

The Achievement Gap within the Asian-American Community: Disaggregating Asian-American Ethnic Groups to Dismantle the Model Minority Myth

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Introduction

The achievement gap is an important topic when discussing the education system in America. The first thing that comes to mind is the black-white achievement gap, which most research deem indisputable (Condron et al. 2013; McKown 2013; Kao and Thompson 2003). However, this model reduces the prevalent achievement gaps in the United States to an oversimplified and non-inclusive dichotomy. More specifically, Asian-Americans are often overlooked when looking at achievement gaps or are used through racial triangulation as the “model minority” pawn by which they are used to blame other minorities for their shortcomings (Ryabov 2016; Ngo and Lee 2007). This creates hostility between minority groups and falsely overgeneralizes the achievements of Asian-Americans (Kao and Thompson 2003). Asian-Americans have a very unique place in American society, as their immigration can range from doctors completing their residency in the United States to refugees seeking safe-haven from their war-ridden countries (Ngo and Lee 2007; Ogbu 1998). There are staggering differences in the academic achievements within the Asian-American community. Using data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, I will first identify the differences in the educational attainment of different Asian ethnic groups and compare them to white, black, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American educational attainments. Secondly, I will conduct a generalized least squares (GLS) regression analysis to analyze the following independent variables: disability status, language skills, place of birth/origin, unemployment rates, health insurance coverage, median household income, housing tenure and costs, poverty rates, and social welfare programs, to show the relationship between the variables and the educational attainment of various Asian-American ethnic groups as well as their significance.

Literature review

The achievement gap and segregation in America

There is a plethora of research regarding achievement gaps in the United States among various identities and social groups, such as race and socioeconomic status (Condron et al. 2013; McKown 2013). Most research compares black and white students in looking at achievement gaps in America, as this is often seen as the most prominent gap in our education system. In most research, they find that there are several factors that play a role in the existence of such disparate gaps, such as cultural differences, educational attainment of students’ parents, and lack of cultural representation in curriculum and educators (Condron et al. 2013; McKown 2013; Kao and Thompson 2003). For example, in Condron et al.’s (2013) research, they used a longitudinal study to look at racial segregation and the black/white achievement gap. Their study implied that school racial segregation is a major source of academic achievement disparities when comparing black and white students in America (Condron et al. 2013). Another study by Clark McKown (2013) critically examined the black/white achievement gap through the lens of the social equity theory, in which racial achievement gaps originate from both direct and signal influences, or the social processes and the social settings in which they take place. By focusing on the black-white

achievement gap, other achievement gaps among various racial groups are often overlooked or forgotten.

There are other studies, however, that look beyond a simple black-white model that oversimplifies and overgeneralizes the achievement gaps in the United States; Melissa Herman (2009) looked at racial differences in academic performance among both monoracial and multiracial high school students. In her study, she found that “multiracial students who self-identify as black or Hispanic achieve lower grades than those who self-identify as white or Asian” (Herman 2009). From these findings, Herman (2009) suggests a transracial theory of academic performance, which incorporates Steele and Aronson’s theory of stereotype threat, where minority students are particularly vulnerable and susceptible to negative stereotypes about their identity group’s academic performance, and Park and Stonequist’s theory of “marginal man,” where mixed-race people are more likely to have lower self-esteem because they feel isolated by each race they identify with. However, Herman fails to address how those who self-identify as white or Asian may be negatively impacted by their identity group’s stereotypes.

In an even earlier study, Kao and Thompson (2003) looked not only at African-Americans, Hispanics, whites, and Asian-Americans, but looked at Native Americans as well. In studying these five racial groups, they found that the achievement gaps were narrowing significantly compared to years past but were still prominent nonetheless (Kao and Thompson 2003). This is especially important to note because the achievement gap was affected by the segregation, desegregation, and re-segregation of educational institutions in America (Reardon 2016). Reardon (2016) looked at links between racial segregation and academic achievement gaps by investigating the disparity in average school poverty rates between white and black students’ schools in correlation with achievement gaps. He found that high-poverty schools are, on average, much less effective than lower-poverty schools (Reardon 2016). Similarly, Quillian (2014) identified the effects of residential segregation on the basis of both poverty status and race for completing high school and college, where he estimated segregation effects by contrasting educational outcomes between people raised in metropolitan areas with varying levels of segregation. The results from his study suggested that residential segregation harms the educational attainment of disadvantaged groups without increasing the educational attainment of advantaged groups (Quillian 2014). What was concerning in Kao and Thompson’s (2003) research was that they categorized African-Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans as “less advantaged” compared to whites and Asian-Americans, but this creates a false dichotomy between the races and overgeneralizes the experiences of each group. Although not often discussed, Asian-Americans can be considered to be placed at a disadvantage in terms of expectations from both familial influences as well as societal influences, which is why it is extremely important to look at the achievement and educational attainment of Asian-Americans.

