

## **Are Asian American Employees a Model Minority or Just a Minority?**

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This literature review note attempts to review and import from Asian American studies into organizational behavior key aspects of the Model Minority Thesis literature as it relates to workforce diversity. The supportive and critical perspectives on the Model Minority Thesis are explored. On the supportive side, it is argued that Asian Americans are a Model Minority: too successful to be considered a disadvantaged minority. Supporters want other minority groups to emulate Asian Americans and to eliminate affirmative action. Critics disaggregate the statistics used by proponents and find a bimodal distribution; some Asian Americans are economically well off but run into a glass ceiling, whereas others are disadvantaged.

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In this literature review note, I attempt to import into the workforce diversity literature a number of key concepts from Asian American studies pertaining to the notion that Asian Americans are a Model Minority. In Asian American studies, this notion is considered refuted and is referred to as the Model Minority Myth. To distinguish this critical Asian Americanist position from the position taken by the proponents of this notion, the latter shall be referred to as the Model Minority Phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> I also shall use the more neutral term, the Model Minority Thesis.

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According to the Model Minority Phenomenon, Asian Americans are "too successful" to be considered a disadvantaged minority group (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Petersen, 1966). Asian Americans are popularly believed to have high educational attainment, high median family income, low crime rates, a lack of juvenile delinquency, and a lack of mental illness. This high-achiever stereotype was viewed by 80% of 162 Asian American respondents taking an introduction to psychology course at a large Midwestern university as including the following personal characteristics: smart, genius, intelligent, overachiever, nerdy, majoring in law or math or science, 4.0 GPA, competitive and diligent, not having fun, short, wears glasses, speaking English poorly or not at all, having an accent, and an inability to communicate (Oyserman & Sakamoto, 1997). This overachiever stereotype is attributed to an ethic of hard work and a serious attitude that values education. Likewise, human resources managers regard Asian Americans as hard-working and noncomplaining employees (Park, 1992). The Model Minority Thesis is most commonly applied to East Asian American and Asian Indian immigrants from, or descendants of immigrants from, Confucian countries such as China, Japan, or Korea.<sup>2,3</sup>

The body of literature on the Model Minority Thesis in Asian American studies is small. Few questions have been answered through studies beyond the initial study. The limited quantity, varying age, and methodological differences found among these studies do not permit a successful meta-analysis thereof. Instead, this literature review note provides a summary of relevant literature from both the supportive and critical perspectives. Supporters view the Model Minority Thesis as the Model Minority Phenomenon. Critics view it as the Model Minority Myth.

### ARE ASIAN AMERICANS THE MODEL MINORITY?

The Model Minority Thesis on Asian Americans was originated by sociologist William Petersen (1966). Petersen (1966), and more recently Herrnstein and Murray (1994), argued that Japanese Americans have high educational attainment, high median family income, low crime rates, a lack of juvenile delinquency, and a lack of mental illness. *U.S. News & World Report* ran a story emphasizing how Chinese Americans have overcome racial discrimination ("The Success Story," 1966). This stereotype has since been applied to all Asian Americans (Min, 1995; Osajima, 1988; Suzuki, 1977).

The Asian American Model Minority Phenomenon remains in place today as "general knowledge." The general public, including most Asian Americans, believe that Asian Americans are too successful to be considered a disadvantaged minority group.<sup>4</sup> Actually, supporters of the Model Minority Phenomenon have not done enough rigorous scholarly research to support their position and to respond to their critics with further research. Instead, proponents tend to continue to make the same arguments as Petersen (1966) did, despite subsequent research to the contrary.

The assertion that Asian Americans have low crime rates, a lack of juvenile delinquency, and a lack of mental illness has been refuted elsewhere (see Gall & Gall,

1993, chaps. 3, 5; Kitano, 1969; Sue & Morishima, 1982; Sue & Sue, 1973; Wang, 1995, p. 303). Here, I shall discuss the pros and cons of three aspects of the Model Minority Thesis that relate to workforce diversity: (a) educational attainment and family incomes (and employment), (b) employment and occupational dynamics, and (c) the glass ceiling and exploitation. This literature review note concludes with a discussion of the sociohistorical-political context of the Model Minority Thesis.

