “When I first came to the U.S., some students in my school asked me what nationality I was. I answered ‘Chinese.’ They then give me this disgusted look . . . they again asked ‘why do you Chinese always have to do better than us?’” Resentment from other students toward the Chinese American students regarding their perceived academic skills was felt among the Black students as well. When asked if she had ever experienced discrimination, Sheerah, an African American student from a New York school that some of our Chinese participants attended, commented, “The teachers think that the Chinese kids can do everything.”

Teachers’ Preferences and Student Resentment. As discussed by Rosenbloom and Way (2004), our interview data indicated that it was often the teachers’ explicit statements that “Chinese kids can do everything” that frustrated the non-Chinese kids more than the Chinese American students’ actual academic achievement. In many classes, non-Chinese and Chinese students discussed the obvious preference that many of the teachers had for the Chinese American students and how both the Chinese and non-Chinese students thought it was unfair to the other students. A Chinese American boy in his sophomore year of high school discussed at great length the unjust treatment that the Black and Latino students received because of the teachers’ high expectations for the Chinese American students and their lower expectations for “everyone else.” There were, furthermore, numerous examples of teachers’ making explicit statements to other students as well as to the researchers on the New York and Boston projects that they greatly preferred to teach the Chinese students. One English teacher the first author interviewed in a school of mainly African American, Latino, and Chinese students sang high praises of the Chinese students: “They are so hard-working and so respectful, always on time, just such a delight to work with! If they get me to teach students like this, I will never retire for the rest of my life!” These explicit preferences made many of the non-Chinese students quite frustrated and angry, and they vented their anger on the Chinese American students themselves.

On the one hand, the model minority myth may serve some Chinese American students well by encouraging the teachers to have high expectations of them; on the other hand, this myth haunted the Chinese kids as it led to other students, Black, Latino, and White, to resent and harass them for the preferential treatment they received from the teachers (see Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). This complex dynamic was evident across most of the schools in which we conducted our research.

Physical Attributes. Another reason for peer discrimination and harassment was related to physical size and strength. According to about 20% of our participants, Chinese American students, both first- and second-generation immigrant students, were often perceived as “small,” “weak,”

“skinny,” “nerdy,” and easy targets for bullying. This is most pronounced in boys’ experiences. For example, Qiang, a 14-year-old boy, said, “American people think all Chinese people are weak, they always bother Chinese people, always call them ‘Chinos’ and all this stuff, ’cuz they think that Chinese are like, all weak; that these Americans should beat the Chinese up—that’s why they bother them.” Similarly, 16-year-old boy Ming, who attended school with mostly Chinese, Latino, and Black peers, talked about peer bullying in his school by Black and Latino students: “they always picking on me; so I’m not sure it’s ’cause I’m skinny or the glasses or something . . . that’s why sometimes I don’t like being Chinese ’cause they’re small; they get picked on by these big Black and Spanish people.” Thus for Ming and Qiang, peer bullying and teasing could at least partially be attributed to the perception of a lack in physical size, strength, both important signs of masculinity in schools.

Physical size and perceived weakness was a struggle that at its root is a struggle of masculinity for many Chinese American boys (Eng, 2001; Yoshikawa, Wilson, Chae, & Cheng, 2004; Wilson & Yoshikawa, 2004). Traditional Chinese culture places education, morality, self-cultivation, and gentleness in men as valued qualities (Sung, 1987). In the Chinese culture, physical strength is often contrasted negatively with mental or intellectual capacities. The Chinese idiom “strong limbs, simple mind” clearly shows the bias against physical size and strength. However, in the U.S. context, proving one’s masculinity through activities involving physical strength such as sports is such an important part of male identity development that boys learn to wear the “masculine straightjacket” very early on (Pollack, 1998). The lack of emphasis on Western norms of masculinity within the Chinese American community (Eng, 2001) may lead to particularly high levels of teasing or bullying from peers at school.

“We don’t stick together.” A number of our students attributed the fact that Chinese “don’t stick together” as one of the reasons they were so often the victims of discrimination and harassment. Many tensions among the Chinese American students based on immigrant status discouraged group solidarity among them. For example, Ting, a 15-year-old Chinese girl, talked about being teased by her Chinese peers because she did not speak English well:

When I just came to United states because I am Chinese right and I don’t understand English then my classmates, just like, teasing me, just like, “you don’t know English, why you here?” . . . I don’t understand. All the teasing—people who just like born in here like ABC [American-born Chinese]. I think they should not do that to me because the same thing is they are Chinese right? . . . and they are just like Americans.

Conflicts among immigrants from different regions of China have also emerged in recent years. In both New York and Boston, the within-group

tension among Chinese students was primarily between the Cantonese and the Fujianese, people from two adjacent provinces in Southern China. The Fujianese are newcomers whereas the Cantonese have been in the United States for a longer period of time. Conflicts in concentrated urban areas have been noted in recent years as large number of Fujianese are perceived as “taking over” sections of the traditionally Cantonese territories in major urban Chinatowns in New York and Boston. The conflicts in the communities have also been felt in schools. Tian, a Fujianese girl living in Boston who had been in the United States for a number of years, observed in her school that when she first came a few years ago, she was the only Fujianese student in her class; however, now, “almost half the class is Fujianese.” Tian talked about her efforts to help the newly arrived Fujianese students who often felt shunned by the Cantonese students because of regional and language differences: “[in the bilingual program,] because they speak Cantonese, and if you don’t speak Cantonese, you will feel that they are strangers. They won’t talk to you. They feel that it is not OK to befriend Fujianese people.” Another student in New York expressed her perplexity around the tension between the Cantonese and the Fukeneses:

Even Chinese people tease Chinese people, I mean like Cantonese people and Fukeneses Fujianese people. They don’t get along with each other. I don’t know, I mean, I could get along with anyone fine as long as they don’t judge me, but I don’t get what’s the point of having Cantonese against Fukeneses people and Fukeneses people against Cantonese.