Asian-American achievement, minority status, and racial triangulation

Igor Ryabov (2016) found that there was a significant pattern in the relationship between educational attainment and the darkness of Asian-Americans’ skin tones, which also holds severe implications about how ethnicity plays a role in the achievement gap within the Asian-American community. This research overtly highlights the overwhelming differences among Asian-Americans and their achievement levels, but there is still a lack of a conclusion on where these differences lie, how these differences affect certain ethnic groups, and what solutions there can be to such issues. This is examined in-depth in Ngo and Lee’s (2007) review of literature on

various southeast Asian ethnic groups—Vietnamese-Americans, Cambodian-Americans, Hmong-Americans, and Lao-Americans—and the various explanations for their struggles, successes, and educational experiences. They compare the experiences of southeast Asian students in America to the experiences of African-American students, where they consider the “Black/White discourse” on race and how it has resulted in the “ideological whitening” of economically successful east Asian and south Asian groups and the “ideological blackening” of low-income southeast Asians (Ngo and Lee 2007). Although many Asian-American groups can be compared to African-Americans in terms of economic and educational attainment, they are often seen as privileged in comparison to other minority groups. However, Ngo and Lee lack research that considers the impact of race, social context, school context, and economic opportunities on educational persistence and achievement among various southeast Asian groups, as they simply review existing literature pertaining to their experiences rather than look directly at southeast Asian-American students themselves.

In looking at Ogbu’s (1998) different types of minority status, he identified minority groups as autonomous, voluntary/immigrant, and involuntary/nonimmigrant minorities. He emphasized the different histories that each category has: autonomous minorities are small groups of people who may be different from the dominant group in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, or language, but are not completely dominated and oppressed (i.e. the Amish, Jews, Mormons), voluntary/immigrant minorities are those who have moved to the U.S. because they are seeking better opportunities and do not interpret their presence in the U.S. as forced upon them by the U.S. government or white Americans, and involuntary/nonimmigrant minorities are people who did not choose to become a part of the U.S. and interpret their presence in the U.S. as forced upon them by white people through conquer, colonization, or enslavement (Ogbu 1998). Ogbu (1998) reiterated the notion that minorities’ adaptations and school performance depended on their different cultural models and responses to the U.S. society that were based on their entrance to the U.S. He called his explanation a cultural-ecological theory, where he considers the broad societal and school factors (the system) along with the dynamics within minority communities (community forces) the most impactful aspects of minority success (Ogbu 1998). Typically, Asian-Americans are considered voluntary/immigrant minorities; however, what is not included in these categories is refugees, which Ogbu later discusses. Refugees are those who were forced to come to the U.S. because of civil war or other crises in their places of origin; for example, Cambodian, Hmong, and Vietnamese people are among the most common groups to come to the U.S. as refugees (Ogbu 1998). Although Asian-Americans are depicted as having more opportunities for higher school performance, this model neglects a large portion of Asian-Americans that, although may not have come to the U.S. by the force of white Americans, came to the U.S. for safety from their places of origin and in turn, do not have the same experiences as Asian-American groups who immigrated there.

