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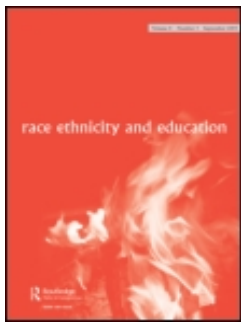
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Learning from the margins: the education of Southeast and South Asian Americans in context

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This article explicates the diversity within the Asian American community by focusing on Southeast and South Asian American students. Focusing on these two groups is important given their recent migration (relative to other groups) and tenuous position within Asian American research, discourse, and representation. In particular, this article contends that the image of Asian American success masks the contexts—economic, social, and cultural challenges—that mark the educational experiences of many Southeast Asian and South Asian American students. It explores (1) issues of cultural capital; (2) negotiations of identity, gender and generation; and (3) experiences of racism. By highlighting the social and cultural contexts of the education of Southeast and South Asian students, it reveals the many ways students are learning from the margins and the price of ‘success’ that is often diminished by the image of Asian American achievement.

Asian American profile of academic success

While the media portrayed Asian Americans as model minorities in the mid 1960s and 1980s, and many researchers have been critical of the stereotype, the model minority stereotype is still thriving. In a *Newsweek* article (Pan, 2000), for example, Asian American men were touted as ideal boyfriends or husbands. Rather than a thing of the past, the successful image of Asian Americans persists: ‘In the age of Yahoo’s cofounder Jerry Yang, traditionally negative stereotypes of Asian males as smart, studious and hardworking become positives. They are practically turn-of-the-century American heroes’ (Pan, 2000). In the minds of the US public, teachers, and educational policy makers, Asian Americans as an entire group are still ‘outwhiting the Whites’ and are overachievers (Lee, 1996; Walker-Moffat, 1995).

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This image of high educational achievement fails to take into account the vast difference and diversity influenced by ethnic, socioeconomic, generational, and gender issues. Lost in the Asian American success story is the diversity in the refugee waves and the recent migration of some Asian (particularly Southeast Asian) ethnic groups. Earlier, pre-1975 refugee and immigrant waves of Asian ethnics were wealthier and had more years of education. Each successive wave, however, brought poorer and less educated refugees and immigrants (Ima & Rumbaut, 1995; Olsen, 1997; Walker-Moffat, 1995). There is a salient difference in the educational attainment between immigrants and refugees from middle-class, urban backgrounds and those from oral cultures (e.g. the Hmong). Nevertheless, the image of high academic success assumes similar educational and historical experiences among all Asian American ethnic groups.

In this article, I seek to explicate the diversity within the Asian American community by focusing on Southeast and South Asian American students. Focusing on these two groups is important given their recent migration (relative to other groups) and tenuous position within Asian American research, discourse, and representation. In particular, I contend that the image of Asian American success masks the contexts—economic, social, and cultural challenges—that mark the educational experiences of many Southeast Asian and South Asian American students. Many of these students have household obligations that may include cooking dinner or translating for elders (Goldstein, 1985; Hune, 1998). They often experience conflicting demands from their families and peer groups, especially in regards to dating and co-curricular activities (Donnelly, 1994; Faderman, 1998; Gibson, 1988; Lee, 2005; Maira, 2002; Ngo, 2002; Walker-Moffat, 1995). The first three sections will examine some of the differences between Southeast Asian, South Asian, and other Asian American groups. The bulk of the article will highlight the social and cultural contexts of Southeast and South Asian American education, including (1) issues of cultural capital, (2) negotiations of identity, gender and generation, and (3) experiences of racism. I focus on these issue areas because they comprise issues that create substantial difficulties in the education of both Southeast and South Asian American students. It is beyond the scope of this article to give a thorough review of the specific experiences of specific ethnic groups. By highlighting the social and cultural contexts of the education of Southeast and South Asian students, I seek to reveal the many ways students are learning from the margins and the price of ‘success’ that is often diminished by the image of Asian American achievement.