### **Educational Return on Investment<sup>5</sup>**

One key argument by proponents of the Model Minority Phenomenon is that Asian Americans have high educational attainment. Critics of the Model Minority Phenomenon argue that Asian American educational achievement is an exaggerated myth. Underlying this disagreement is a basic methodological difference between the two sides. Supporters of the Model Minority Phenomenon have used aggregated statistics on educational attainment, occupational distribution, household income, and so on. Critics, by contrast, have disaggregated the supportive side's arguments and find importance in selective immigration, the high numbers of hours worked, the high number of individuals per household, and so on. In short, the critics have found a bimodal distribution within Asian America—both a low-pay, low-skill group and a more educated, higher paid professional group.

Since 1965, when immigration quotas were increased, there has been a steady influx into the United States of educated and skilled Asian immigrants. These immigrants have been counted with lower achieving U.S.-born Asian Americans, thereby "increasing" the mean educational attainment level of all Asian Americans. The selective U.S. immigration policy that favors educated and skilled Asian immigrants, especially scientists and engineers (Bouvier & Gardner, 1986; Fawcett & Carino, 1987), accounts for the misperception of high achievement by native-born Asian Americans (O'Hare & Felt, 1989). Further, Tang (1993b) found that Asian immigrant scientists and engineers earn less than native-born European Americans.<sup>6</sup>

The issue of greatest concern to organizational scholars is not educational attainment in and of itself but educational return on investment (ROI). This is the income derived from increased educational achievement, which can help us look at career development patterns at the organizational unit of analysis. Presumably, most students are motivated to secure a high ROI from their educational expenditures. Based on 1960 census data, Schmid and Nobbe (1965) (the only study available) found that Japanese Americans outperform European Americans (including Hispanics), Chinese Americans, Filipino Americans, Native Americans, and African Americans in the median number of years of schooling and in the percentage of high school graduates.<sup>7</sup> Chinese and Japanese Americans outperform European Americans (including Hispanics), Filipino Americans, Native Americans, and African Americans in the percentage completing 4 years of college (Schmid & Nobbe, 1965).

Despite having higher educational attainment than European Americans, Asian Americans have a lower educational ROI (Cabezas & Kawaguchi, 1988; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1988, 1992; Wong, 1982). European American college graduates earn an additional annual income of \$4,349, whereas Chinese Americans

have an increase of \$1,936 and Asian Indian Americans an increase of \$1,297 (Barringer, Takeuchi, & Xenos, 1990).

In the discourse of the "American Dream," education is seen as a ticket to a better economic and social life. However, Becker (1971) suggests that more educated Asian Americans have more difficulty than do less educated ones in achieving income parity with Euro-Americans. Minorities with more education face more competition with Euro-Americans than do less educated minorities (Tienda & Lii, 1987). Asian Americans are less likely than European Americans to hold tenure track, tenure, or full professor positions (Cabezas, Tam, Lowe, Wong, & Turner, 1989; Thompson & DiTomaso, 1988; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1992). Adding social capital theory to this education versus earnings literature, Friedman and Krackhardt (1997 [this issue]) conclude that Asian Americans are excluded (based on their differentness from the dominant group) from participating in and supporting those social networks in organizations that are the key to career mobility.

### Employment and Occupational Dynamics

Proponents of the position that Asian Americans are a Model Minority assert that Asian Americans have a low unemployment rate. The implication of this assertion is that such a low unemployment rate is desirable and implies success. Asian Americanists agree that the unemployment rate for Asian Americans is comparatively low. However, these critics also point out that strong cultural forces keep the Asian American unemployment rate artificially low. Many underemployed Asian Americans would rather preserve face and work for low pay or work seasonally or part-time than be on public assistance (Ong, 1984). In addition, foreign-born Asian Americans may be willing to work for lower wages in exchange for an employer's sponsorship, enabling them to obtain a green card (permanent residency) (Tang, 1993b, p. 253).