Conflicts resulting from generational (e.g., first vs. second generation), regional (e.g., Cantonese vs. Fujianese, or Hong Kong vs. Mainland China), linguistic (e.g., different Chinese dialects) differences within the Chinese American community are increasingly becoming salient as more diverse groups of Chinese are immigrating to the United States in recent years. As our findings suggest, the differences may also serve to divide the Chinese youth in schools, which also contribute to high levels of negative peer experiences.

The differences within the Chinese American community are particularly difficult for students because of the potential support that fellow Chinese peers could provide to deal with discrimination. For example, Bobby, who talked about Chinese students being teased and verbally bullied at school for being smart, had the following advice for students who experienced peer discrimination: “Talk to someone, their friends or someone else, if they face discrimination. But not talk to parents because they can’t really help you that much—they don’t really understand discrimination among kids which is more verbal.” Indeed, very few students we interviewed indicated that they discussed these experiences with their parents. They usually resorted to fellow Chinese peers for support. When there is division among the Chinese peers, coping can be more difficult.

Discussion

In this chapter, we explored the factors that perpetuate the high rates of discrimination reported by Chinese American first- and second-generation immigrant students. Our findings show that Chinese American immigrant students experienced high levels of verbal, physical, and nonverbal discrimination and harassment from non-Chinese peers, confirming previous research findings (Greene et al., 2006; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). Our study contributes to the literature on peer bullying and discrimination by highlighting the multiple contributing factors that may be associated with peer harassment and discrimination for Chinese American youth, including immigration status and languages, the model minority perception, physical size, and conflicts within the Chinese American community. These experiences of harassment are likely to be a significant source of stress and have been found to be linked to poor psychological adjustment for Chinese American students, particularly during adolescence (Greene et al., 2006; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004).

Our findings point to important issues facing Chinese American students that have not been adequately addressed in current research and practice. First, academic achievement continues to be the focus of most research on Chinese and Asian American youth. A growing body of research suggests that these youth and particularly those from immigrant families are also experiencing remarkably high levels of depression (Centers for Disease Control, 1995, 1997, 2003), low-levels of self-esteem (Greene et al., 2006; Rhee, Chang, & Rhee, 2003; Way & Robinson, 2003), and poor social adjustment (Uba, 1994; Qin, 2008; Way & Chen, 2000; Way & Pahl, 2001). More research is needed to understand why this Asian American youth experience higher levels of psychosocial distress than expected, particularly in the context of their relatively high academic achievement. Second, as our findings demonstrate, the social and emotional toll of the “model minority” perception can be quite high for Chinese American youth. In the last two decades, research has been conducted to understand the ways in which the “model minority” myth ignores the diverse academic needs of Asian American students (see Lee, 1996). However, few studies have examined the ways in which this stereotype negatively influences the social worlds of Asian American students. As our findings demonstrate, the perception that Asian American students are smart and favored by teachers often leads to peer ostracism and resentment. It is important for future research to continue to examine how the model minority stereotype may negatively impact the social and psychological adjustment of Asian American students. Third, for Chinese American boys, the social toll of the “model minority” image may be even higher. The construction of masculinity is a deeply cultural process with important implications for social dynamics at school. On one hand, the lack of emphasis on aggression or physical toughness may help Chinese American boys in their educational success (Connell, 2000). On the other hand, this emphasis is in

sharp contrast to the mainstream code of masculinity. Chinese American boys thus are likely to be easy targets in the other boys' efforts to prove their own masculinity (Qin, 2008; Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004). Finally, the diversity among the Chinese American students at school is likely to mirror the increasing diversity within the larger Chinese American community due to generation, regional, linguistic, and cultural differences. At most schools in the urban areas with a substantial Chinese American population, there is a lack of identity or cohesive force that can unify students to support each other, particularly when faced with peer bullying. Most of the research on Chinese American students has focused on the Cantonese-speaking students near Chinatown. The experiences and dynamics of the recent immigrants from Fujian province and some northern provinces and how these dynamics influence students' social relations at school should also be examined.

In the majority of cases of ethnic tension and harassment, the school authorities do an inadequate job of addressing these issues and protecting the victims. Quite often, schools choose to avoid dealing with these issues that are considered sensitive and troublesome. As Semons (1991) pointed out, "Negative comments about Asians were overheard in the presence of teachers, who did nothing to interrupt them. Students could therefore infer that prejudice against Asians was acceptable" (p. 147). It is important for teachers and other school personnel to be aware of how these dynamics may shape the experiences of Chinese American students at school. In particular, it would be helpful for schools to establish guidelines and direct interventions in curbing different forms of peer bullying, e.g., verbal and physical harassment. To stop the root of peer bullying, it is also important to establish a healthy school environment. This can be done at the classroom level by introducing students to different cultures with a positive light in social studies curricula. It can also be achieved through different organized activities and programs at school that aim specifically to promote cultural understanding and exchanges between students from different backgrounds. Maintaining a healthy school environment where students from different backgrounds can interact positively will promote the healthy development of all children, girls and boys, native and immigrant alike.

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DESIREE BAOLIAN QIN is an assistant professor of human development in the Department of Family and Child Ecology at Michigan State University.

NIOBE WAY is a professor of applied psychology at New York University.

MEENAL RANA is a doctoral candidate in Child Development in the Department of Family and Child Ecology at Michigan State University.