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PREVIEW

**CORRELATES OF ASIAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS'
CAREER ASPIRATIONS: GENERATIONAL STATUS, SELF-REPORTS, AND
PARENTAL-REPORTS ON ACCULTURATION AND PERCEIVED PREJUDICE**

by

Amy Tiongson Corey

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**Interdepartmental Area of
Major: Psychological and Cultural Studies**

(Counseling Psychology)

Under the Supervision of Professor Gargi Roysircar-Sodowsky

Lincoln, Nebraska

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DISSERTATION TITLE

Correlates of Asian American College Students' Career Aspirations: Generational Status,
Self-Reports, and Parental Reports on Acculturation and Perceived Prejudice

BY

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GRADUATE COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

CORRELATES OF ASIAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS'
CAREER ASPIRATIONS: GENERATIONAL STATUS, SELF-REPORTS, AND
PARENTAL-REPORTS ON ACCULTURATION AND PERCEIVED PREJUDICE

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University of Nebraska, 2000

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Asian Americans' career choices are strongly influenced by parental pressure (Leong & Gim, 1995), racial prejudice (Lee, 1994), and cultural values (Sodowsky, 1991; Sodowsky, Kwan, & Pannu, 1995). Low acculturation and high perceived prejudice has been related to occupational stereotyping (Leong & Hayes, 1990), segregation (Leong, 1996), and discrimination (Leong & Chou, 1994). The present study explores the correlates of the career aspirations of U.S.-born second generation Asian American college students by measuring their acculturation, perceived prejudice, and these participants' reports on their foreign-born immigrant parents' acculturation, perceived prejudice, and career aspirations. A total of 139 Asian American students from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Creighton University returned completed surveys. The Minority-Majority Relations Survey (MMRS; Sodowsky, Lai, & Plake, 1991) was used to measure acculturation and perceived prejudice, while career aspirations were defined as science or nonscience by the Career Aspirations Survey (CAS) developed by the author. It was hypothesized that the career aspirations of the

U.S.-born second generation students, along with their foreign-born first generation counterparts (early vs. late arrived), would be predicted by their level of acculturation and perceived prejudice. However, for the U.S.-born second generation students, their reports of parental acculturation and perceived prejudice predicted their career aspirations, while the students' own levels of acculturation and perceived prejudice did not predict their career aspirations. The foreign-born first generation students (early and late arrived) indicated a higher likelihood of pursuing science careers than U.S.-born second generation students, and they also reported significantly lower acculturation and higher perceived prejudice than their second generation counterparts. On the other hand, there were no differences among the foreign-born first generation students (early and late arrived) and the U.S.-born second generation students for non-science career aspirations. The implications of the college students' generational status, perceived prejudice, acculturation, science and non-science career aspirations, and parental influence on the career counseling process with Asian Americans are discussed.

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PREVIEW

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Purpose

Asian Americans are one of the fastest growing minority groups in the United States. The Asian American population more than doubled between 1970 and 1980 when Asians became 1.5 percent of the population, a growth of 141 percent (Lee & Yamanaka, 1990). This dramatic increase can be attributed to the 1965 Amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act, which removed restrictions on Asian immigration (Lee & Yamanaka, 1990). In 1998, the Asian and Pacific Islander population in the United States (U.S.) was estimated at 10.5 million, a representation of 3.9 percent of the country's total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 1998a). Thus, because of the increase in the number of Asian Americans in this country, there is great need to study the Asian American population and this study will focus primarily on their career concerns.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the correlates of the career aspirations of U.S.-born second generation Asian Americans by measuring their level of acculturation, amount of perceived prejudice, and perceptions of their foreign-born immigrant parents' acculturation, perceived prejudice, and career aspirations. Research has shown that Asian Americans' career choices are strongly influenced by parental pressure (Leong & Gim, 1995), racial prejudice (Lee, 1994), and Asian cultural values (Sodowsky, 1991; Sodowsky, Kwan, & Pannu, 1995). Specifically, low Asian American acculturation and perceived prejudice have been demonstrated in the literature to be related to occupational stereotyping (Leong & Hayes, 1990), segregation (Leong, 1996), and discrimination (Leong & Chou, 1994).