The poverty rate of Asian Americans in Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco is twice that of their European American counterparts (Ong, 1993, 1994). The poverty rate for the Southeast Asian subgroup of Asian America does not reflect economic success. Of the Vietnamese Americans in the United States, 40% live in California. Half of them are on public assistance (Chan, 1991, p. 170). Southeast Asians (Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians) comprise 13% of the total Asian American population in Los Angeles County but account for 87% of all Asians on welfare there (Ong, 1993, 1994).<sup>8</sup>

*Labor market theory.* Two theories of labor markets are important to the critics of the Model Minority Phenomenon: dual labor market theory and split labor market theory. Both theories disaggregate the argument of proponents of the Model Minority Myth that Asian Americans are prosperous. Dual labor market theory holds that labor markets have cores and peripheral sectors. In the core labor market, European American males work at higher wage rates and have a realistic chance for advancement. Minorities and women, by contrast, work in the peripheral, lower pay, "dead-end" part of various labor markets, where there is little chance for advancement. The primary labor market is characterized by high wages, good fringe benefits, job security,

unionization, and advancement opportunities. The secondary market is its opposite on all points mentioned (Lynch, 1989). More minorities than European Americans are in the secondary labor market (Bluestone, Murphy, & Stevenson, 1973; Piore, 1979), which explains why Asian Americans have a lower ROI despite their higher educational investment (Cabezas & Kawaguchi, 1988; Lee, 1989; Toji & Johnson, 1992).<sup>9</sup>

Although there are some Asian Americans in higher paying occupational categories, they occupy certain occupational niches that are not in competition with the dominant group but are dependent on the goodwill of the dominant group (Bonacich & Modell, 1980; Hirschman & Wong, 1981). For instance, Korean immigrant physicians and Asian American governmental workers are overrepresented in peripheral specialties and underrepresented in influential management positions and medical specialties (Shin & Chang, 1988; Taylor & Kim, 1980).

In addition, in a study of certain occupations using the 1970 census (the most recent study of its kind) for the San Francisco–Oakland standard metropolitan statistical area (SMSA), it was discovered that Asian Americans in management are more likely to be self-employed than to be managers of large firms (Chan, 1991, p. 169). In sales, they are more likely to be lower paid, holding positions as retail clerks rather than higher paid brokers or insurance agents. In the clerical occupations, Asian Americans mostly are file clerks, typists, and office machine operators rather than higher paid secretaries or receptionists (Chan, 1991, p. 169).<sup>10</sup>

Further, in this San Francisco–Oakland SMSA study, Asian Americans were found to be occupationally well represented in accounting, dentistry, nursing, medical technology, and engineering but underrepresented in law, teaching, administration, social services, and higher level medical professions (Chan, 1991, p. 169). In higher education, Asian Americans tend to enroll in physical and natural sciences (subjects that require minimal verbal expression) rather than subjects in the humanities and social sciences, which require high verbal expression (Hsia, 1988; Sue, 1973, p. 146; Watanabe, 1973; Yoshioka et al., 1973).<sup>11</sup> Sue (1973, p. 146) found that Asian Americans are overrepresented in professions and occupations that require minimal verbal proficiency, such as math, engineering, chemistry, accounting, and business, but they are underrepresented in people-contact professions and occupations, such as law, advertising, and journalism. The job characteristics of occupations that require contact with other people are antagonistic to Asian Americans' increased inhibition, reserve, and decreased social extroversion when compared with attributes found in European American samples (Cox, 1993; Sue, 1973, p. 146; Thomas, 1991, pp. 102-103).