Southeast Asians and South Asian Americans in the USA

Southeast Asian Americans are comprised of people from a variety of ethnic groups from the countries of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Ethnic groups from Vietnam include Vietnamese, Khmer Kampuchea Krom (ethnic Khmer), and Montagnards (highlanders from diverse ethnic minorities). Those from Laos include Hmong (or Mong), Lao (Lao Loum, ‘Lowland Lao’), Khmu, Taidam, and many other smaller ethnic groups. Southeast Asians from Cambodia include Khmer (ethnic Cambodians),

Cham, and Khmer Loeu ('Highland Khmer').¹ In this article, when referring to 'South-east Asian Americans', I am primarily referring to Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong, and Lao Americans.

Most Southeast Asian Americans migrated to the USA as refugees after 1975 as a result of the Vietnam War or are the children of refugees. According to the 2000 US Census, Southeast Asian Americans comprised 15.2% of people reporting Asian and/or Pacific Islander heritage. Approximately 186,000 Hmong and 198,000 Lao live in the USA.² California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin have the largest Hmong populations (Census 2000). States with the largest number of Lao include California, Texas and Minnesota, with the majority of the Lao in the San Diego and San Francisco Bay areas of California. Approximately 206,000 Cambodian Americans live in the US (Census 2000). The largest Cambodian communities are located in California, Massachusetts, and Washington. Vietnamese Americans comprise the largest number of Southeast Asian Americans with a total of approximately 1.2 million (Census 2000). Almost half of Vietnamese Americans live in California, with significant numbers also in Texas, Washington, Virginia, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Florida.³

South Asian Americans are comprised primarily of people from India (Indian Americans, also known as Asian Indians), but also include Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Sri Lankans, among others. In 2000, 1.9 million Indian Americans lived in the USA, constituting the third largest Asian ethnic group, behind Chinese Americans and Filipino/a Americans (Census 2000). Between 1990 and 2000, the Indian American community had the largest growth rate in the Asian American community, at 105.87%. Based on the Census 2000 Supplemental Survey that tracked Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Sri Lankans, the number of South Asians is estimated to be close to 2.2 million. The largest South Asian American communities (primarily composed of Indian Americans) are located in California, New York, New Jersey, and Illinois.

A disaggregated profile: education, income and poverty

The difference and disparity among Asian American groups are astounding when data on educational attainment, income and poverty is disaggregated by ethnic groups. The 2000 US Census figures indicate that 52.0% of Cambodian Americans, 59.3% of Hmong Americans, 49.3% of Lao Americans, and 38.1% of Vietnamese Americans, aged 25 and over, have less than a high school education, compared with 14.6% of Indian Americans, 8.6% of Japanese Americans, and 12.6% of Chinese Americans. Moreover, while 42.7% of all Asian Americans aged 25 and over hold a bachelor's degree or higher (with Indian Americans leading Asian ethnics at 60.9%), only 9.1% of Cambodian Americans, 7.4% Hmong Americans, 7.6% Lao Americans, and 19.5% Vietnamese Americans hold a bachelor's degree or higher. Additionally, while only 4.1% of all households in the USA and 24.7% of Asians overall reported being 'linguistically isolated',⁴ 31.8% of Cambodian, 35.1% of Hmong, 31.8% of Lao, and 45% of Vietnamese households reported being 'linguistically isolated'.

An examination of per-person (or per capita) income also reveals astonishing economic realities. Three Southeast Asian American groups had average per-person income below US\$12,000. While Cambodian Americans and Lao Americans had incomes of US\$10,215 and US\$11,454 respectively, Hmong Americans averaged the lowest per-person income of any ethnic group included in the 2000 US Census with an average of US\$6,613. Even though Vietnamese Americans earned a little more with an average per-person income of US\$15,385, this is still relatively low when compared with over US\$21,000 for the overall US population. Moreover, a consideration of the average per-person income of other racial and ethnic groups reveals that, with the exception of Vietnamese Americans, Southeast Asian Americans had lower average per-person incomes than all other racial/ethnic groups. For example, American Indians and Alaska Natives had an average per-person income of US\$14,267, Black or Africans Americans averaged US\$14,222, Hispanic or Latinos averaged US\$12,111, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders averaged US\$14,773, and White Americans averaged US\$23,635.