Ng et al. (2007) look at C. Kim’s theory of “a field of racial positions” in which Asian-Americans are used in the racial triangulation of Asians, blacks, and whites through the processes of “relative valorization,” where whites are valorizing Asians relative to blacks, and “civic ostracism,” where whites are constructing Asian-Americans as foreign or other. This notion ostracizes Asian-Americans from the white majority while simultaneously causing racial tensions with other minorities; this falsely divides Asian-Americans with other minorities when in reality, Asian-Americans often face similar struggles as other minorities (Ng et al. 2007). In Xu and Lee’s (2013) study about racial triangulation, they found that on average, whites are

more likely than blacks to have more favorable views of the relative positions of Asians—particularly for nonviolence, wealth, and family commitment. They found that on average, Americans evaluated Asians as “inferior” to whites and “superior” to blacks on grounds such as work ethic and family commitment, and they discussed how the simultaneous process of both valorization and civic ostracism of Asians, along with the racial subordination of blacks, maintains systems of white privilege (Xu and Lee 2013). The use of Asian-Americans in the systemic marginalization of other minorities emphasizes the model minority myth and invalidates the issues that Asian-Americans face. It not only separates Asian-Americans from other minorities; it also creates a lack of resources that are available to Asian-Americans in education and labor. In a study conducted by Pang et al. (2011), they looked at more than one million Asian-American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) and white seventh graders in California, examining their mathematics and reading achievement between 2003 and 2008. They found that although AAPI student performance is typically aggregated in reports, the achievement within 13 AAPI subgroups is much more diverse than it appears and demonstrates a continuum of academic achievement, which refutes the model minority myth (Pang et al. 2011).

Asian-Americans in higher education and the workforce

The dismantling of the model minority myth is extremely important not only because it does not accurately depict Asian-Americans, but also because it impacts the resources provided to Asian-American students as well as job and higher education opportunities. In Ng et al.’s (2007) research, they looked at how the model minority image is used to produce a “heightened sense of fear” among groups that are supposed to “admire” and “emulate” Asian-Americans for their success. The notion that the “Asian ‘horde’ [would] take over the classrooms to raise test scores and ruin the grading curve” resulted in a new form of “white flight” (Ng et al. 2007: 95). In actuality, Asian-Americans are diverse in their identities, even within ethnic lines; although research has found that Chinese students had the highest rates of attending private colleges, this was only the case at the highest socioeconomic levels (Ng et al. 2007). In another study pertaining to Asian-Americans in higher education, UCLA’s Cooperative Institution Research Program found in 1997 that Southeast Asian and Chinese students were more often from families earning less than \$24,999 per year (Ng et al. 2007). In a 1990 study, they found that 40 percent of Asian-American students in higher education were in two-year community colleges, which Ng et al. (2007) emphasized has extremely limited research. In a 1992 study, they found that Asian-American students had extremely high rates of working part-time, lower retention rates than white students, and frustrations with language barriers and family obligations (Ng et al. 2007). Yet, these results are not discussed in terms of the model minority ideology and are neglected in dialogues related to Asian-Americans being a “threat” to the opportunities of white students to succeed. In fact, most of this research has not been conducted in nearly 30 years, so the lack of research in the higher education experiences of Asian-Americans is extremely concerning. This is especially important in looking at opportunities for Asian-Americans in the labor market; Torres Stone et al. (2006) look at how the model minority myth masks significant barriers that Asian-Americans have in achieving full equality in the labor market. They looked at data on 23,852 Filipina, Asian Indian, and non-Hispanic white women who lived in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles in order to analyze their earning differences and highlight the importance of immigration context and occupational race segregation (Torres Stone et al. 2006). However, my research looks at data compiled from a large sample of Asian-Americans spread throughout the country. The disparities in educational attainment parallel and correlate with the disparities in the

labor market, which means that the gaps in achievement for Asian-Americans in education continue to progress into the gaps in earning wages in the labor force.

Methods

Although there is a plethora of research available in terms of achievement gaps throughout various groups in America, the research is extremely limited, especially when looking at Asian-Americans. While other researchers have conducted interviews/surveys of a smaller sample size of 5,117 students (Herman 2009), looked at only specific Asian-American ethnic groups (Torres Stone et al. 2006; Ngo and Lee 2007), or looked only at specific test scores in secondary education (Pang et al. 2011), I use data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau, where they extrapolate the data collected by the American Community Survey's sample to make estimates of the entire U.S. population. The American Community Survey is a survey conducted by the Census Bureau, but it provides information on a yearly basis rather than every ten years as the U.S. Census does. The sample that the American Community Survey uses is designed to ensure that it is geographically representative by selecting a random sample of addresses and sending out its questionnaires to approximately 295,000 addresses per month across the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau 2017). They also conduct personal visits to people living in group housing to maintain representation of people who live in college residence halls, nursing homes, and prisons (U.S. Census Bureau 2017). The sample data obtained is then used to make estimates of the entire population, which is the data that I use to compare various Asian-American ethnic groups.