One reason for this overrepresentation may be that Asian Americans (and other minorities and women) in the fields aforementioned believe that highly codified quantitative disciplines enable them to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and abilities better than do more subjective disciplines (Baron & Newman, 1990; Featherman & Hauser, 1978; Shenhav & Habermeld, 1992). Asian Americans prefer careers in hard science, physical science, and engineering because they assume that these fields base rewards on merit as opposed to rewards in soft science (social science), humanities, and arts (Cole, 1992; Hargens & Hagstrom, 1967; Hsia, 1988; Leong & Hayes, 1990; Merton, 1973). Although Asian American social scientists have achieved parity

with their European American counterparts, this is misleading. Disaggregation of this convergence reveals that Asian American social scientists are overrepresented in high-demand quantitative specialties (Gaston, 1989; Leong, 1991; Tang, 1993b). Asian American scientists earn 15% to 26% less than their European American counterparts (Tang, 1993b).

To Bonacich (1972), Asian Americans find themselves in a split labor market that is characterized by pay inequity. That is, Asian Americans perform comparably to Caucasians but are paid less than them. Tang (1997 [this issue]) hypothesized that if the Model Minority Thesis were valid, then one would expect the upward career mobility into management of European and Asian Americans working in engineering and the natural and social sciences would converge. Her analysis, based on data from the National Science Foundation, did not find such convergence.

### Career Mobility, Glass Ceiling, and Exploitation

Being perceived as a member of a Model Minority group, all individual factors being equal and assuming that the organization does not racially discriminate, may give Asian Americans an advantage in initially getting hired. However, workplace diversity scholars point to the glass ceiling that is a barrier to promotion into management. The U.S. Department of Labor (1991) defines the glass ceiling as "artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization" (p. 1). The glass ceiling may exist at any organizational level, but primarily it is a barrier to movement into top management (Powell & Butterfield, 1994, p. 1). The glass ceiling may be a barrier to promotion into middle or lower management. If Asian Americans are a Model Minority, then there would be no glass ceiling for them.

However, research supports the conclusion that there is a glass ceiling for Asian Americans (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1992). In top management overall, fewer than 1% are minority group members. Although Asian Americans account for 2.9% of the U.S. population, they represent only .3% of senior *Fortune* 500 executives (Korn/Ferry International, 1990). Among *Fortune* 1,000 firms, only 4% of top managers are African American, Asian American, or Hispanic American (Powell & Butterfield, 1994). In science and engineering, 28% of European Americans and 28% of African Americans are in management, compared to 22% of Asian Americans (National Science Foundation, 1990, p. 89). For Asian Americans, engineering positions are the underside of a glass ceiling for promotion in management and also the less desirable part of a split labor market (Tang, 1993a, 1997). For them, occupancy of such positions is unlikely to lead to becoming a CEO (Leong, 1995). Women and minorities are often employees of the "third sector" (i.e., schools, health and social welfare agencies) rather than in the higher paying sectors of the U.S. economy. When Asian Americans work in the private sector, they tend to be located in the lower half of a split labor market.

The glass ceiling is not the only problem Asian Americans face in European American-dominated organizations. Park (1992) found, in his interview study of human resource managers in the Silicon Valley, that the social construction of Asian

Americans as the Model Minority leads to exploitation. Asian Americans are seen as expendable workers who may be hired and fired at will because they will take what is offered and are too passive to complain (let alone file wrongful termination lawsuits). Similarly, Hung (1995) found that European American managers perceive Asian Americans as the Model Minority whose members are modest, polite, soft spoken, and nonconfrontational.<sup>12</sup>

### Discussion

The Asian American Model Minority Thesis is either supported or disconfirmed, depending on whether the data are aggregated or disaggregated. Because the data are aggregated, the Model Minority Phenomenon is supported. The success of Asian Americans appears to be phenomenal. They are the Model Minority for other minorities to follow.

