The Success Frame and Achievement Paradox: The Costs and Consequences for Asian Americans

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Abstract The status attainment model highlights the role of family socioeconomic status (SES) in the intergenerational reproduction of educational attainment; however, the model falls short in predicting the educational outcomes of the children of Asian immigrants, whose attainment exceeds that which would have been predicted based on family SES alone. On the other hand, the cultural capital model gives primacy to the role of middle-class cultural capital in reproducing advantage, but neglects contextual factors outside the family. We fill a theoretical and empirical niche by introducing a model of cultural frames to explain how the children of immigrants whose families exhibit low SES and lack middle-class cultural capital attain exceptional educational outcomes. Based on in-depth interviews with adult children of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants randomly drawn from the survey of Immigration and Intergenerational Mobility in Metropolitan Los Angeles, we show that Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant parents and their children use ethnicity as a resource to construct and support a strict "success frame" that helps the poor and working class override their disadvantages. However, there are unintended consequences to adopting such a strict success frame: those who do not meet its exacting tenets feel like ethnic outliers, and as a result, they distance themselves from coethnics and from their ethnic identities because they link achievement with ethnicity. We conclude by underscoring the benefits of decoupling race/ethnicity and achievement for all groups.

Introduction

In January 2011, *The Wall Street Journal* published an article by Amy Chua, titled, "Why Chinese Mothers are Superior,"[1] shortly before the release of her memoir, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. The article and subsequent book set off a firestorm of controversy; some lambasted Chua for reifying the stereotype of the authoritarian Chinese mother (and Asians parents more generally), while others praised her for the candor with which she contrasted Eastern and Western parenting styles. Chua argues that the Eastern parenting style is more likely to produce "successful kids," "math whizzes," and "music prodigies" because the "Tiger Mother" understands the cultural formula for success: an unyielding schedule of hard work, discipline, and rote repetition. By contrast, the Western parenting style focuses on developing children's individuality through positive reinforcement—asking them to "try their best," and allowing them to follow their passions and make their own choices.

Chua attributes her successful parenting style to Chinese culture, affirming an essentialist cultural perspective on educational attainment (Fukuyama 1993; Sowell 1996). Like other culturalist scholars, however, Chua failed to acknowledge that she—unlike most parents—has a wealth

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[1] The article was published in *The Wall Street Journal* on January 8, 2011 [http://online.wsj.com/article/SB1000142405274870411150457 6059713528698754.html], accessed on June 4, 2011.

of economic resources and cultural capital at her disposal. She and her husband are both law professors at Yale, and their parents are highly educated; Chua's father, for example, is a professor at Berkeley. Chua's older daughter has earned admission to Harvard, and is now an undergraduate there. While Chua may credit her Chinese cultural child-rearing practices for paving the way for her daughter's admission to Harvard, both Chua and her daughter have benefitted from the intergenerational transmission of socioeconomic advantage and middle-class cultural capital.

It would be easy to dismiss Chua's argument as little more than a reification of racial, ethnic, and cultural stereotypes, but by doing so, we would miss an opportunity to engage in a debate that her work has ignited, that is, how do we explain the differences in educational achievement among racial/ethnic groups, especially when the patterns defy both the status attainment and cultural capital models? The status attainment model emphasizes a combination of family socioeconomic status (SES), individual effort, and ability to explain intergenerational mobility (Blau and Duncan 1967). By contrast, the cultural capital model underscores the role of noneconomic resources in the household, such as parental education and knowledge of middle-class styles and behavior to which a child is routinely exposed and socialized. Both economic and noneconomic resources affect a child's prospects for mobility, and help to explain the intergenerational reproduction of advantage among children from middle- and upper-class families (Bourdieu 1984; DiMaggio 1982).

However, neither model can explain the educational attainment of the children of Asian immigrants whose parents arrive in the United States with little to no English proficiency, minimal formal education, few labor market skills and financial resources, and little understanding of middle-class American mores. Despite the disadvantages associated with low family SES and cultural capital, some children of Asian immigrants manage to graduate as high school valedictorians, earn admission into elite universities, and pursue graduate degrees (Kasinitz et al. 2009; Zhou and Bankston 1998). By focusing primarily on differences in family SES and cultural capital among racial/ethnic groups without considering the roles of "ethnic capital" and "ethnic resources," social scientists have left the door wide open for scholars like Chua to advance essentialist cultural arguments about the Asian "Tiger Mother" and Asian culture without a strong voice of rebuttal.

In this paper, we aim to bring culture more squarely and analytically into the debate by addressing the question: why do the children of Asian immigrants exhibit high educational aspirations and mobility outcomes, even when they hail from families with low SES and low levels of middle-class cultural capital? In doing so, we draw on the classic sociological concepts of frames and reference groups to advance a model of cultural frames in order to illustrate how culture and ethnicity operate as resources for the children of Asian immigrants, especially for those who hail from poor socioeconomic backgrounds. Our analyses are based on qualitative interview data of two Asian groups—Chinese and Vietnamese—in metropolitan Los Angeles.

The paper is divided into four parts. First, we demonstrate how Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant parents and their children frame academic success—what we refer to as "the success frame." Second, we illustrate how the success frame is supported by ethnic resources beyond the household, which help poor and working-class coethnics override their class disadvantage. Third, while the success frame helps to buttress academic outcomes, we highlight the costs and consequences associated with it. Those who do not meet its strict tenets feel like ethnic outliers and, in some cases, like failures; as a result, they distance themselves from coethnics and from their ethnic identities because they link achievement with ethnicity. Fourth, we conclude by underscoring the benefits of decoupling race/ethnicity and achievement for all racial/ethnic groups.

Theory and Previous Research

Family SES and Status Attainment

As early as 1967, Blau and Duncan noted that the strongest predictor of a son's occupation is his father's occupation. Their pioneering study proved that life chances are unequal from the starting gate since advantages are transmitted intergenerationally; if a son is fortunate to be born to a father who is highly educated and holds a high-status job, he is likely to reproduce those advantages in adulthood (Blau and Duncan 1967). Since Blau and Duncan's groundbreaking study, sociologists have followed their lead and advanced the status attainment model in the study of intergenerational mobility, which emphasizes the role of family socioeconomic status in determining children's educational and occupational outcomes (Breen and Jonsson 2005; Haller and Portes 1973; Sewell et al. 1969).

While this model explains how educational attainment patterns are reproduced across generations, the cultural capital model explains why family SES matters for children's educational attainment. Cultural capital refers to both tangible resources (such as the availability of books, computers, and newspapers at home) and intangible resources (such as the exposure and access to middle- and upper-class cultural knowledge, cues, mannerisms, habits, and practices) that the dominant group values (Bourdieu 1984; DiMaggio 1982; Lareau 2003; Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell 1999)—what Carter (2005) refers to as dominant cultural capital. Dominant cultural capital is

associated with high-status cultural signals (including attitudes, styles, speech patterns, and taste preferences) and high-brow cultural practices (such as visiting museums, listening to classical music, and playing instruments like the piano or violin).

These high-status signals and practices give children from middle- and upper-class households an advantage in their quest for educational attainment because class-specific signals and practices are rewarded in gateway institutions such as schools and in the workplace (Lamont and Lareau 1988; Ridgeway and Fisk 2012). Moreover, because the acquisition of dominant cultural capital is both class- and race-specific, poor African American and Latino youth find themselves at a disadvantage in their quest for educational attainment and mobility (Carter 2005; Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell 1999).

While the status attainment and cultural capital models help to explain the reproduction of advantage and disadvantage among US-born white and black children, both models fall short in explaining some of the vexing patterns among the children of immigrants. For example, children of Chinese immigrants from disadvantaged backgrounds achieve levels of education on par with their middle-class coethnic counterparts, and even attain levels of education that exceed their native-born, middle-class white peers (Kao 1995; Kasinitz et al. 2009; Louie 2004). Furthermore, those who hail from middle-class family origins are disproportionately likely to over-achieve despite the intergenerational tensions they experience with their strict, "unacculturated" parents (Chao 1994).