First, deconstructing the model minority myth

The model minority myth can be deconstructed by disaggregating data from the U.S. Census Bureau based on the educational attainment of Asian-American ethnic groups (Asian Indian, Bangladeshi, Cambodian, Chinese, Taiwanese, Filipino, Hmong, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Pakistani, Thai, Vietnamese, Burmese, and Nepalese). For the purpose of my research, "educational attainment" is defined as the percent of the population 25 years old and above who graduated high school or higher. By presenting the educational attainment of each ethnic group from the years 2011 to 2018 and comparing them to white, Black, Hispanic/Latino, and Native Americans, I depicted the standings of various Asian-American ethnic groups in comparison to other groups in America and highlight the broad experiences of they each have. I looked at the years of 2011 to 2018 due to the availability of data on the Census Bureau's website. I created a line graph to be used as a visual representation of the differences between the ethnic groups' educational attainment and how they have changed over time (see Figure 1).

Second, determining what affects educational attainment

I next identify the variables that affect educational attainment using data from the U.S. Census Bureau. I used SPSS and Stata to conduct a fixed-effects stepwise generalized least squares (GLS) regression analysis instead of ordinal least squares (OLS) regression analysis because GLS adjusts for autocorrelation with regards to the data being time-series, so using OLS would assume that prediction errors are uncorrelated. The GLS regression analysis identifies the relationship between educational attainment and several independent variables, including:

- Median household income
- Poverty rate

- Percent of population that is unemployed
- Percent of population with disability status
- Percent of population with no health insurance
- Percent of population with Food Stamp/SNAP benefits
- Percent of housing units that are owner-occupied
 - Median value of owned houses
 - Percent of owner's costs as less than 30% of household income
- Percent of housing units that are renter-occupied
 - Median gross rent
 - Percent of rent as less than 30% of household income
- Percent of population that speaks English "less than very well"
- Percent of population that is foreign-born
 - Percent of the foreign-born population who entered before 2000

My unit of analysis is at the group level rather than individual, as the Census Bureau has already aggregated the data per ethnic group. The conclusions drawn from this research are group-based and cannot be used to make assumptions about individual-level educational attainment. One limitation to my research is that the data I use is estimates of the population based on a random sample rather than population-level data, which causes there to be a margin of error in each category. However, I look at patterns of the group, and because each group's sample data was obtained in the same way, the data maintains reliability despite categorical margins of error.