Poverty data for 1999 also reveals tremendous disparities. Over 29.3% of Cambodian Americans, 37.6% of Hmong Americans, 19.1% of Lao Americans, and 16% of Vietnamese Americans lived under the poverty line, compared with 10.4% of Indian Americans and just over 12.4% of the overall US population. Once again, the percentage of Southeast Asians living below poverty is more comparable to racial and ethnic groups such as African Americans (24.7%), American Indian and Alaskan Natives (25.7%), and Latinos (22.6%).

These statistics not only highlight the dire circumstances of Southeast Asian Americans in comparison with other racial and ethnic groups, but also underscore the difference *between* Southeast Asians, South Asians, and other Asian Americans as well as *within* Southeast Asian groups.

Issues in education

The profile of Asian American academic success ignores and denies the different educational experiences and needs of Asian Americans. The experiences of Southeast Asian Americans and South Asian Americans, in particular, are imbued with social and economic issues that significantly impact their educational experiences and attainment. For instance, the majority of the research literature on Vietnamese American education emphasizes the educational successes of Vietnamese students and families. However, some of the literature also indicate the existence of tensions and problems within the schools and within the Vietnamese American family/community (Davis & McDaid, 1992; Kibria, 1993). For example, Long (1996) and Ima (1995) pointed out that significant numbers of Vietnamese youths are estranged from US culture, alienated from school, and being pushed into gangs. Zhou and Bankston (1998) emphasize not only the tremendous success of Vietnamese American students, but also the 'unignorable number' of Vietnamese youth involved in gangs and juvenile delinquency.

Similarly, while much of the recent research point to the success of Hmong American students, there is also indication that Hmong youth are contending with academic and social difficulties. Of concern are inter-generational conflict, truancy, high dropout rates and delinquency among Hmong American teens (Faderman, 1998; Thao, 1999; Walker-Moffat, 1995). Researchers also point to the adverse effects of racism, poverty, and the model minority stereotype on Hmong American students' educational opportunities and experiences (Lee, 2001; Walker-Moffat, 1995).

Other researchers point to the alarming rates of under-achievement among Cambodian American students (Hein, 1995; Um, 1999). Of significant concern are the ways in which Cambodian American students struggle with language learning, score lower on standardized tests, have lower grade point averages, and drop out at a higher rate than Vietnamese and Hmong American students (Goldberg, 1999; Rumbaut, 1989; Wright, 1999).

The few studies available on Lao American education report that Lao students are stereotyped, labeled, and racialized in essentializing categories (Devoe, 1996; Ima, 1995). In my own research, I also found that Lao American students' identities as heads of households, refugee/immigrant 'Others', parents, daughters/sons, and breadwinners intersected with and affected their identities and experiences as students in school (Ngo, 2004).

While the academic achievement of South Asian American students is relatively high compared to Southeast Asian Americans, their education is also fraught with tensions from intergenerational conflict arising out of family and gender role expectations as well as racism (Gibson, 1988; Maira, 2002; Verma, 2004). Further, since the events of 11 September 2001, South Asian Americans have to contend with an increasingly hostile environment characterized by hate speech and hate crimes by those who perceive them to be Muslim and terrorists (Ahuja *et al.*, 2004; Verma, 2004).

As the next three sections reveal, the educational experiences of Southeast and South Asian American students are fraught with challenges stemming from their social, cultural, economic, and political marginalization in the US society. The contexts of students' lives and educational experiences make the 'success' of the Asian American success story difficult to achieve and, if achieved, the price of success is unduly high.