The educational outcomes of the children of Vietnamese immigrants are even more puzzling. Although most Vietnamese parents arrived in the United States since the mid-1970s as poorly educated, penniless refugees, Vietnamese children have graduated from high school and college at much higher rates than their parents and, remarkably, they have surpassed the levels of educational attainment of native-born whites and blacks. How do children of Chinese immigrants and Vietnamese refugees attain high academic outcomes in spite of their families' disadvantaged economic backgrounds and lack of middle-class cultural capital? Furthermore, why do Chinese and Vietnamese—two Asian ethnic groups who hail from such divergent class origins—converge in the second generation with respect to educational attainment?

Culture and Immigration

For decades, sociologists retreated from discussing the relationship between culture and achievement, due in large part to the backlash and stigma that resulted from "the culture of poverty model" made famous by Moynihan's Report, *The Negro Family* (1965). Seeking to understand poverty among African Americans, Moynihan (1965: 218–219) pointed to the "tangle of pathology" that was "capable of perpetuating itself" due to the weak, dysfunctional black family structure. Moynihan argued that eradicating poverty in the United States necessitated changing the cultural values, aspirations, and behaviors among poor African Americans. Moynihan's conclusions proved to be attractive to US politicians and policy makers because they highlighted the cultural differences and deficiencies of individuals and families rather than the gross structural inequalities that produced them.

Most social scientists, however, reacted differently, and for years following the release of the Moynihan Report, they abandoned culture as an explanation for poverty and inequality. Instead, they focused exclusively on the macro-structural causes of poverty and inequality: the change from a manufacturing to a service-based economy; the outsourcing of jobs from central cities to the suburbs and to developing countries; the skills and spatial mismatch between jobs and residents in inner cities; and persistent residential and school segregation (Massey and Denton 1993; Wilson 1987). Evoking culture to explain poverty or inequality became tantamount to endorsing a neoconservative policy paradigm, and therefore, largely for political reasons, cultural analysis lagged structural analysis (Skrentny 2008).

The study of culture receded into the sociological background at a historic moment in the United States: the year that Moynihan released his infamous report, the United States passed the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act, which abolished the national origins quota system, and replaced it with a skills-based and family reunification preference system. The Hart-Cellar Act ushered in a new stream of immigrants from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean and changed the landscape of the United States from a largely black–white society to one composed of multiple racial and ethnic groups (Alba and Nee 2003; Lee and Bean 2010; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993).

While Asians and Latinos have altered the racial and ethnic landscape of the United States, research in immigration and culture has lagged behind America's new demographic realities for two primary reasons. First, the debate about race and culture was at an intellectual stalemate when America's new immigrants began to arrive in 1965. Second, scholarship about race and culture has traditionally been framed within a black–white binary, which has left Asians and Latinos far behind (and often absent) in the discussion.

The Re-emergence of Culture

Decades later, culture re-emerged with the birth of a new generation of social scientists who have placed it at the forefront of the poverty and inequality research agendas

(Carter 2005; Harding 2007; Lamont and Lareau 1988; Small 2004; Skrentny 2008; Small et al. 2010; Vaisey 2010; Young 2010). This cadre of scholars departs from the generation of old in two fundamental ways. First, they reject the essentialist definition of culture as a core set of unchanging values, behaviors, practices, and norms that are immune to structural changes. Instead, they maintain that culture is dynamic and susceptible to change because it is supported by reinforcement mechanisms, in the absence of which changes occur (Small 2004).

Second, they do not define culture as an all-encompassing category that includes a group's values, norms, aspirations, and behaviors. Instead, they conceive of culture through more narrow, analytical concepts such as cultural capital, frames, repertoires, narratives, schemas, and group boundaries. By defining culture through a more narrowly defined lens, scholars have been able to empirically test its role in influencing a diversity of outcomes, including education, employment, and community involvement (Carter 2005; DiMaggio 1997; Small 2004; Harding 2007; Young 2010). While the emergent scholarship in culture has advanced tremendously since Moynihan's Report, still absent in the literature is a focus on culture and immigration and, more specifically, the role of culture in explaining the variation in immigrant and second-generation outcomes.

Frames

In the vast literature in the field of culture, we found the concept of frames particularly useful in understanding the varied mobility outcomes among members of the new second generation. Goffman (1974) conceived of a frame as a lens through which we observe, interpret, and analyze our social life. Most plainly, frames are ways of understanding how the world works, and by understanding the different frames that the members of different ethnic groups employ in their decision-making process, we may begin to understand the intergroup variations in attitudes and behavior. Frames, however, are not culturally intrinsic, nor do they cause particular behavior; rather, they make certain patterns of behavior possible or likely by delineating horizons of possibilities (Lee and Zhou 2013; Small et al. 2010). For example, in his study of a Latino housing project in Boston, Small (2004) employed the concept of frames to understand the variation in community participation among its residents. He found that the "neighborhood narrative frames" through which the Latino residents viewed the neighborhood (rather than how much the residents valued community involvement in itself) affected participation. Residents who framed the community as a beautiful neighborhood to be preserved were more likely to participate than those who viewed the neighborhood as a ghetto that they wished to escape.

In addition, in a study of African American men in poverty, Young (2010) employed the concept of frames to examine meaning-making processes. He found that while most African American men adhered to the same general contours in defining "a good job" (such as salary, benefits, opportunities for promotion, personal growth, and respect), their frames differed in the degree with which the men emphasized particular features of a lived experience. Differences in the framing of situations, Young found, influenced the men's orientation toward work, which, in turn, affected their employment outcomes.

Applying the concept of frames to immigration research sheds new light in understanding interethnic differences in second-generation educational achievement. We find that while immigrant parents and their children value education, the frame through which they define "a good education" differs across ethnic groups (Lee and Zhou 2013). For example, some members of the second generation frame "a good education" as graduating from high school, attending a local community college, and earning an occupational certificate that allows them to work as a laboratory technician or dental assistant. Others frame "a good education" as graduating as the high school valedictorian, getting into a highly competitive university, and then going to law or medical school in order to work in a high-status profession. In other words, it is not the case that some second-generation groups value education more than others (which is the essentialist interpretation of culture), but rather they construct remarkably different notions of what a good education and academic success mean depending on the frame is accessible to them, and that which they adopt.

Ethnic Capital and Ethnic Resources

Having certain values is a necessary, although insufficient, condition to enact a frame; for frames to be effective, they need support and reinforcement mechanisms. This is where ethnicity comes in. Because of immigration selectivity, newcomers arrive in the United States with different levels of group SES, or what Borjas (1992) defines as "ethnic capital." High levels of ethnic capital in an immigrant group give parents and their children a competitive advantage (even when parents hail from low-SES backgrounds) because groups with high ethnic capital create and provide access to invaluable ethnic resources. The availability of and access to ethnic resources—which are often created by middle-class group members of the first generation—help the second generation to achieve mobility outcomes in spite of low parental human capital and poor socioeconomic status. Ethnic capital functions in three critical ways.

First, ethnic capital results in the creation of tangible resources in the ethnic economy. Developed by highly selected members of an immigrant group, the ethnic economy generates *tangible resources*—such as jobs, housing, and opportunities for self-employment for immigrant adults; and educational resources, such as after-school tutoring, supplementary educational programs, and college preparation classes for children (Lee 2002; Zhou and Cho 2010). These tangible resources are especially useful for immigrants and their children from poor and working-class backgrounds.