With regard to counseling applications, this study has underscored the need for counselors to be cognizant of how a) the cultural values and b) sociopolitical status of Asian American clients influence their career decisions. In addition, increased knowledge of various factors influencing the career decision-making of second generation Asian Americans as indicated by the current study, suggests a need to revise and expand current mainstream career theories and assessment tools. The study emphasizes the need for career counselors to use an approach that is based on a cultural-political-context when carrying out their interventions with Asian American clients. This approach would include information about nationality, acculturation adaptations, experiences of prejudice, differences in Asian American socio-demographic characteristics, such as age of entry into the U.S. and generational status, and Asian American perceptions of parental authority. All of these socio-environmental factors of immigrants impact the multicultural counseling process and outcome with Asian Americans.

Three Issues Affecting Career Aspirations of Asian Americans

There are three factors that affect Asian Americans' career aspirations: Cultural values as related to Asian ethnicity; Asian ethnic minorities' experience of racism; and acculturation differences between Asian children and their parents.

1. Ethnicity. Ethnicity is an important factor for determining how Asian Americans behave. An ethnicity's cultural norms and values dictate the "rules" of a family, including how members "identify, define, and attempt to solve their problems, and how they seek help" (McGoldrick & Rohrbaugh, 1987, p. 89). Traditional Asian cultural values generally emphasize personality traits such as silence, nonconfrontation,

self-control, patience, humility, and modesty (Sodowsky et al., 1995). For many Asians, family identity is characterized by the interdependence of individual members who seek to honor the family and avoid shame by prioritizing family demands over individual desires (Sodowsky et al., 1995). Leong and Gim (1995) found that Asian Americans' career choices are strongly influenced by parental pressure because Asian parents hold high regard and status in the family.

2. Racism. Lee (1994) argues that racial *prejudice* of the White American group influences Asian Americans' behavior and attitudes. For instance, students of Japanese descent realize that they will be easily identifiable due to their physical attributes and be racially discriminated against. They also realize that to be identified as Japanese American means they will be considered by others to be smart, hardworking, studious, and well behaved (Matute-Bianchi, 1986). Thus they will be denied affirmative action resources that are available to other racial and ethnic minorities.

3. Acculturation differences between Asian American children and their parents. Acculturation is related to occupational choice and interest among Asian Americans (Leong & Chou, 1994). Leong and Gim (1995) cite a study by Gim (1992) that showed that Asian Americans were the only group (among Blacks, Asian Americans, Whites, and Chicano/Latinos) to list parental pressure as one of the top five factors influential in career choice. Thus in order to expand career assessment and interventions, it would be important to study Asian American youth's perceptions of their first generation parents' career aspirations for their children and their concordance or discordance with the youth's preferred choices.

Asian Cultural Values Versus Acculturation to the U.S. White Society

Traditional Asian cultural backgrounds emphasize interpersonal reserve and formality, inhibition of strong feelings, and deference to authority (Sodowsky et al., 1995). These characteristics are not compatible with communication-oriented Western careers that incorporate confrontational or aggressive behavior, and this contributes to the occupational segregation of Asian Americans (Leong, 1996). Thus, less acculturated Asian Americans may be segregated into occupational fields requiring less mastery of English and less interpersonal contact (Leong, 1996), which, in turn, may further segregate Asians and provide few opportunities to learn U.S.-acculturated behavior.

It is argued that Asian parents who are less acculturated may encourage their children to work in the science and engineering fields because they believe those are the fields that would be most accepting of Asians (Kuo, 1982). Leong and Serafica (1993) further noted that Asian American parents believe that their children will be better off if they are in respected and independent professions in which many Asian Americans have already succeeded. Because parental respect is a strong trait in Asian cultures (Fong, 1973), the parents' wishes may be an influential factor in the continued occupational segregation of Asians (Leong, 1996). Asians found in "overrepresented" careers may be less acculturated because the occupational segregation makes acculturation less necessary for success and provides fewer chances for acculturating experiences (Leong, 1996). This pattern of occupational segregation for Asian Americans into the physical, biological, and medical sciences and engineering (Leong & Serafica, 1993) feeds into American society's occupational stereotypes (Leong & Chou, 1994). For instance, on the basis of 1988-89 campus statistics of college students' choice of majors (Kim,

1993), it was noted that 27.8% of Asian Americans declared a major in engineering, as compared to 17.5% of African Americans, 15.6% of Hispanic Americans, and 13.3% of Caucasian students. In the biological sciences, 9.5% of Asian Americans had declared their majors, as compared to 6.6% of Hispanic Americans, 4.9% of Caucasian, and 4.4% of African American students. Similarly, 7.3% of Asian Americans declared majors in chemistry, as compared to 3.7% of Caucasians, 2.4% of African Americans, and 2.0% of Hispanic American students.