Struggling with cultural capital

Educational researchers interested in how schools reproduce existing social inequalities often turn to the concept of social reproduction. Defined as the general cultural background, knowledge, disposition, and skills that are passed from one generation to the next (McLeod, 1987; Gandara, 1995), cultural capital is central to the analysis of how culture and education interact to contribute to the social reproduction of inequality. Instead of couching academic success or failure in terms of natural aptitudes or talents, social reproduction theorists assert that talent or ability is in fact the product of an investment of time and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

The importance of social class background to academic achievement has been documented by many researchers (Dimaggio, 1982; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 1996; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Vincent *et al.*, 1999). Lareau (1987) has argued that in working- and middle-class communities, parents who understand and share the same middle-class values of the schools are better able to assist in their children's education. Equipped with the 'legitimate' cultural capital, they are able to intervene and make sure that their children benefit from all that the school has to offer.

As first-generation immigrants, many Southeast and South Asian American parents do not have the necessary cultural capital to understand the mechanism of US educational institutions in order to help their children negotiate school and academics. As previously mentioned, the 2000 US Census statistics reveal that many Southeast Asian Americans 25 years and over do not have more than a high school graduation. In addition, a significant number of Southeast Asian Americans ages 25 and over have no formal schooling—26.2% Cambodian Americans; 45% Hmong Americans; 22.7% Lao Americans; and 8% Vietnamese Americans. In comparison, 0.9% White Americans; 1.7% African Americans and 6.6% Latino Americans ages 25 and over have no formal schooling. Parents' lack of education and/or experience with educational institutions creates situations in which they cannot participate meaningfully in their children's education. Parents know and instill in their children the importance of education for economic stability and upward mobility. Their experiences and the implicit messages of the US achievement ideology testify to this. However, encouraging their children to pursue education is almost the only thing that most (especially Southeast Asian) parents are able to do.

Parents' different perspectives on education, their limited understanding of the process of education, and their unfamiliarity with the roles of students, teachers, and other school staff as well as their roles as parents are salient factors in students' academic achievement. For instance, in her research with South Asian students and families, Gibson (1988) found that parents rarely blamed teachers or the education system for their children's difficulties. They believed that the responsibility for learning rests with the individual and that 'those who wish to learn, will learn'. In a similar vein, research on Cambodian American education revealed that, for many Cambodian parents, their children's educational success and failure are rooted in Theravada Buddhism (Goldberg, 1999; Rumbaut, 1989; Smith-Hefner, 1990, 1999). Rather than a matter of personal effort, educational (and life) success and failure is a matter of destiny. As Smith-Hefner explains, 'A child who gets good grades "can do it"; a child who does not do well in school, "cannot do it"' (Smith-Hefner 1990, p. 262). Parents believe that their attempts to direct or affect their children's education and lives are constrained by the 'personal character' of each child, and thus do not attempt to intervene or become involved in their children's education (Smith-Hefner, 1990, 1999). Rumbaut characterizes Cambodian American parents' belief in destiny as 'an adaptive style that is more passive and reactive, comparatively less pragmatic and more fatalistic' (Rumbaut, 1989, p. 181). Similar to Rumbaut, teachers of Cambodian American students misinterpret Cambodian

parents' attitudes to mean that Cambodian parents do not value education (Smith-Hefner, 1999).

Moreover, culturally specific understandings of hierarchy and appropriate social relations affect school engagement among some parents. Um points out that 'Cambodian parents are often reluctant to question authority' in their relationships with school teachers and staff (Um, 1997, p. 35). Phommsasouvanh notes that Lao American parents do not question teachers because 'The Lao are often characterized as quiet, peace-loving, accommodating, patient and happy people. They dislike confrontation, value harmony, and do not like to make waves' (Phommsasouvanh, 1997, p. 25). Similarly, in her research with South Asian American high school students, Gibson found that 'most parents had little understanding of the US educational system. Few were able to help with homework or course selection.' Additionally, she notes that 'only rarely did parents directly involve themselves in school affairs. They were reluctant to visit the schools or to attend school meetings, nor did they see reason why they should do so' (Gibson, 1988, pp. 128–129).