Second, ethnic capital facilitates social networking. Through their participation in the ethnic economy, low-SES group members link into socioeconomically diverse ethnic networks that include middle-class coethnics. As a result, poor and working-class coethnics have access to *intangible resources*, including relevant information to facilitate their children's educational attainment. For example, information about high school rankings, neighborhoods with strong school districts, AP classes, tutoring, and the college admissions process are often disseminated through ethnic channels—both formally through ethnic newspapers and media, and informally through kin and coethnic friendship circles—thereby making the information available across class lines (Kasinitz et al. 2009; Zhou and Cho 2010).

Third, high ethnic capital results in a large number of visible *role models* who serve as mobility prototypes for less advantaged coethnics (Fernández-Kelly 2008; Merton 1949; Zuckerman 1988). As a result, high-achieving co-ethnics—rather than middle-class whites—have become the reference group by which the children of Asian immigrants chart and measure their progress (Jiménez and Horowitz 2013; Lee and Zhou 2013). Consequently, they adopt a frame for achievement that expands their opportunity horizons in ways that exceed that which would have been predicted by the status attainment and cultural capital models.

Data and Methods

The data on which our analysis is based are drawn from a qualitative study of adult children of immigrants, who were randomly selected from the survey of Immigration and Intergenerational Mobility in Metropolitan Los Angeles (IIMMLA).[2] The chief purpose of our qualitative study is to examine how members of today's 1.5 and second generation define "success," how their prospects and outcomes of "success" are affected by national origin, class, and gender, how they construct the meaning of "a good education" and "a good job," and how they choose to identify themselves. We define the second generation as those who are US born with at least one foreign-born parent, and define the 1.5 generation as those who are foreign-born, but who immigrated to the United States prior to age thirteen. Our data for the current analysis include 82 face-to-face, life history interviews with 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese. While the 82 cases are randomly drawn from the IIMMLA sample, the cases are not directly drawn from source populations in metropolitan Los Angeles. As a result, we note a word of caution about the representativeness and generalizability of our findings.

Lasting, on average, between one and a half and 2 hours, the in-depth interviews were structured, but most questions were open-ended; this allowed the respondents to speak at length and in detail about their answers, and also provided the interviewers free reign to ask unanticipated follow-up questions. The interviews were tape-recorded and conducted by trained graduate research assistants, who wrote five to eight single-spaced pages of detailed field notes immediately following each interview, which helped us to identify thematic patterns before the formal coding process began. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded by question and by theme using ATLIS.ti software, and then analyzed and re-analyzed for notable and consistent patterns.

Taking advantage of the in-depth interview method, we focused on the contexts under which the respondents made choices about their educational and occupational trajectories—data that we were unable to glean from the IIMMLA survey. The interviews covered a wide scope of topics related to inter- and intragenerational mobility, ranging from educational and employment decisions, high school and college experiences, supplementary education, family and work histories, familial resources and obligations, neighborhood and community resources, role models and reference groups, to in-group and out-group perceptions. Because the study centered on how the respondents defined success, we inquired about how they measured "a good education" and "a good job," and the

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[2] IIMMLA is a multi-investigator study that examines the patterns of intra- and intergenerational mobility among the adult children of immigrants in the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area. It includes a telephone survey of 4,800 randomly selected respondents in five counties of Los Angeles metropolitan region (Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside, and Ventura). It targets 1.5- and second-

Footnote 2 continued

generation Chinese, Vietnamese, Koreans, Filipinos, Mexicans, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans between the ages of 20 and 39 from geographically, socioeconomically, and racially/ethnically diverse neighborhoods. It also contains samples of third-plus-generation (native-born of native-born parentage) Mexican Americans, non-Hispanic blacks, and non-Hispanic whites for comparison.

factors that played into their decision-making processes. The answers provided insight into the frame the respondents adopted when measuring success, how their frame affected the decisions they made about their educational and occupational pathways, and which reference group they turned to when charting their educational and occupational pursuits.

Los Angeles is a strategic research site to study the 1.5 and second generation because 62 % of its residents are immigrants or the children of immigrants. Among the various ethnic groups in LA, we choose to compare 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese because both are East Asian and share a Confucian philosophical worldview (Wang 2002). Along with other East Asian ethnic groups such as Japanese and Koreans, Chinese and the Vietnamese have also been touted as a "model minority," whose success is often attributed to their "superior" cultural values, work ethic, entrepreneurial spirit, and strong family cohesion (Ngo and Lee 2007).

There are also considerable differences between these Asian groups. The Chinese are the largest Asian ethnic group in the United States, accounting for nearly 23 % of the Asian population. They are also the largest Asian ethnic group in metropolitan Los Angeles with a migration history that dates back longer than most other national-origin groups. In addition, Chinese immigrants in LA are diverse with respect to socioeconomic background (even among those who hail from mainland China alone); they include low-skilled urban workers and uneducated rural peasants whose profiles are similar to the low-skilled Vietnamese, as well as highly educated professionals whose human capital exceeds native-born whites. Some highly educated Chinese immigrants experience downward mobility upon arrival in the United States because their pre-immigrant skills, experience, and education may not translate into comparable jobs in the American labor market due to language and cultural barriers. In such cases, low SES (as measured by income or occupational status) is not an accurate reflection of low human capital.

We include the Vietnamese because they are the largest non-European refugee group in the United States and concentrate predominantly in metropolitan Los Angeles (Bloemraad 2006; Zhou and Bankston 1998). Unlike the long history of Chinese immigration to the United States, Vietnamese immigration is of a much more recent vintage. Most Vietnamese refugees had minimal formal education, few marketable skills, little English-language proficiency, and scant knowledge of the ways of an advanced Western society. Compounding their class disadvantage was their emotional distress, anxiety, and the severe trauma experienced during their precarious exit from their home country, which was exacerbated by their often uncertain, lengthy

stays in refugee camps (Rumbaut 2005). Lacking a pre-existing ethnic community that could assist their acculturation and incorporation in their new host society, the Vietnamese relied exclusively on the US government and individual or institutional sponsors who determined where they would settle and the resources they were given (Zhou and Bankston 1998).

The Vietnamese provide a useful comparison with the Chinese because while these groups differ with respect to migration experiences, socioeconomic backgrounds, and immigration selectivity, the children of Vietnamese immigrants exhibit educational outcomes that are much more similar to the children of Chinese immigrants than to native-born whites and blacks. The dissimilar socioeconomic backgrounds of these two immigrant groups and the convergent educational outcomes of their adult children allow us to assess how ethnic capital influences the cultural frames of academic achievement among 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese.

Results

1.5- and Second-Generation Chinese and Vietnamese at a Glance

Descriptive analyses from the IIMMLA survey data reveal discernible patterns of difference among LA's immigrant and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese populations. We also include third-plus-generation non-Hispanic blacks and non-Hispanic whites as a useful reference. Table 1 provides a glimpse of some demographic and family characteristics, revealing several notable patterns. First, Vietnamese are relatively young with the median age of 25 years, compared to Chinese (27), blacks (31), and whites (30). They also have a higher percentage of 1.5 generation in their population; this, along with their young age, reflects the relative recency of Vietnamese immigration to the United States.

Second, Chinese immigrant parents exhibit much higher levels of human and financial capital than the other groups; they are more highly educated, more likely to be English-proficient, and more likely to own a home—SES resources that translate into intergenerational advantages for their children. Over 60 % of Chinese immigrant fathers and over 40 % of Chinese immigrant mothers in IIMMLA survey have a bachelor's degree, which exceeds the educational attainment of native-born blacks and whites, and reflects the high selectivity of Chinese immigration. By contrast, Vietnamese immigrants evince lower levels of educational attainment than native-born whites and blacks, especially Vietnamese mothers, more than 30 % of whom have not graduated from high school.