Although both sides in this debate agree that Asian Americans, as a group, have higher educational attainment than other groups (including European Americans), only the critics of the Model Minority Phenomenon have tested hypotheses on the ROI of educational attainments. Asian Americanists find that Asian Americans have lower returns on investment for their education. Asian Americans tend to work at the lower end of a split labor market. Their poverty rate is higher than that of European Americans. They face a glass ceiling.

It is a mistake to assume that all Asian Americans are successful, in socioeconomic terms. As Barringer, Gardner, and Levin (1993) point out,

Some Asian Americans certainly fit the "Model Minority" image, and then some. But Vietnamese did not, as of 1980; in fact, they displayed demographic and social characteristics more typical of the "castelike" minorities—blacks, American Indians, and Hispanics. From what we know, the same was true of other Southeast Asian refugees. It was not the case with many Japanese—they mirrored white characteristics in many respects. Asian Indians as a group were the super models, but only in the case of the newer immigrants, and only because their immigration was so selective [favoring highly educated immigrants]. (p. 316)

In other words, Asian American socioeconomic status is bifurcated. One part of this group has higher paying jobs, and the other does not.

### SOCIOHISTORICAL-POLITICAL CONTEXT

The previous section pointed out the methodological differences that underlie divergent views of the Model Minority Thesis. Although some Asian Americanists believe that these methodological differences are part of a concerted action against this minority, as well as other minorities and women, on the part of foes of affirmative action, conspiracy and intentional lying with statistics are difficult to prove. Nevertheless, it is important to note the sociohistorical-political context of the Model Minority Thesis. Those who believe that Asian Americans are the Model Minority rarely, if ever, examine the context of the times in which this argument arose and still arises.

On the other hand, Asian Americanists such as Osajima (1988), Takagi (1992), and Omatsu (1994), whose views, in part, inform this section, point out that the formation of the Model Minority Myth first arose in the mid-1960s. This coincided with two important American sociohistorical-political events. One of these was the easing of U.S. immigration quotas, a development permitting mass Asian immigration. The second such event was the civil rights movements (including African American civil rights, women's rights, gay and lesbian rights) and the development of affirmative action.

Supporters of the Model Minority Phenomenon interpret the timing of these events as mere coincidence. The Asian American studies literature, on the other hand, interprets these events as the source of a conservative backlash against women, minorities, and especially immigrants. That literature sees conservative European American writers such as Lynch (1989) and Herrnstein and Murray (1994) as forming a backlash against changing demographics, Asian immigration, and the civil rights movements.<sup>13</sup>

An examination of the change in stereotypes of Asian Americans with respect to the aforementioned sociohistorical-political events supports this backlash interpretation of the context of the Model Minority Myth. The sociohistorical-political events in question threatened the status quo. Conservative thinkers countered this threat to the status quo by changing their negative stereotypes of Asian Americans from unassimilable coolies, Charlie Chans, evil Fu Manchus, kamikaze pilots, geishas, and erotic Suzie Wongs to the Model Minority that has succeeded without any need of affirmative action (Osajima, 1988, pp. 166-167). To Osajima (1988, p. 167), proponents of the Model Minority Myth assert that Asian Americans are "successful" to counter the claims of "black militants" that America is a racist society.<sup>14</sup> In this view, the Model Minority Myth reinforces the claim that America is an open society in which anyone can be successful, based on "merit" (Osajima, 1988, p. 167).<sup>15</sup>

Asian Americanists not only argue that the Model Minority Myth supports a conservative backlash but also that it reinforces divisive race politics. Conservatives use the Model Minority Myth as a "divide and conquer strategy" against minority groups (Chan, 1991, p. 165; Daniels, 1988, p. 318). They imply that minorities other than Asian Americans are stereotypically lazy. Conservatives imply, if not outright say, that if only Africans Americans and Hispanics would adopt a serious work ethic and serious attitude toward education like Asian Americans, they too could be successful.