For parents who want to engage and/or intervene in their children's education, their lack of knowledge of the educational institutions in our society deeply limit their ability to participate. As Ngo's (2000) study on Hmong American college students revealed, when parents do not know about prestige differences among higher education institutions and do not know the process of college admissions (e.g. SATs/ACTs, fee waivers, financial aid), the pursuit of higher education becomes something that students must negotiate on their own, or sometimes with the help of older siblings and friends.

Further, parents' experience with education may at times contribute to a difference in expectations and understanding of career paths and school activities. Parents' concern for their children's financial security and upward mobility often results in pressure for children to pursue careers in medicine or law. A South Asian college student who chose to pursue a different career path 'felt that he was disappointing his mother by not becoming a doctor' (Maira, 2002, p. 162). Additionally, many Southeast Asian parents are not aware of the importance of extracurricular activities, and regard children's participation in field trips and sports as 'distractions from the "real academic focus"', or as opportunity costs' that they cannot afford (Um, 2003b, p. 10). Similarly, Hmong parents who are unfamiliar with academic activities such as group projects and study groups think that daughters-in-law are cheating on their husbands when male students call to talk about group projects (Ngo, 2000).

Negotiating gender and generation

The myth of seamless, carefree success advanced by the Asian American success story belies negotiations of family social structure, struggles over gender and cultural identities, and the enormous class disparities among various Asian ethnic groups. For many Southeast and South Asian American students, their educational experiences often necessitate balancing expectations and pressures from their parents, school, and friends.

Students often must assist parents in a variety of ways while attending to the demands of education. For a variety of reasons (e.g. lack of English language fluency, lack of time, or lack of cultural knowledge), parents may ask children to take on adult roles and perform 'caring work' (Song, 1999). Hmong girls and young women were responsible, from a young age, for cooking family meals, cleaning the house, babysitting younger siblings, and doing chores such as laundry, while Hmong boys and young men are responsible for mowing the lawn and doing general maintenance around the house. Students not only helped out within the home, but also assisted parents in caring work—serving as drivers, translators, and intermediaries for their parents (Ngo, 2000). Furthermore, Hmong male students are at times obligated to contribute to the cultural maintenance of the family. The involvement of sons was particularly important in Hmong ceremonies (e.g. funerals, naming, or weddings) (Ngo, 2000; Um, 2003b).

At the same time, helping out is at times infused by and couched in terms of guilt. Not wanting to clean or needing to get out of cleaning for other reasons becomes a reflection of one's commitment to the family. Yet, for other students, helping parents is important because if they do the chore, then their parents will not have to do it. There is a need to contribute in order to alleviate some of the pressures from parents who are already working too much. At the same time, students' responsibilities with housework and childcare can negatively impact their educational achievement and persistence. In some instances, students who cannot juggle the dual roles of student and family contributor/caretaker have to choose either education or family responsibilities (Kibria, 1993; Ngo, 2000; Smith-Hefner, 1993; Um, 1999).

The collective nature in which Southeast and South Asian American families approach life and education has important ramifications for students' educational experiences (Chuong, 1999; Gibson, 1988; Kibria, 1993). Indeed, as Zhou and Bankston have noted, 'children [are] constantly reminded of their duty to respect elders, to take care of younger siblings, to work hard, and to make decisions only with the approval of their parents' (Zhou & Bankston, 1998, p. 151). The US society's emphasis on the individual and encouragement that youth make decisions on their own is extremely disturbing for parents.