Table 1 Selected characteristics by generation and race/ethnicity: Los Angeles metropolitan region

Characteristics	1.5 and second generation		Third-plus generation	
	Chinese	Vietnamese	Black	White
Female	43.5	49.9	53.7	50.6
Median age	27.0	25.0	31.0	30.0
Citizenship status				
Citizen by birth	45.3	29.4	100.0	100.0
Citizen through naturalization	49.8	64.3	–	–
Permanent resident	4.4	6.1	–	–
Undocumented status	0.5	0.2	–	–
Parental SES				
Father with no English proficiency	7.0	7.9	–	–
Mother with no English proficiency	7.8	12.0	–	–
Father with no high school diploma	7.5	15.6	10.9	3.5
Mother with no high school diploma	12.2	30.5	9.0	4.4
Father with a bachelor's degree or more	61.3	31.9	35.0	46.5
Mother with a bachelor's degree or more	42.3	16.1	28.0	36.3
Parent ever been undocumented	1.0	0.6	–	–
Parent owning a home	86.5	58.8	67.5	89.2
Family situation				
Both parents married	85.5	83.6	43.3	51.9
Grew up living with both parents	85.6	83.1	45.4	64.8
Total	400	401	401	402

Source: IIMMLA (see Footnote #2)

Third, both 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese were more likely to grow up in two-parent, married households compared to their native-born white and black counterparts. This is salient because previous research has shown that children who grow up in single-parent homes are less likely to finish high school and attend college, less likely to find and maintain a steady job, and more likely to become teenage mothers (McLanahan and Bumpass 1988; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994).

Table 2 illustrates other cross-sectional outcomes in educational attainment and labor market status among the four groups. The 1.5- and second-generation Chinese outpace all groups on educational and socioeconomic measures, reflecting the intergenerational transmission of parental advantage. Forty-two percent of 1.5- and second-generation Chinese have earned a BA, and another 22 % have attained a graduate degree (22 %)—these figures far exceed those of native-born blacks (19 and 5 %) and whites (32 and 14 %). Moreover, none of the 1.5- and second-generation Chinese have dropped out of high school, and 18 % hold a professional occupation.

What is most striking, however, is the educational attainment of the 1.5- and second-generation Vietnamese, who, within one generation, surpass native-born blacks and whites. Neither the status attainment model nor the cultural capital model can explain why 1.5- and second-generation Vietnamese attain higher educational outcomes than native-

Table 2 Divergent outcomes by generation and race/ethnicity: Los Angeles metropolitan region

Outcomes	1.5 and second generation		Third-plus generation	
	Chinese	Vietnamese	Black	White
Education				
No high school diploma	0.0	1.0	6.7	3.7
High school diploma	4.5	6.7	24.2	17.7
Some college	32.4	44.1	45.1	32.5
Bachelor's degree	41.5	37.7	18.8	31.8
Graduate degrees	21.6	10.5	5.2	14.3
Labor market status				
Professional occupations	17.9	14.0	4.6	9.6
Earnings				
$20,000 or less	43.6	53.3	73.7	60.2
$20,001–$50,000	48.4	39.0	24.7	33.9
Over $50,000	8.0	7.7	1.7	5.9
Family situation				
Married	26.0	24.4	25.9	44.6
Mean age when first child was born	30.2	27.5	22.3	25.4
Having children at teen age	0.0	2.2	12.0	2.9
Incarceration	1.8	3.2	19.3	10.6
Total	400	401	401	402

Source: IIMMLA (see Footnote #2)

born whites and blacks, given their immigrant parents' lower levels of education and lack of middle-class cultural capital. As Table 2 shows, 38 % of 1.5- and second-generation Vietnamese have attained a BA and another 11 % have earned a graduate degree. Moreover, 14 % hold a professional occupation.[3] The young median age of the 1.5- and second-generation Vietnamese (25 years) is also salient because most of the respondents had just finished college and some had not yet completed their education at the time of the IIMMLA survey, indicating that the percentage who earn bachelor's and graduate degrees and the percentage who hold professional occupations will climb higher in the near future.

That the educational outcomes of the 1.5- and second-generation Vietnamese surpass that of native-born whites and blacks in just one generation, and move in the direction of the 1.5- and second-generation Chinese suggests that race or ethnicity may affect educational outcomes in ways that the status attainment model has failed to predict and in ways that existing cultural models have overlooked. In the following pages, we turn to the in-depth, life history interviews of our respondents to illustrate how the children of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants construct a strict success frame, and how this frame is supported by ethnic resources to produce unexpected and exceptional educational outcomes.

The Success Frame

"A is for Average, and B is an Asian Fail"

Cultural sociologists define a frame as a lens through which individuals interpret and make sense of their lives and their social reality. The frame that individuals adopt depends on that which is accessible to them, which, in turn, influences their opportunity horizons (what they believe is possible), their expectations, and their trajectories. Applying the concept of frames to our research, we find that 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese respondents framed "a good education" similarly, despite the dissimilar educational backgrounds of their immigrant parents. For the Chinese and Vietnamese respondents, high school was mandatory, college was an obligation, and only after earning an advanced degree does one deserve kudos. For example, Caroline, a 35-year-old second-generation Chinese woman who works in the film industry noted that her mother (who holds a BA) believes it is ludicrous that graduating from high school is cause for celebration, as she described her mother's educational expectations for her children,

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[3] We examined these measures based on the 2000 US Census data for the Los Angeles region and found similar trends regarding intergroup differences.

The idea of graduating from high school for my mother was not a great congratulatory day. I was happy, but you know what? My mother was very blunt, she said, "This is a good day, but it's not that special."
She said to me that a lot of Westerners in American society value high school. She finds it absurd that graduating from high school is made into a big deal because you should graduate high school; everyone should. It's not necessarily a privilege; it's an obligation. You must go to high school, and you must finish. It's a further obligation that you go to college and get a bachelor's degree. Thereafter, if you get a Ph.D. or a Master's, that's the big thing; that's the icing on the cake with a cherry on top, and that's what she values.

Not only was college an expectation for the 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese respondents, but both groups also adopted a similar frame for what "doing well in school" means: getting straight A's, graduating as valedictorian or salutatorian, getting into one of the top UC (University of California) schools or an Ivy, and pursuing some type of graduate education in order work in one of the "four professions": doctor, lawyer, pharmacist, or engineer. So exacting is the frame for "doing well in school" that our Asian respondents described the value of grades on an Asian scale as "A is for average, and B is an Asian fail."

Not only does the "Asian fail" descriptor reveal the exacting parameters of the success frame, but it also reveals the racialization of the frame. Regardless of whether the Chinese and Vietnamese respondents agreed with the success frame, each was aware of it, and most racialized academic achievement as "the Asian thing." For example, Debra, a 1.5-generation Chinese woman explains,

Doing well in school is the Asian thing. You just see a lot more Asians being valedictorians, being top ten, never getting in trouble with the teachers, and entering into the good UC's and the Ivy League schools. And I even heard jokes from my best friend, this Caucasian girl, she liked hanging around with Asians because she knew that Asians were good students. The ones that I hung around with ended up at Harvard, Stanford, Cal.

The coding of academic excellence as "the Asian thing" is not unique to Los Angeles; Jiménez and Horowitz (2013) also find that academic achievement is racially coded as Asian in the San Francisco Bay Area, where the influx of highly skilled immigrants from east and south Asia has redefined the meaning and association of academic achievement. In Silicon Valley's high schools, Asians are cast as high-achieving, hard-working, and successful, while whites are stereotyped as low-achieving, lazy, and all too

willing to settle for mediocrity—essentially flipping the traditional US hierarchy between the native-born white host society and the new Asian second-generation population.