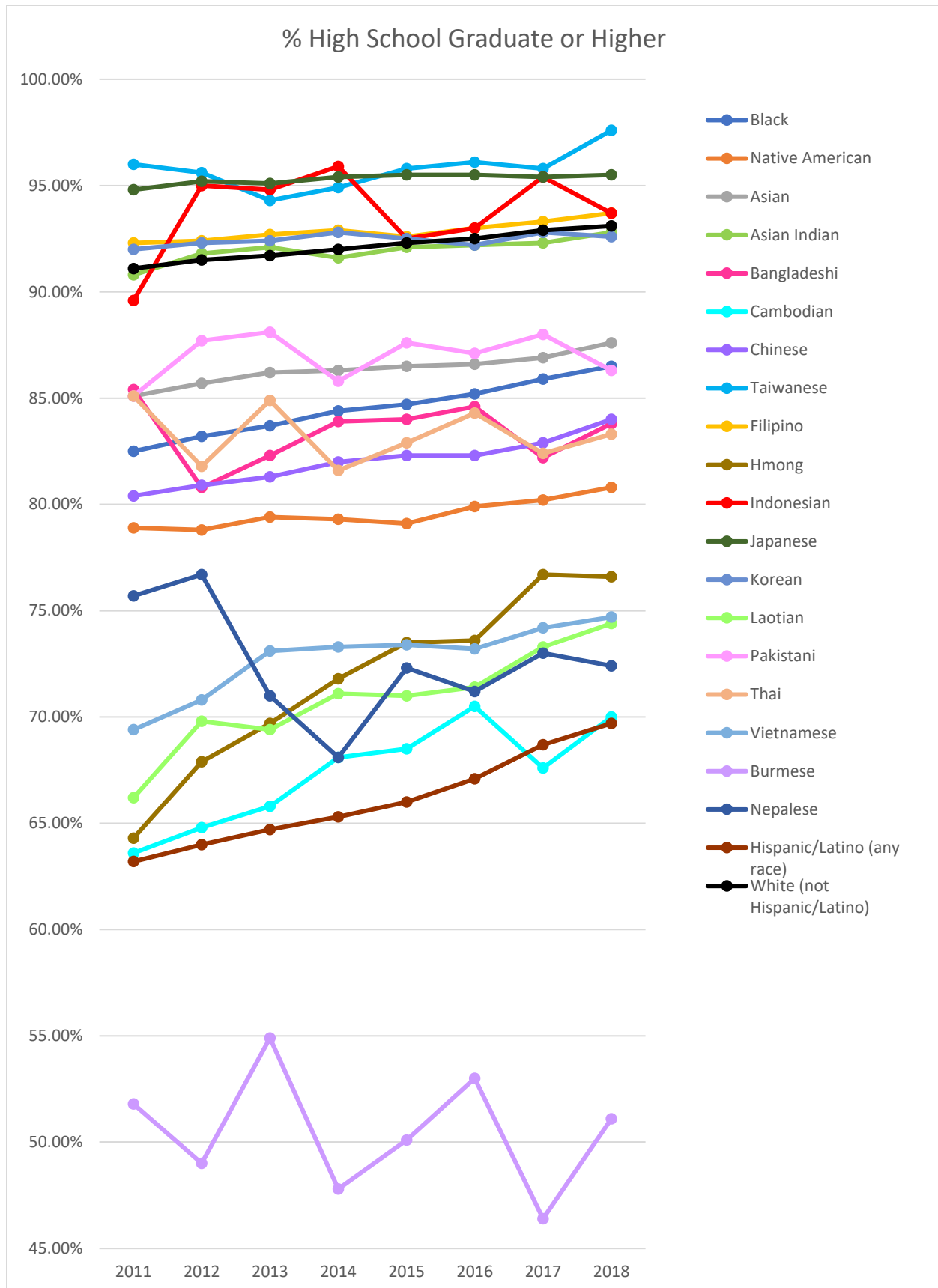
Hypotheses

- *Hypothesis 1:* There will be at least a 30 percent difference between the highest-attaining Asian-American ethnic group and lowest-attaining ethnic group in 2018.
- *Hypothesis 2:* The achievement gap will stay the same between the highest-attaining Asian-American ethnic group and lowest-attaining ethnic group from 2011 to 2018.
- *Hypothesis 3:* Ethnic groups with higher median household incomes will have higher educational attainment.
- *Hypothesis 4:* Ethnic groups with higher poverty rates will have lower educational attainment.
- *Hypothesis 5:* Ethnic groups with higher percentages of people who are unemployed will have lower educational attainment.
- *Hypothesis 6:* Ethnic groups with higher percentages of people with disabilities will have lower educational attainment.
- *Hypothesis 7:* Ethnic groups with higher percentages of people with no health insurance will have lower educational attainment.
- *Hypothesis 8:* Ethnic groups with higher percentages of people who have food stamp/SNAP benefits will have lower educational attainment.
- *Hypothesis 9:* Ethnic groups with higher percentages of people who own the housing unit they occupy will have higher educational attainment.
- *Hypothesis 10:* Ethnic groups with higher median values of the homes they own will have higher educational attainment.
- *Hypothesis 11:* Ethnic groups with higher percentages of people whose owner costs on their homes that are less than 30 percent of their household income will have higher educational attainment.

- *Hypothesis 12:* Ethnic groups with higher median gross rents will have higher educational attainment.
- *Hypothesis 13:* Ethnic groups with higher percentages of people whose gross rent costs are less than 30 percent of their household income will have higher educational attainment.
- *Hypothesis 14:* Ethnic groups with higher percentages of people who speak English “less than very well” will have lower educational attainment.
- *Hypothesis 15:* Ethnic groups with higher percentages of people who are foreign-born will have lower educational attainment.
- *Hypothesis 16:* Ethnic groups with higher percentages of their foreign-born population entering the U.S. before 2000 will have higher educational attainment.