However, this collective approach to educational achievement and upward mobility puts tremendous pressure on youth to do well (Gibson, 1988; Verma, 2004). Hmong students believe that their future as well as the future of other family members hinge on their success. Implicitly and explicitly, older siblings are expected to serve as role models for younger siblings (Ngo, 2000). Children who did not meet certain expectations had 'the general sense of failure that stemmed from their inability to do well at school ...; they felt that they had let their families down' (Kibria, 1993, p. 156).

Additionally, as the work of several researchers has revealed, gender norms and expectations for girls and young women often intervene in and interrupt their education (Baizerman & Hendricks, 1988; Goldstein, 1985; Lee, 1997; Rumbaut & Ima, 1988; Smith-Hefner, 1993; Xiong, 1991). Women's responsibilities in the home as wives, mothers, and daughters have tremendous implications for their status as

educated persons and economic contributors. Dating, early marriage, and arranged marriages are frequently sites of intergenerational conflict between parents and daughters (Ngo, 2002; Maira, 2002). Increasingly, however, girls and young women are challenging male authority and the 'traditional' social structure.

Within the context of education, Southeast and South Asian girls and young women challenge gender norms by postponing marriage and pursuing higher education and work outside of the home (Gibson, 1988; Smith-Hefner, 1999; Verma, 2004). However, as Lee (1997) points out, the road to college for many Hmong American women is an extremely difficult one. Hmong women face many barriers and are often discouraged and ridiculed in their pursuit of higher education. According to several researchers, the attainment of higher education by Hmong American women may even significantly lower their social status (Chan, 1994; Donnelly, 1994; Lee, 1997; Xiong, 1991). Furthermore, the entry of South Asian women into higher education and the paid workforce does not mitigate the gendered expectations for women. In Maira's study, a South Asian female confesses to the pressure to live up to expectations: 'So much is expected of us. We are expected to excel in schools and careers and still be demure and delicate, good mothers, wives, and daughter-in laws' (Maira, 2002, p. 161).

Similar to struggles over gender norms, the forces of change faced by adults affect the socialization environment of youth. The changes faced by youth contribute to transformations, challenges, and ethnic instability within the community (Faderman, 1998; Goldstein, 1985; Kibria, 1993; Smith-Hefner, 1999). The relatively faster rate of acculturation of youth has bestowed upon them significant power and responsibility. In limited English proficient families, youth have become decision makers as well as cultural and information brokers (Faderman, 1998; Um, 2003a). As youth assume adult roles and responsibilities, the negotiation of power relations across generational and gender lines becomes necessary. Several researchers have documented that this process creates a role reversal that empowers youth and conversely disempowers adults (Donnelly, 1994; Faderman, 1998; Ima, 1995; Kibria, 1993; Long, 1996; Um, 2003a; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Manifestations of parental loss of control include not only intergenerational conflict, but also domestic violence and substance abuse (Donnelly, 1994; Faderman, 1998; Kibria, 1993; Um, 2003a). As Um (2003b) points out, the acquisition of English proficiency among Southeast Asian American youth often comes at a cost to their ancestral language. Given the limited English proficiency of Southeast Asian American adult, the language loss among youth severely affects intergenerational communication.

Schools play a critical role in cultural production and transformation that contributes to the tensions at home (Chuong, 1999; Kibria, 1993). Participants in Ngo's (2000) study shared that they often must struggle with 'the traditional Hmong way' of their parents and 'the American way' of the US society. Underlying these (gender and generation) struggles are identity negotiations and constructions, whereby Southeast and South Asian youth attempt to balance the demands and influence of the parent and home communities and those of their school peers and mainstream society. This process requires the creation of a 'cut 'n mix' style and identity because

youth are not fully accepting the music, fashion, and practices of their parents' generation (Maira, 1999). At the same time, they are also not fully taking on the practices of the mainstream US society. As immigrant students construct and assert new identities as ethnic Americans, their identities are also being co-constructed by school teachers and peers (Ngo, 2004).