Most remarkable was the consistency with which the Chinese and Vietnamese respondents recounted this frame, regardless of parental education, occupation, class background, and migration history. Second-generation Vietnamese whose parents arrived as refugees, had only a fourth-grade education, do not speak English, and work in ethnic restaurants were just as likely to recount this frame as second-generation Chinese whose parents have advanced degrees and work as doctors and engineers. For example, when we asked Maryann, a 24-year-old second-generation Vietnamese woman who grew up in the housing projects in downtown LA how she defines success, she relayed, "getting into one of the top schools," which, by her account, includes "UCLA, Berkeley, Yale, Harvard, Princeton, and Stanford," and then working in one of the "top professions" such as "doctor or lawyer." When we asked Maryann how she knew about the top schools and top professions, she answered, "Other parents, like their friends who have kids. We know a few families who have kids who have gone to Yale, and they're doctors now, and they're doing really well for themselves."

Maryann's parents have only a sixth-grade education, work in Chinatown's garment factories, speak no English, and live in LA's housing projects surrounded by Mexican immigrant neighbors who are similarly disadvantaged. Yet despite Maryann's poor parental human capital, disadvantaged family background, and residential segregation from more privileged coethnics, she readily recounted a success frame that mirrored that of her middle-class coethnic and Chinese peers. Low parental human capital did not stunt Maryann's opportunity horizon, nor did it truncate her educational expectations because she benefited from intangible ethnic resources—parental networks that pointed to mobility prototypes who conveyed the meaning of the success frame and realistic possibility of attaining it.

While Maryann did not graduate from one of the "top schools" that she listed, she did graduate from a Cal State university and is now a substitute teacher while she works toward her MA in Education. Despite the extraordinary intergenerational mobility that she has attained, Maryann feels that she departed from the success frame because she earned only a 3.5 GPA and graduated from a Cal State University rather than a UC. By Maryann's account, her GPA "wasn't great" and she describes herself as "an average person" who was "never really focused on school," especially compared to her twin sister, who earned top billing as the high school valedictorian and graduated from UC Berkeley.

Maryann was not unique among the Chinese and Vietnamese respondents who described themselves as "average" because they did not fit the exacting frame for academic success. Those who graduated with GPAs of 3.5 and 3.6 consistently pointed to coethnic and panethnic peers whose GPAs exceeded 4.0, and earned admission to top public and private universities. So precise is the frame for academic success that even among those whose GPAs exceeded 4.0 felt that they were not as academically successful as they or their parents would have liked. For example, Hannah is a 25-year-old second-generation Vietnamese woman who graduated third in her high school class with a GPA of 4.21, was voted "most likely to succeed" by her peers, and earned admission to UCLA and Berkeley. Despite Hannah's stellar accomplishments, when we asked whether she and her parents were proud of her academic achievement in high school, she casually replied, "It would have been better if I was first or second."

Supporting the Success Frame

"The Chinese Yellow Book" and Supplementary Education

Simply adopting a frame is insufficient to usher a particular outcome; for frames to be effective, they need individual and institutional support, as well as consistent reinforcement. The Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant parents reinforce the narrow frame for academic success by proactively accessing the *tangible resources* that they learn about through formal and informal ethnic networks. Regardless of their education, these immigrant parents quickly learn that in order to support the success frame, they need to buy or rent homes or apartments in neighborhoods based foremost on the strength of the public school district, they need to demand that their children are placed in the Honor's and AP tracks in high school, and they need to provide supplementary education and tutoring to insure that they are. Christopher and Jason's cases illustrate precisely how their working-class immigrant parents supported the success frame, despite their poor human capital, limited economic resources, and lack of dominant cultural capital.

Christopher—A Transfer of Guardianship Christopher is a 27-year-old second-generation Vietnamese whose refugee parents have only a fourth-grade education; yet, despite their poor human capital, Christopher graduated from the University of Texas with a degree in computer science. He now works as a financial analyst for a management consulting firm and earns an annual salary of $70,000, which is more than his parents' combined earnings. Despite his family's low socioeconomic status, Christopher benefited from having high-achieving cousins who served as his

academic role models and mobility prototypes whose paths he could emulate. In addition, at the advice of their friends, Christopher's parents (who live in a low-income, predominantly Vietnamese immigrant community in Westminster) transferred legal guardianship of their son to one of their coethnic friends so that he could attend a more competitive public high school in an affluent neighborhood in Orange County. Not only did the transfer offer Christopher a more resource-rich high school education, but it also shielded him from his potential involvement in Vietnamese gangs, which was a serious concern in his parents' poor neighborhood.

Hence, Christopher's parents benefited from their ethnic capital and intangible resources; they tapped into their class-diverse ethnic networks to learn how they could provide Christopher a better education. And in spite of their socioeconomic disadvantage, they provided Christopher with the tangible and intangible resources to support the success frame, which put him on equitable footing with his middle-class coethnic peers.

Jason and Hannah—The Role of Supplementary Education Like Christopher, Jason, a 25-year-old second-generation Chinese, grew up in a working-class neighborhood in Long Beach, but as soon as his parents could afford to do so, they moved their family to a modest home in Cerritos. Jason's parents selected Cerritos because they learned from the "Chinese Yellow Book" that Cerritos High School "ranks in the teens." The "Chinese Yellow Book" is a two-inch thick, 1,500-page long telephone directory that is published annually and lists ethnic businesses in Southern California, as well as the rankings of the region's public high schools and the nation's best universities. When Jason initially moved to Cerritos and took the junior high school admissions examination, he was placed in the school's "regular" track rather than AP academic track. Dismayed and concerned, Jason's parents immediately tapped into their ethnic networks to inquire about after-school Chinese academies and promptly enrolled their son in one near his school. When Jason took the examination for high school, he was placed in the AP track.

His parents' efforts, along with Jason's hard work, paid off; Jason graduated in the top 10 % of his high school and was admitted into all of the UC campuses to which he applied. Although his parents wanted him to go to Berkeley, he chose UCLA because he could save money by living at home. In addition, because he was able to apply his high school AP credits to college, he graduated from UCLA in 3 years and is now attending a law school.

Supplementary education—including after-school tutoring, college preparation classes, academic enrichment courses, and taking classes ahead of schedule—was not unique to Jason's experience. For many of the Chinese and Vietnamese respondents, supplementary education was such an integral part of their adolescence that they hardly characterized it as supplementary; this is just what their parents had them do as an insurance policy so that they would excel in high school. For example, Hannah, the 25-year-old second-generation Vietnamese woman who graduated third in her class with a 4.21 GPA, admitted that her summers were reserved for summer school and tutoring,

> Summertime, besides going to summer school every single year, we also did tutoring classes to get ahead. I believe it was my junior year summer, I was taking classes at community college for calculus or something like that. And then younger than that, like in junior high and stuff, we were taking a class ahead, like math classes. Like, if we were going to take geometry, then we were doing it in the summertime already, or algebra in the summertime, the summer before. In the Asian community, I think everyone does tutoring.

When we pressed further and asked Hannah why her mother insisted on having her and her siblings enroll in summer school classes and tutoring, she explained, "She just knew that doing these tutoring classes would help us be ahead of our class and get better grades so that we could go to college." But Hannah specified that it was not just a question of attending any college, but, rather, a prestigious college. Hannah's parents' insistence on supplementary education for their children resulted in exceptional academic outcomes: she graduated from UCLA and is currently applying to pharmacy schools; her sister is enrolled in pharmacy school, and her brother is in medical school.

The Costs and Consequences of the Success Frame

The Achievement Paradox

While the success frame and the ethnic resources utilized to support it help poor and working-class 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese override their class disadvantage and produce higher educational outcomes than would have been predicted based on parental SES, it comes with costs and consequences. Because they turn to high-achieving coethnics as their reference group, those who do not fit the narrow success frame feel like outliers, and, in some cases, like failures, because their educational outcomes depart from what they perceive is the norm for coethnics and Asian Americans more generally. Many of the respondents were not satisfied with their own achievements, regardless of how much education they attained or how much they earn in their current position, because they compared their accomplishments to a

reference group that includes even higher-achieving co-ethnics—including their siblings, cousins, friends, and peers—rather than to non-Hispanic whites or the US mean. Regardless of what they have achieved, they (or their parents) know someone who has achieved more, and therefore, they measure their achievements upward, against an exceptionally high bar. The dissatisfaction with their academic and professional achievements (which exceeds the norm for native-born white Americans) points to the "achievement paradox" that many 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese experience, as the cases of Carolyn, Sarah, and Jemmy illuminate.