In her ethnographic study, Lee (1994) found that Asian American high school students who were Asian-identified were motivated by guilt and a sense of responsibility to their families to achieve academically. In another study, students of Japanese descent were found to be very achievement-oriented and highly goal-specific in describing their future educational and occupational aspirations (Matute-Bianchi, 1986). Successful Japanese American students possessed more detailed and intimate knowledge of adult occupations and opportunities when compared to successful Mexican American students. This was attributed to facts that (a) most of the Japanese-descent students had family members or family friends who were engaged in the particular occupations to which these students aspired; and (b) the Japanese students were more likely to have visible, intimate role models within the family network (Matute-Bianchi, 1986).

Counselors who work with Asian American students may find that many Asian clients present with career-related issues that may be related to their level of acculturation to the U.S. society. A reluctance to seek help outside the family, even with regard to career choices and academic majors, may be due to traditional Asian cultural

values that view psychological problems as a failure of the family (Kinzie, 1985; Sodowsky, 1991). Markus and Kitayama (1991) asserted that persons with an individualistic orientation are more likely to view their career aspiration as a personal matter that allows for self-expression and self-actualization, whereas Asian individuals with a collectivistic orientation may view their career choice in the context of potential contributions and obligations to the family and such people may seek guidance about career choice only within the family. Because characteristics such as maintaining honor and avoiding loss of face are generally important dynamics of communication for Asians, counselors need to be knowledgeable of specific Asian value differences from the White American society and their impact on Asian American interactions in the counseling setting (Leong, 1993).

Leong and Gim (1995) proposed that more acculturated Asian Americans (showing assimilated or integrated adaptations) will perceive their occupation more like White Americans do (e.g., a virtue in and of itself) and, therefore, will choose occupations based on what they enjoy. They also asserted that less acculturated Asian Americans (rejectionist adaptation) to the U.S. White society will view careers more as a means to an end (e.g., financial security) (see also Leong & Tata, 1990).

Sodowsky and Lai (1997) asserted possible reasons for the academic and career anxieties of Asians, as these are related to acculturative stress. First, in traditional Asian cultures, scholars rank high in the social hierarchy. For example, the Hindu culture has a goddess of learning who is accorded high status in Hindu households. Second, most Asians make it a priority to take care of and bring honor to their families. Academic or career achievement is one concrete way to bring glory to the family. Thus academic

achievement, as related to promising careers, is something early generations of Asian immigrants worry about as they acculturate to U.S. society.

Asian Experience of Prejudice

Asians are viewed as a “model minority” and students are often praised as “whiz kids” (Yee, 1992). The misconception, however, of the model minority maintains that Asian Americans do not need to be studied because they are a successful and a model minority with no need for assistance with problems unlike other minority groups (Leong, 1996). The model minority stereotype asserts that Asian Americans are successful academically because they work hard and come from cultures that value education (Lee, 1994). Lee (1994) examined the model minority myth and argued that Asian American students’ attitudes towards schooling and career aspirations are not merely culturally determined, but rather they are also related to experiences of racism: how one copes with racism (Lee, 1994; Matute-Bianchi, 1986); and perceptions of restricted adult opportunities (Matute-Bianchi, 1986). In her ethnographic study on Asian American high school students, Lee (1994) found that some Korean students believed that “by being like model minorities Koreans could earn the respect of whites and move up the social ladder” (p. 417). Korean and Asian-identified students had positive attitudes toward education based on their belief that it would help them achieve social and economic success. Lee (1994) found that Asian-identified students seemed resigned to the fact that discrimination would limit their potential. Instead of challenging discrimination, they altered their expectations to fit what they perceived as their opportunities. Sodowsky and Lai (1997) hypothesized that because Asians in the United States are subjected to prejudice and discrimination, Asians perceive education

as their only available option for adaptation to and advancement in the U.S. White society (Sodowsky & Lai, 1997).