Asian Americans fit into this conservative backlash argument because no Asian American civil rights leader emerged in the late 1960s (or since then) with the popular and media appeal of Malcolm X or Martin Luther King, Jr., nor was there an Asian American equivalent of the Black Panther Party (Takagi, 1992, pp. 58-59). In other words, rather than openly attack groups they have historically dominated, more sophisticated conservatives use Asian Americans as their proxy (Takagi, 1992, pp. 58-59). Asian Americans are more sympathetic "victims of affirmative action" than are European American males. Conservatives argue that Asian American students are high achievers who are being discriminated against by affirmative action in college admissions (Takagi, 1992, pp. 120, 139). They are "punished for academic excellence by racial quotas" (Takagi, 1992, p. 103), which limit their admissions to college. President



Reagan's deputy attorney general, William Bradford Reynolds, declared that racial quotas limited Asian American college admissions. So saying, Reynolds chose to use this as an excuse to attack affirmative action in general rather than as a reason to provide remedies for students (Omi & Winant, 1986, p. 78; Takagi, 1992, pp.103-105).

## CONCLUSION

This literature review note has attempted to inform organizational scholars about the Model Minority Thesis by summarizing literature from Asian American studies. There are two positions in the debate as to whether Asian Americans are the Model Minority. Dominant group members (including some conservative Asian Americans), using aggregated data or no more than popular beliefs, claim that Asian Americans are the Model Minority—too successful to be considered a disadvantaged minority group. The Asian Americanists, disaggregating the data on Asian Americans, find that despite higher educational attainments, Asian Americans have lower returns on investment for their education. Asian Americans tend to work at the lower end of a split labor market. Their poverty rate is higher than that of European Americans. They face a glass ceiling. The policy implications of this debate imply either no need for affirmative action, validating the American Dream, or they imply a need for affirmative action.

The conservative argument places the locus of responsibility for the plight of minority groups with the individual members of that group. The Asian Americanist counterargument is that group disadvantage is caused by, and is based on, unfavorable intergroup relations. If group disadvantage is to be overcome, intervention both at the group and the individual level is necessary.

## NOTES

1. *Model Minority Phenomenon* is a term that I coined for this literature review note. Proponents of the notion that Asian Americans are a Model Minority simply say this. The term *phenomenon* is used to distinguish it from the critical perspective, which considers the Model Minority notion to be a "myth"—an untruth.

2. Asian Americans are a very diverse group whose definition is problematic (Gardner, Robey, & Smith, 1989; Lyman, 1974, p. 173; O'Hare & Felt, 1989). Their physical (racial) appearances, languages, cultures, religions, political and economic systems, and recency of immigration vary. However, from an intergroup perspective, it is the dominant group (European American, male, capitalist, heterosexual, Judeo-Christian) construction of Asian Americans as a homogeneous group that is of interest because the social power to redefine many peoples into one has overridden the realities and identities of these diverse groups.

Most of the time, what is meant by *Asian American* is immigrants from or descendants of East Asian peoples, such as Chinese, Japanese, or Koreans who share the common cultural influence of Confucianism (Kahn, 1979). However, East Asians vary widely too, despite such common cultural influences.

3. I am a member of the group under study. More specifically, I am a Chinese immigrant to the United States. I have been placed into the panethnic group of Asian Americans by the U.S. census. Initially, I did not accept this imposed (etic) definition because my culture and language of origin are not the same as the cultures and languages of other Asian immigrant groups. *Asian American* is an etic term, a descriptor imposed on a group of peoples by another group—in this case, a more powerful group. Anyone who has

descended from inhabitants of Asia, the Pacific Islands, or the Indian subcontinent and is living in the United States is categorized by the U.S. census into the panethnic Asian American or Asian Pacific American category. Dominant group members generally refuse to learn that the different Asian American ethnic groups are actually distinct. They socially categorize Asian American ethnic groups into one homogeneous group. Asian Americans are in fact a panethnic group—that is, a group made up of two or more distinct ethnic groups (for elaboration, see Espiritu, 1990; Omi & Winant, 1986).