Carolyn—"The Black Sheep"   Carolyn is a 35-year-old second-generation Chinese woman, who earned a BA in Film Studies from a Cal State school and currently works as a visual effects coordinator for movies. Armed with human capital, her parents immigrated to the United States from Taiwan; her father holds a graduate degree and her mother a Bachelor's.

By Carolyn's account, she did not excel in high school and earned "only a 3.3" GPA. Despite her "low GPA," she always knew that she would go to college, not only because her parents are highly educated, but also because her aunts, uncles, and cousins are college-educated, most of whom attended elite universities like MIT, Stanford, and Cornell. Carolyn's high school record was not competitive enough to earn her admission into any of the UC schools to which she applied, but it did earn her a spot at a Cal State school. During college, she took a film class on a whim and enjoyed it so much that she decided to major in it. After graduating, she landed a job as a production assistant—no easy feat in the fiercely competitive entertainment industry in Los Angeles.

Carolyn has worked in the film industry for most of her adult life and has moved up the ranks from production assistant to visual effects coordinator, for which she earns a salary of $60,000. Because she works on films, she travels extensively—a perk of her job that she relishes—and because Carolyn aspires to make films of her own some-day, she is acquiring as much experience as she can while she "pays her dues." Now that Carolyn earns a steady income and is able to support herself, her parents are content, but they do not feel that they have "bragging rights"—that is, they are not proud enough to brag about her accomplishments to her aunts, uncles, and other family members. When asked to elaborate on the way her parents feel about her educational and occupational trajectory, Carolyn candidly replied,

> My parents were disappointed in a few things. Because I didn't go to the UC system, they were disappointed. My brother Robert was a golden child.

He got in, even though it was just Irvine, but Irvine's a good school. My parents felt like I could have done better. I tried my best, but it was a challenge.

> In terms of the bragging, you'll hear it. So and so went to MIT, and so and so went to Cornell or Stanford, and you start feeling, as an Asian person, less and less of yourself because you couldn't compete with these people, because you're not bright or smart enough, and you're not at that equal level. I used to feel a lot like that, especially when I was a production assistant and running around, and I was already out of college. I should have been happy that I finished college and I have a degree to show for it, but I didn't.

Carolyn is keenly aware that her occupational pursuit falls out of the success frame, and although she enjoys her career, she explained that her choice is unconventional by Chinese standards. She also candidly revealed that she feels like the "black sheep" of her family, especially compared to her cousins who graduated from elite, private universities, and work as doctors and lawyers. Other respondents echoed Carolyn's sentiments and described themselves as "not that smart," "not smart enough," and even "dumb" compared to their friends and family members who attended prestigious universities, attained advanced degrees, and have high-status occupations. Because they compare themselves to the highest-achieving coethnics who have attained the success frame, many of the respondents feel that they are not successful—pointing to the "achievement paradox," as Sarah and Jemmy's cases underscore.

Sarah and Jemmy—The Status of an Advanced Degree
Sarah is a 1.5-generation Chinese woman who graduated from a UC school and now owns a profitable contracting and design company from which she earned $160,000 last year. Sarah described herself as "a double-minority" (female and nonwhite) who works in an industry that is dominated by white males, which makes her business ownership and success that much more impressive. Despite all of Sarah's markers of success—including a thriving business and a home in an affluent neighborhood in Los Angeles—neither she nor her parents view her as successful because she has not attained an advanced degree. When we asked whether she feels successful, Sarah answered, "not yet."

Compared to her older sister, who graduated from law school and now works as a lawyer, Sarah feels that she pales in comparison, as she relayed, "I don't have a graduate degree." Elaborating on this point, Sarah mentioned with a touch of embarrassment, "All of my friends in high school went to grad school except me." When we asked why a graduate degree is important, she explained,

"The perception among Chinese is that education is the key to success." What is noteworthy about Sarah's statement is that while an advanced degree may not help her in her chosen profession, she will not feel successful until she has earned one.

We then asked Sarah whether she feels successful compared to her friends who are not Chinese. She paused for a moment as if she had never considered that comparison before and finally replied,

> Let me think about that for a moment (pause). If I were to look at my white friends of that same age range, yes I'm more successful. If I were to look at all of my friends, yes, I would say so.

While Sarah does not feel successful according to the strict success frame, she does feel successful vis-à-vis her white and non-Chinese friends, but, remarkably, she had never considered making this comparison before we raised the question. Sarah is not unique in this regard; none of the 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese respondents considered measuring their success against native-born whites (or native-born blacks for that matter). Rather, they turn to high-achieving coethnics as their reference group—a finding that highlights that native-born whites are not the standard by which today's 1.5- and second-generation Asians measure their success and achievements.

Like Sarah, Jemmy, a 1.5-generation Chinese male, measures his success against high-achieving coethnics, and as a result, he feels that he pales in comparison. Jemmy graduated from a UC school and now does research in a laboratory for a scientist and aspires to attain a PhD. Jemmy had not been accepted into any of the prestigious PhD programs to which he applied, which has caused him a great deal of anguish and embarrassment because he compares himself to his peers, friends, and brother who are currently in doctoral programs or who have already attained their PhD degrees. When we asked Jemmy to whom he compares himself when measuring his success, he answered

> Most of my family, at least who live close by. They have already gotten their PhD's a long time ago. My brother already has his PhD Most of my friends already have their PhD's, or are on their way to getting it.

Less than 1 percent of Americans have a PhD, yet Jemmy's reference group includes only those who have a doctoral degree or are on their way to attaining one, and because Jemmy was not admitted to any of the doctoral programs to which he applied, he feels like an abject failure because he has "only a BA." But later in the interview, Jemmy admitted that not all of his family members and

friends have their PhD degrees (in fact, most do not), yet he does not compare his accomplishments to those who do not, nor does he consider measuring his success against the native-born whites or against lower-achieving coethnics. Instead, he (like most other respondents) compares upward, and in the process, Jemmy feels unsuccessful, despite his educational and professional accomplishments.

Coupling Ethnicity and Achievement

So strong is the perception that the success frame is the norm among Asian Americans that the 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese who cannot attain it or choose to buck it find themselves at odds with their immigrant parents and with their ethnic identities. Because they couple ethnicity and achievement, and because they believe that the success frame is a product of their ethnic culture and a reflection of their ethnic identity, they find themselves attempting to relinquish their ethnic identities in the process of contesting the frame. So rather than challenging and rejecting the frame, the respondents were more likely to distance themselves from coethnics and their ethnic identities, as Paul, Andrew, and Lana's cases illustrate.

Paul and Andrew—Relinquishing their Ethnic Identities Paul is a 33-year-old second-generation Chinese who works as a freelance artist. Paul's mother died when he was a young teenager, so he was raised by his single father, who was not only a strict disciplinarian, but also physically abusive. Much of the abuse stemmed from the discord between Paul's desire to pursue a career in art and his father's insistence that Paul pursue a more traditional, high-status career as a doctor, lawyer, or scientist. According to Paul's father, pursuing a career in art is not a prestigious occupation, and certainly not one that he could "boast about," as Paul explained

> He didn't see it as prestigious. It's nothing he could boast about. He had other friends whose children were going to Harvard, and becoming scientists and doctors and lawyers, and boasting about their accomplishments. Being an artist seemed like too much of a step down.