Up against racism

One of the most insidious messages of the Asian American model minority stereotype includes its affirmation of the US achievement ideology—the view that the US is the land of opportunity. The achievement of Asian Americans is touted as the achievement of the 'American Dream'. Asian Americans, we are told, are able to 'make it' on their own, without special assistance or anyone's help. Implicitly, historically marginalized groups (e.g. African Americans) are told that their failure is not due to the fact that the USA is a fundamentally racist society (Osajima, 1987). Rather, their failure is due to a lack of industry, or vanishing US values such as strong family ties and sacrifice for children. For those who fail to 'make it', the implication is that there must be something wrong with their culture. Such delineation between good and bad culture deflects attention away from systemic factors contributing to racial inequalities. Instead, the blame for racial inequalities is placed on communities of color.

Southeast Asian Americans are uniquely positioned both within and outside this discourse of academic success. On the one hand, Southeast Asians are lumped with other Asian American groups and viewed as part of the 'model minority'. On the other hand, they are portrayed as gangsters, high school dropouts, and welfare dependents. The complexity of Southeast Asian Americans' lives and struggles are reduced to binary extremes because they are depicted as 'valedictorians and delinquents' (Kibria, 1993). However, as Lee (2001) points out, the complexities of Southeast Asian students' educational experiences make them more than 'model minorities or "delinquents"'. Problematically, the prevailing dual perception of Southeast Asian Americans have resulted in the denial of support to Southeast Asian students based, on one extreme, on the assumption that they have no problems and, on the other extreme, on the belief that they are 'lazy' and do not deserve assistance (Um, 2003b).

The education of Southeast and South Asian American students is imbued with experiences of discrimination and alienation that are simultaneously masked and compounded by the US achievement ideology and profile of Asian American success. In the experiences of some students, their manner of speech, the clothes they wear, and the music they listen to contribute to negative stereotypes and assumptions (e.g. gangsters) by school teachers and staff (Lee, 2005; Lei, 2003; Um, 2003b). In some instances, assumptions about students determine the amount and type of assistance offered to them by teachers and counselors (Devoe, 1996; Um, 2003b).

Overt and covert forms of racism are a part of Southeast and South Asian American students' educational experiences. Gibson found that South Asian students were abused verbally as well as physically. Students experienced remarks, such as 'you stink', 'you God damn Hindus', and 'get out of our country', and had food thrown at

them (Gibson, 1988, p. 142). In one instance, a participant in Gibson's study had her hair set on fire by a White student. Other studies reveal that Southeast Asian students had to contend with remarks about gang involvement or eating dogs (Ngo, 2000; Um, 2003b).

The effects of 9/11 are particularly salient in the experiences of immigrant students such as Southeast and South Asian American students. Anti-immigrant attitudes and immigration restrictions have markedly increased since the 9/11 attacks. Asian Americans continue to be viewed as foreigners as well as economic and political threats (Lowe, 1996; Tuan, 1996). As Verma's research with South Asian (Sikh) high school students and families revealed, students became victims of racist slurs, physical assaults and threats after 9/11. In response, students stopped going to school, attempted to illustrate their patriotism with pro-US displays, and changed their physical appearances. Some became depressed and even suicidal (Verma, 2004).

These overt and covert forms of racism create inhospitable environments where students do not feel that they 'belong' (Ngo, 2000; Um, 2003b; Verma, 2004). For example, in my research with Hmong American college students, I discovered that students felt uncomfortable and did not belong on campus, and were comfortable only in certain spaces and with certain people. The pervasive feeling of alienation caused some students to stockpile food in their rooms so that they would not have to go to campus or the cafeteria (Ngo, 2000).