However, the everyday social reality is that I and others who bear some physical resemblance to me are placed into this category. Asian Americanists, such as Espiritu (1990), Wei (1993), and Omatu (1994), point out that the etic imposition of homogeneity can be used to organize and look after panethnic interests. As an organizational behavior scholar and organizational change agent, I am interested in studying how organizations may be encouraged to value diverse employees such as Asian Americans and others. I have elsewhere (Cheng, 1997a) at length explored why I teach and do diversity research.

4. *Minority*, as used here, refers to a group that has less economic, social, political, and legal power than the dominant group. "A minority group is any group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment" (Wirth, 1945, p. 347). "Power minorities" may or may not be a numerical minority but, more important, hold power.

5. Tang's (1993b, 1997) work has been especially valuable in shaping the thinking contained in this subsection and the next.

6. The terms *European Americans*, *Euro-Americans*, *Caucasian Americans*, and *Caucasian Europeans* denote membership in the "dominant group." Although it is recognized that there are multiple ethnic groups among European Americans, Euro-Americans, Caucasian Americans, and Caucasian Europeans, this group more often than not presents itself as homogeneous to derive racial solidarity and consequent racial class privileges from being members of the dominant group.

7. These authors have explored relationships between educational level and income but have not done so with respect to other variables, such as seniority, age, and so on.

8. According to Gall and Gall (1993, p. 514), the poverty rate for recent Asian immigrants is high. Of those below the poverty line, 30% are Vietnamese, 18% Chinese, 17% Koreans, 16% Asian Indians, 15% Japanese, and 9% Filipinos. By contrast, only 7% of European Americans are below the poverty line, set at \$3,740 for individuals and \$10,000 for families of six.

9. Furthermore, Bonacich (1972, 1973) points out that middlemen minority entrepreneurs, such as Korean American shopkeepers in non-Asian American neighborhoods, are resented for their success and are the target of ethnic antagonism. Middlemen minorities, such as Korean American shopkeepers in South Central Los Angeles, occupy a middle economic position by buying goods from the elite European American owner class and selling them to the African American masses. This helps ensure that economic competition becomes a source of intergroup conflicts. Hence, as the American economy has declined with massive layoffs, immigrants have been scapegoated. Immigrant bashing, racial discrimination, and racism are directed at anyone who looks "foreign" (nonwhite). These problems occur at the panethnic (Asian American) unit of analysis because the identification of Asian American ethnic subgroups is seldom made.

10. A word of caution: Although the glass ceiling is an important issue to more affluent Asian Americans, less affluent Asian Americans are concerned about other pressing issues, such as labor exploitation, poverty, racial violence, and so on.

11. Asian Americanists who are humanists represent the exception to this tendency for Asian Americans to study quantitative disciplines. Perhaps the former tend to be made up of U.S.-born Asian Americans for whom English is a first language.

12. See also Fernandez (1991) and Cox (1993).

13. Essentialism is a position that argues that diversity can be achieved based on sex or race. Backlashers are essentialist. They point to those in the dominant group who are essentially diverse, based on sex or race, as evidence that the American Dream works and that there is no discrimination and hence no need for affirmative action. However, essential differences (e.g., sex or race) are not the important ones if the goal is to value differences. To value diversity, the alleged "different values" must be significantly different from dominant group values and recognized and accepted as such. Although conservatives such as Clarence Thomas, Shelby Steele, Thomas Sowell, and Ward Connerly are African American, their arguments are the

same as those of conservative European American dominant-class males. Their essential biological difference (race) from conservative white males becomes irrelevant when their discourse is analyzed.

14. Backlashers bifurcate minority groups. "Black militants" are a social construction of a "bad minority." Asian Americans, as the Model Minority, are a construction of a "good minority."

15. See Cheng (1996, 1997b) for a discussion of the "merit" discourse.

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