Paul's father was so adamantly opposed to his son's desire to pursue a career in art that he threatened not to pay for Paul's college tuition if he accepted admission to the art academy to which he was admitted. Paul contrived that the only way to force his father to support his college education was to threaten to ask his uncles and grandparents on his mother's side for financial assistance, which would have caused even greater embarrassment to his father. Faced with the threat, Paul's father finally relented and

reluctantly agreed to pay for his college tuition at the art academy.

Today, Paul works as a freelance artist who earns a six-figure salary, which is enough, so that his wife can stay at home full time to care for their two preschool age children. He and his wife purchased a home in an affluent Orange County suburb, yet despite Paul's productive and prosperous career, his decision to become an artist has caused such a severe rift with his father that the two have not made amends. Even today, they rarely speak to one another.

Paul attributes his father's reluctance to support his career in art to his father's adherence to Chinese culture, because, according to Paul, in Chinese culture, "It's really bad to choose to be an artist; it's really undesirable." Paul also attributes his refusal to buckle under his father's pressure to his "being more American than Chinese," as Paul described, "I didn't buy into that. I grew up with the mindset which I attribute to being more American culture, which is, I can choose to do anything I want; it's about individuality of freedom." Furthermore, Paul racializes his decision to be an artist by describing himself as "the whitest Chinese guy you'll ever meet." Because he departed from the success frame, Paul feels like an ethnic outlier.

There are several noteworthy points about the way in which Paul described his educational and occupational pursuits. First, Paul attributes his willingness to buck the success frame as an act that is culturally American rather than Chinese. Second, because Paul does not fit the success frame, he distances himself from his ethnicity as far as he is able by claiming to be the "whitest Chinese guy you'll ever meet;" however, by doing so, he reinforces the association between Chinese ethnicity, achievement, and the success frame. He has even changed the spelling of his ethnic surname, so that clients would be unable to detect his ethnic identity prior to meeting him in person.

Third, while Paul feels no attachment to his Chinese ethnicity, he is unable to completely relinquish it, as he insightfully noted, "I'm an American at heart, but I'm Chinese, undeniable." Given his phenotype and features, Paul does not believe that he can claim an unhyphenated American identity because he cannot physically escape his racial status. Like other 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese, Paul distances himself from his ethnic identity as a way to disassociate himself from the narrow success frame. And like the other respondents who diverged from the success frame, Paul attempts to reject his ethnic identity because he believes the two—the success frame and ethnicity—are inextricably linked.

Many of the 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese respondents expressed that they do not feel Chinese, Vietnamese, or Asian because they do not fit the narrow parameters of the success frame. Andrew

(a 21-year-old second-generation Vietnamese respondent) is another example; he does not consider himself "Vietnamese enough" because he has not achieved the accolades that his younger brother has. Andrew described his brother as "everything that I'm not" because he excelled in his high school AP courses, attends an elite UC school as a Biology major, and is on his way to medical school, as Andrew described,

> My brother is very successful. He managed to do everything that I wasn't able to do. He got very high grades in all AP classes. I just think I didn't do well enough. I'm not angry at him, just disappointed I didn't meet those goals and expectations.

Andrew's sense that he is not as successful as his brother has affected how he chooses to identify; he prefers the racial label of "American Asian" rather than an ethnic one as Vietnamese or Vietnamese American because he feels like a failure compared to his brother. When we asked Andrew how he thinks other people identify him, he answered, "I'm not sure how people see me. If they asked what I am, I say Vietnamese, but I don't consider myself Vietnamese enough" and then added that his brother is "much more Vietnamese than me." Because his brother fits the success frame, Andrew feels that he is a better, more accurate reflection of Vietnamese ethnicity. Believing that he is an outlier in the Vietnamese community, Andrew feels no connection to his Vietnamese ethnicity and chooses to avoid contact with coethnics whenever possible. Like Andrew, Lana also prefers to opt out of her ethnic identity and chooses the racial label "Asian American."

Lana—Opting out of Ethnicity Lana is a 25-year-old second-generation Vietnamese woman who lives at home with her parents. She has completed 4 years of community college and described her working status as "self-employed," by which she means that she does odd jobs such as babysitting children, taking care of elderly neighbors, and occasionally helping people with film and theatrical productions when she has the opportunity. As the only child of Vietnamese immigrants, Lana has felt the weight of her parents' expectations all of her life and feels that she has failed them miserably. She did not graduate from a UC school as they had hoped, and she does not hold a prestigious job as a doctor, lawyer, engineer, or pharmacist. Since Lana graduated from community college, her parents have adjusted their expectations and now hope that she will become a teacher, but Lana has no interest in becoming a teacher, and, instead, dreams of working behind the scenes in films. When we asked how her parents feel about her passion for films, she answered, "I'm so far off from what my parents want, so I might as well just make myself happy."

As a second-generation Vietnamese whose accomplishments are far afield from the success frame, Lana chooses to have as little contact as possible with the Vietnamese community, who in her view defines success by the "three M's: Money, Motorola, and Mercedes." Moreover, Lana chooses to identify racially as Asian American, rather than ethnically as Vietnamese or Vietnamese American, because she conflates ethnicity with achievement. Lana opts out of her ethnic identity because she does not fit the narrow parameters of the success frame, but in the process of opting out of her ethnic identity, she (like Paul and Andrew) reifies the association between ethnicity and achievement.

This self-selection process of preferring a racial versus ethnic identification has an unintended consequence: it provides specious support for the association between ethnicity and achievement. Because the 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese who do not fit the success frame are less likely to identify ethnically and are also less likely to engage with their ethnic communities, they become less visible to coethnics and also less visible to non-Asians more generally. By contrast, those who fit the frame are more likely to identify with and embrace their ethnic identities, more likely to have contact with coethnics and their coethnic communities, and as a consequence, they become more visible to coethnics and non-Asians alike. Their visibility is raised even further when stories about those who have attained the success frame are featured in ethnic newspapers and ethnic news programs. Consequently, the seemingly simple and inconsequential process of racial versus ethnic identification—and the resultant behavior that ensues—can transform a once-specious association into a veritable one, thereby strengthening the link between ethnicity and achievement.

Previous research has also found that Asian Americans link ethnicity and achievement (Caplan et al. 1989; Lee 2006; Zhou and Bankston 1998). For example, second-generation Koreans who did not attend an elite university and who had not secured high-salaried, professional jobs were embarrassed by their "failure," and as a result, they did not feel authentically Korean or Korean American, and disassociated themselves from the Korean American community because they felt like underachieving anomalies (Lee 2006). In addition, the children of Southeast Asian refugees who failed in school were more likely to detach themselves from their families and ethnic communities (Caplan et al. 1989; Zhou and Bankston 1998).

Through this self-selection process, the success frame endures and remains tangled with ethnicity, despite the bevy of disconfirming evidence of 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese who do not fit the frame and actively resist it. By opting out of their ethnic identities and removing themselves from their ethnic communities, the

1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese who feel like failures, anomalies, or poor representatives of their coethnic communities unwittingly reinforce the specious link between ethnicity and achievement.

Discussion and Conclusions

We began this paper by engaging the Tiger Mother controversy with a vexing question: how do we explain the exceptional academic outcomes of 1.5- and second-generation Asian American students, when the status attainment model and the cultural capital model fall short in offering adequate answers? The low-SES origins of Vietnamese and Chinese parents do not hamper their children's educational outcomes in the same way that it obstructs the educational outcomes of other racial/ethnic minority groups. The Vietnamese arrive in the United States as disadvantaged refugees with less than a high school education, few labor market skills, and little command of the English language, yet their children evince higher educational outcomes than their native-born white and black peers. Furthermore, rather than converging to the white middle-class norm, the children of Vietnamese immigrants exhibit educational outcomes that are more similar to their 1.5- and second-generation Chinese counterparts.