Language differences in the United States are viewed by Asians as barriers to success in the United States (Ogbu, 1987). Apparently, in addition to cultural values, perceptions of prejudice are also influencing Asians' occupational segregation into the science and engineering fields. In Lee's (1994) study, many Asian-identified students believed that their "accent" would keep them from doing certain things. Lee (1994) said, "One Asian identified informant told me that, although he wanted to be a lawyer or politician, he planned to be an engineer because of his 'accent'" (p. 418).

However, occupational discrimination occurs in any field that Asian Americans may choose (Leong & Chou, 1994). This discrimination can occur in the form of lower pay, weaker evaluations, and fewer promotions than would be expected based on performance and credentials. Leong and Chou (1994) argued that an individual's ethnic identity affects the level of discrimination the Asian American individual will encounter. Specifically, they propose that someone who is strongly ethnically identified may be perceived as very different or as "troublesome." On the other hand, the least ethnically identified Asian Americans will perceive and experience the least amount of occupational discrimination because they will attribute their lack of success to an individual lack of ability rather than to discrimination. To understand this rationalization of self-doubting Asian Americans, Leong (1996) makes a theoretical connection to Helms' model of Black racial identity development in which Blacks in the Preencounter stage are described to attribute their low success to a lack of personal effort and ability (Helms, 1993). Believing that lack of success is due to a lack of

personal effort describes someone who is not strongly identified with their ethnic culture. This individual is more easily swayed by the majority society's stereotypes that minorities' difficulties are a result of their lack of effort and other deficient trait attributes (Leong, 1996; Sodowsky, Kuo-Jackson, Richardson, & Corey, 1998). Leong (1996) uses the term "bamboo ceiling" to describe the discrimination and exclusion of qualified individuals from moving up the corporate ladder because of their Asian American ethnicity. The least ethnically identified persons may also be rewarded more by White employers and supervisors. Career concerns related to cultural values, acculturation issues, and experiences of racism may be overlooked by career counselors when it comes to Asians because counselors, too, may believe the model minority myth (Leong, 1996).

Acculturation Differences Among Immigrant Groups

Ogbu (1989) asserted that minorities' attitudes about prestige and mobility must be distinguished by their different minority statuses. He differentiated between voluntary and involuntary minorities, defining voluntary minorities as immigrants who voluntarily choose to come to the United States in search of a better life (e.g., South Asians and some Southeast Asians). Involuntary minorities are those who were forced into American society through slavery or domination (e.g., African Americans, Native Americans). Ogbu (1989) contends that differences in achievement levels between voluntary and involuntary minorities are due to their perceptions of future opportunities. Many Asian Americans are considered a voluntary minority and are generally high achievers because they view schooling as an essential step to social mobility (Ogbu, 1987). In addition, second generation Asians are often pressured by their parents to seek

high income and, consequently, high prestige jobs, so that they can have financial security and social status in the U.S. society (Sodowsky, 1991). Thus, Asian American students are commonly portrayed as “academic superstars” (Lee, 1994, p. 413).

Leong and Serafica (1995) suggested that Asian American parents are likely to provide strong parental guidance, especially in terms of their children’s career choice. Parents’ awareness of discrimination in the workplace may make them more likely to exert influence on the career aspirations of their children. Specifically, parents will encourage their children to choose a respected and autonomous profession in which many Asian Americans have already succeeded. Moreover, Leong and Chou (1994) suggested that those Asian Americans who are less acculturated will show less self-efficacy in career choice because of their deference to parental authority. Hence, less acculturated individuals may choose their careers according to family desires rather than examining their own interests and career choices.

If there are differences between Asian parents’ career expectations for their children and the children’s career aspirations for themselves, then one would suspect that there may be conflict in the family over value differences. This family conflict would seemingly have implications for how counselors could deal effectively with intra-family differences with regard to culturally-based career preferences (Sodowsky, 1991).

Counselors need to be able to assess the Asian American client’s level of acculturation as an important variable in the career counseling process. This can be assessed directly or indirectly. An indirect approach would be to observe the client’s speech, manner, dress, and accent. Another indirect form of assessment would be to