Results

Figure 1: High School Graduation Rates, 2011-2018



Based on the data provided from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, Hypothesis 1 (there will be at least a 30 percent difference between the highest-attaining Asian-American ethnic group and lowest-attaining ethnic group) was supported. In 2018, the ethnic group with the highest educational attainment was Taiwanese at 97.6 percent, whereas the ethnic group with the lowest educational attainment was Burmese at 51.1 percent. The difference between these two ethnic groups is 46.5 percent, which supports my hypothesis. However, Hypothesis 2 (the achievement gap will stay the same between the highest-attaining Asian-American ethnic group and lowest-attaining ethnic group from 2011 to 2018) was rejected, as the achievement gap actually increased from 44.2 percent in 2011 to 46.5 percent in 2018.

From the graph, there are several points worth noting about the educational attainment of the Asian-American ethnic groups in comparison to the major racial groups. Only four Asian-American ethnic groups have higher educational attainment than non-Hispanic whites: Taiwanese, Japanese, Indonesian, and Filipino. 10 of the 16 Asian-American ethnic groups have a lower educational attainment than Black Americans, and six have a lower educational attainment than Native Americans. Burmese-Americans have the lowest educational attainment, at nearly 20 percent less than the second-lowest group on the chart, Hispanic or Latino Americans.

Table 1: Fixed-effects stepwise GLS regression

No. observations: 128	A	B	C	D
(Constant)	67.935 (290.678)	748.474 (390.161)	637.748 (493.166)	110.361 (565.847)
Median household income (MHHI)	0.134** (0.056)	0.124** (0.048)	0.108 (0.064)	0.117 (0.062)
Poverty rate		0.173** (0.072)	0.057 (0.082)	0.079 (0.081)
Unemployment rate		-1.016** (0.233)	-0.863** (0.232)	-0.840** (0.232)
Disability status		0.117 (0.212)	0.046 (0.213)	-0.125 (0.225)
No health insurance		0.081 (0.065)	0.099 (0.068)	0.057 (0.067)
Food stamp/SNAP benefits		-0.394** (0.078)	-0.451** (0.078)	-0.451** (0.076)
Owner-occupied home			-0.085 (0.064)	-0.164** (0.070)
Owned home median value			0.014** (0.007)	0.011 (0.007)
Owner costs <30% HHI			0.042 (0.036)	0.028 (0.036)
Median gross rent			-4.194 (3.425)	-5.481 (3.449)
Rent <30% HHI			-0.129** (0.057)	-0.130** (0.056)
English “less than very well”				-0.204** (0.094)
Foreign-born population				0.228 (0.130)
Foreign-born entered before 2000				0.126 (0.077)

R-squared (within)	0.195	0.453	0.520	0.563
R-squared (between)	0.529	0.820	0.811	0.825
R-squared (overall)	0.486	0.801	0.798	0.817

** = P-value of 0.05 or less

I created a stepwise regression analysis to look at how the independent variables relate to the dependent variable both separately and collectively. In step A of the regression model, the median household income is the sole independent variable being compared to the dependent variable. In step B, I added independent variables pertaining to economic statuses and health. In step C, I added independent variables pertaining to housing. In step D, I added independent variables pertaining to language and origin. When other independent variables are not introduced, certain variables seem significant in affecting the dependent variable (i.e. median household income, poverty rate), but once other independent variables are introduced in each step of the regression, these independent variables are no longer significant. The significance of each independent variable is determined by their p-value equaling less than 0.05, meaning that there is less than a five percent probability that the null hypothesis is correct and is therefore rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis.

Based on the results of the fixed-effects GLS regression analysis, only three of my hypotheses were supported: Hypothesis 5 (ethnic groups with higher percentages of people who are unemployed will have lower educational attainment), Hypothesis 8 (ethnic groups with higher percentages of people who have food stamp/SNAP benefits will have lower educational attainment), and Hypothesis 14 (ethnic groups with higher percentages of people who speak English “less than very well” will have lower educational attainment). For every one percent increase in unemployment rate, the educational attainment decreases by 0.840 percent; for every one percent increase in food stamp/SNAP benefits, the educational attainment decreases by 0.451 percent; for every one percent increase in population that speaks English “less than very well,” the educational attainment decreases by 0.204 percent.