The exceptional academic outcomes of the children of Asian immigrants have led to the resurgence of racial/ethnic stereotypes about the Asian "Tiger Mother," Asian parents' rigid and authoritarian child-rearing practices, and Asian culture to explain their children's academic achievement (Chua 2011). Chua is not alone in the way she conceives the role of culture. Unable to explain the academic outcomes of some Asian Americans, pundits like David Brooks (2012) and scholars like Charles Murray (2012) point to Asian cultural values—Asians are more hard-working and, therefore, more high-achieving than other students. Even the majority of our 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese respondents attributed their academic achievements to their racial/ethnic culture by claiming that "Asians value education more than other groups."

Culture and ethnicity matter, but not in the way that the Tiger Mother and many of our respondents claim it does. Treating culture as a core set of racially/ethnically intrinsic, comprehensive, and unchanging values, and linking these values to outcomes provides a glib explanation, but a specious one. In our research, we reject the notion of culture as static and intrinsic to race or ethnicity; instead, we develop a model of cultural frames to illustrate how culture operates through frames, and how frames are supported by tangible and intangible ethnic resources.

Our analysis of the in-depth interview data shows that the 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese

share a frame for academic success that entails getting straight A's in high school, graduating from an elite university, and pursuing an advanced degree. This frame reflects a particular mobility strategy in which academic achievement becomes the pragmatic goal in itself because Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant parents perceive education as the *only* sure path to mobility—a perception that they have imparted onto their children (Lee and Zhou 2013; Steinberg 1996; Sue and Okazaki 1990).

Given the potential discrimination that they fear their nonwhite children may experience in fields like writing, acting, or art, Asian immigrant parents push for the most conservative approach and shepherd their children into fields and professions in which they believe their children will experience the least possibility of bias and discrimination. Professions in medicine, law, and engineering require advanced degrees—markers of high education and skill—which, immigrant parents believe, may shield their children from potential bias from employers, fellow employees, peers, customers, and clients. As long as Asian immigrant parents perceive that their children are susceptible to potential discrimination from their host society, they will continue to push their second-generation children into particular professions to shield them from it.

However, Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant parents recognize that it is not enough to adopt a particular success frame; in order to realize the frame, they need to support it with tangible and intangible resources. Consequently, they choose neighborhoods based on the quality of school districts, and parents insist that their children are placed in the Honor's or AP tracks in their schools. In addition, parents provide supplementary education in the form of tutoring, after-school classes in ethnic and nonethnic academies, SAT prep courses, and summer school classes in local community colleges to make sure that their children are a step ahead of their peers. While the middle-class have created and charted this educational strategy, the resources required to follow it are available to poor and working-class coethnics. Access to these supplementary ethnic resources explains why the outcomes of the 1.5- and second-generation Vietnamese are more similar to the Chinese rather than to native-born whites or blacks.

While the 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese respondents framed academic success as "an Asian thing," the mechanisms by which these students achieve success are by no means exclusive to Asian Americans (Lareau 2003; Smith 2014; Tran, forthcoming). Lareau (2003) finds that affluent, native-born white and black parents consciously engage in a process of "concerted cultivation" in order to hone their children's skills and talents. These parents send their children to elite private high schools and pack their children's schedules with a slew of after-school activities, including piano, violin,

and tennis, as well as tutoring, and supplementary education. Middle-class parents now use their class resources to invest more money and time in their children than ever before (Reardon 2011).

While this intensive child-rearing method of "concerted cultivation" is class-specific among non-Asians, it is not so among Asian immigrant parents; regardless of class, Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant parents share a success frame for their children. Furthermore, the openness with which Asian parents admit to enhancing their children's education with tutors, after-school classes, and summer school compared to the reticence among non-Asian parents is one reason why achievement is linked with race/ethnicity. This is not to de-emphasize the significance of family SES, which is conducive for the educational attainment of all children. Rather, we underscore that the low SES of some Asian immigrant families does not hamper the educational attainment of their children as it does with other racial/ethnic minority groups because immigrant parents actively access the tangible and intangible resources in their ethnic communities to help override their class disadvantage.

Carter (2005) made a strong case for decoupling race, culture, and academic achievement; through her extensive research of low-income African American and Latino youth, Carter found that these youth did not equate academic achievement with "acting white." Instead, African American and Latino youth associated "acting white" with cultural styles and tastes in music, dress, food, and speech patterns. Carter convincingly demonstrated that acting white is not an anti-achievement ideology, as Fordham and Ogbu (1986) claimed, but rather a descriptor of a youth's adoption of white, middle-class tastes, styles, and speech patterns. While Carter debunked the association between "acting white" and anti-achievement ideology, pundits, scholars, and the American public more generally continue to pair race/ethnicity (and more specifically, racial/ethnic culture) with academic achievement. Today, however, the association between academic achievement and race/ethnicity has moved beyond the black–white binary; Asian Americans—rather than whites—have become the model of academic excellence (see also Jiménez and Horowitz 2013).

While linking ethnicity and achievement may appear to be positive or advantageous, there are a host of unintended negative consequences associated with this pairing (Cheryan and Bodenhausen 2000; Ho et al. 1998; Lin et al. 2005). To end, we explain why decoupling race/ethnicity from achievement has positive implications for Asian Americans, as well as other racial/ethnic groups. First, de-racializing and de-ethnicizing achievement will provide the space to acknowledge that most Asian Americans are not exceptional, and many do not achieve extraordinary

educational and occupational outcomes. By recognizing the disconfirming evidence and accepting the vast heterogeneity within the Asian American population, Asian Americans who do not fit the success frame may not feel like racial/ethnic outliers or failures when their outcomes do not squarely fit the frame's narrow parameters. As a consequence, they may be less likely to reject their ethnic identities and less likely to distance themselves from their coethnics simply because they do not meet the perceived norm.

Second, decoupling race/ethnicity from achievement will also have positive implications for self-esteem among Asian American college students, which is lower compared to other groups, even controlling for academic performance. In a study of college students at elite universities, Massey et al. (2003) found that while Asian students have the highest academic outcomes, they exhibit the lowest levels of self-esteem compared to white, black, and Latino college students. Moreover, despite their higher GPAs, they are the least likely to see themselves as good students (Massey et al. 2003; Sidanius et al. 2010). We posit that this may be because Asian Americans use high-achieving coethnics—rather than whites, blacks, or Latinos—as the reference group by which they measure their success. If academic achievement is no longer racially coded as "an Asian thing," then Asian American students may be more willing to measure their success against a more reasonable barometer, which may result in a boost in self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Third, decoupling race/ethnicity and achievement has positive implications for other groups, especially blacks and Latinos who are often stereotyped by teachers and peers as low-achieving and, consequently, may suffer from "stereotype threat," which can lead students to underperform in competitive academic settings (Deaux et al. 2007; Massey and Fischer 2005; Steele and Aronson 1995). It will also benefit white students, who are also deemed as less academically inclined than their Asian American counterparts, especially in metropolitan areas that have experienced high rates of high-skilled Asian immigration, such as Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area (Jiménez and Horowitz 2013).

Finally, while we recognize the positive functions of the success frame, we also highlighted the costs associated with embracing it too tightly and the advantages associated with broadening it. Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants (and other Asians more generally) could consider broadening the success frame, so that their children do not feel so constricted in their occupational pursuits. This process has already begun, as the second generation has come of age, and will likely continue, if the incorporation experiences of second- and later-generation European ethnics are a precursor of what lies ahead for later-generation Asians (Alba and Nee

2003; Foner 2010). That Asian Americans are departing from the success frame, choosing alternate pathways, and achieving success on their own terms should give Asian immigrant parents and their children confidence that broadening the success frame is not a route to failure; instead, it may lead to uncharted and fulfilling pathways to success.

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