Moreover, students not only experience discrimination from non-Asian students. Frequently, the processes of racialization have 'hidden injuries' which affect how students of color view one another (Osajima, 1993). Internalizing the dominant society's messages that they are inferior and different, some Asian American students construct racial identities that distance themselves from the stereotypical images of Asians (Woo, 1997). In some instances, attempts to 'belong' manifest in negative attitudes and behavior towards other Asian Americans. As reported by a Lao American student: 'Other kids harass me because I'm Laotian. They say that Laotians eat dog and cats ... the Vietnamese and White students would say this to me' (Um, 2003b, p. 13). Counter to the prevailing discourse on race and racism that dichotomizes racism into a Black/White binary, the experiences of Southeast and South Asian American students are fraught with critical tensions among and between African American, Latino/a, and Asian American groups (Lei, 2003; Ngo, 2004). These experiences cannot be encapsulated by neither Black/White nor dominant/subordinate binaries of racism. Explicating other forms of racism is important for understanding the spectrum of exclusionary practices that perpetuate inequalities.

Conclusion

The educational experiences of Southeast and South Asian American students are shaped by their social, cultural, and economic marginalization. Students often contend with many challenges in their academic pursuits. More often than not, their struggles are exacerbated by the myths perpetuated by the Asian American success story and obscured by the American achievement ideology. As this article has demonstrated, the

educational experiences of Southeast and South Asian American youth are influenced by issues involving cultural capital, gender and generational struggles, and racism. The contexts of students' education challenge assumptions about seamless success as well as immigrant rigor.

The research on the education of Southeast and South Asian Americans has been important in exploring and highlighting the challenges faced by Southeast Asian youth and families in US schools and society. However, there continues to be a need for further research that explicates the social, cultural, and economic conditions that shape students' educational experiences. There is a need for more research on specific Southeast Asian groups—particularly Cambodian Americans and Lao Americans. There is a critical need for more research on South Asian American education. The space and place of South Asian American students in 'Asian America' and their experiences with the model minority image need to be explored. It is also important to examine the educational experiences of the second generation of Southeast Asian American students, many of whom are currently in elementary and middle schools. Additionally, given the events of 9/11 educational researchers need to attend to the current and increasing anti-immigrant sentiment on Southeast and South Asian American students' experiences.

In particular, I suggest that qualitative research (e.g. ethnographic or case study) that 'makes the familiar strange' will allow us to reveal the nuances of everyday, taken-for-granted experiences and understandings. This type of research elaborates on and problematizes the contexts and contradictions within educational experiences. The questions that researchers might ask may involve issues of identity, belonging, gender, generational and cultural transformation. Specific questions include:

1. What are the experiences of specific Southeast Asian and South Asian ethnic groups in schools and society? With identity, belonging, economic, gender and cultural negotiations?
2. What are the educational experiences of South Asian and Southeast Asian American children in elementary and middle schools?
3. How are mixed-race students negotiating identity and belonging?
4. What are the effects of 9/11 on refugee/immigrant students' educational experiences?
5. What are the experiences of students *between* and *within* various Asian ethnic groups? Between other refugee/immigrant students?

Moreover, there is a particular need for educational researchers to talk to parents and adult community members about their research. As several researchers have made clear, the education and lives of Southeast and South Asian American youth are very much intertwined with the needs and demands of their parents and families. However, in much of the research literature, often missing are the voices of parents. Like Southeast and South Asian American students, parents are undergoing a process of social and cultural transformation. They too are attempting to redefine and re-express customs and values. Often, they are afraid that in this time of change, they will lose their children to 'American' ways and society. By talking to parents, educational

researchers may better explicate parents' struggles and concerns in their personal lives and in assisting their children through the process of education.

Notes

1. Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, www.searac.org.
2. Southeast Asian Americans report one or more ethnic/racial designation.
3. For a detailed statistical profile of Southeast Asian Americans, see the Southeast Asia Resource Center's 2004 report *Southeast Asian American Statistical Profile*, www.searac.org.
4. 'A linguistically isolated household is one in which no member 14 years old and over (1) speaks only English or (2) speaks a non-English language and speaks English "very well". In other words, all members 14 years and over have at least some difficulty with English.' Retrieved on 31 October 2003, www.census.gov.

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