Two of my hypotheses were rejected: Hypothesis 9 (ethnic groups with higher percentages of people who own the housing unit they occupy will have higher educational attainment than those who rent the housing unit they occupy) and Hypothesis 13 (ethnic groups with higher percentages of people whose gross rent costs are less than 30 percent of their household income will have higher educational attainment). In both cases, I hypothesized that the educational attainment would increase as the independent variable increased, but the opposite was supported. For the rest of my independent variables, their p-values were not less than 0.05, which meant that their results were not significant and their null hypotheses, that the independent variables had no relationship with the dependent variable, could not be rejected.

It is important to note that my dependent variable, educational attainment, is negatively skewed rather than bell-shaped, which violates the normality assumption of regression. To test for whether or not this assumption is biasing the regression results, supplementary GLS analyses were performed on a transformed (normalized) version of my dependent variable. The results were generally consistent with the results shown in Table 1, so for the sake of simplicity in interpretation, the original (negatively skewed) dependent variable was used in the table and analysis.

Discussion

With regards to educational attainment decreasing as unemployment rates increase, the results align with projections from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics that highlight the relationship between the two variables “Unemployment rates and earnings by educational attainment” (2019). The nature of this relationship, however, is questionable, as unemployment could affect educational attainment in that employment provides people the means to afford higher educational attainment, and many employers offer their employees the funds to further their education as well. On the other hand, educational attainment could affect unemployment because higher educational attainment typically leads to greater employment stability, and with an overall rise in educational attainment, overqualified or “over-educated” individuals are increasingly entering jobs with low educational requirements and pushing lower-educated individuals out (Åberg 2003). Future research should investigate the nature of this relationship, and what would also be interesting is research on how parental unemployment status can impact a child’s educational attainment.

The relationship between food stamp/SNAP benefits and educational attainment has limited research, and in the limited research that explores this relationship, most scholars focus on how SNAP benefits benefit students in their academic performance among students living in poverty (Beharie et al. 2017; Gassman-Pines and Bellows 2018). Gassman-Pines and Bellows (2018) look at the way the introduction to food stamp/SNAP benefits affect children’s test scores in a positive way, while Beharie et al. (2017) identify the relationship between children living in poverty receiving SNAP benefits and grade retention. However, neither article specifically discusses how students receiving food stamp/SNAP benefits may perform compared to students who do not receive food stamp/SNAP benefits nor need them. In both articles, the researchers point specifically to how poverty and economic instability impact the educational achievement and outcomes of children, but what is especially interesting is how my regression analysis does not identify poverty as a significant variable in the educational attainment of Asian-Americans (Beharie et al. 2017; Gassman-Pines and Bellows 2018). In step B of my regression, prior to the inclusion of variables pertaining to housing and language/origin, both poverty rate and food stamp/SNAP benefits were significant, with poverty rate at a p-value of 0.018 and food stamp/SNAP benefits at a p-value of 0.000. In step D of my regression, food stamp/SNAP benefits had a p-value of 0.000, whereas poverty rate had a p-value of 0.331. Although poverty rate and food stamp/SNAP benefits may be related, the introduction of housing and language/origin variables decreases the significance of poverty rate substantially. Several researchers have studied the relationships between poverty and housing, and poverty and origin/immigration. Studies found that immigration was a significant determinant in the increases in poverty of the total population, as well as the recency of their immigration, the nation from which they immigrated from, and initial poverty rates (Murdock, Zhai, and Saenz 1999; Sasson 2010; Raphael and Smolensky 2009).

When looking at educational attainment decreasing as the percentage of people who speak English “less than very well” increases, several scholars can attest to this relationship (Whiteside 2017; Bohm 2015). Whiteside (2017) studied how children learning English as a second or additional language often experience lower academic attainment than their monolingual peers, while Bohm (2015) looked specifically at Asian-Americans who identified their own English-speaking skills as “well” or “not well” and their likelihood of higher education attainment. Earlier studies have shown that Asian-American students have lower retention rates than white students in higher education, pointing specifically to frustrations with language

barriers (Ng et al. 2007). Teranishi et al. (2011) explored ways that community college specifically can serve immigrant students more effectively in relation to helping students with their English-language skills, which would be especially beneficial to the Asian-American community given that 40 percent of Asian-American students in higher education were enrolled in community college (Ng et al. 2007). Although the foreign-born population—or immigrant population—was not found to be statistically significant in my regression analysis, there is an obvious relationship between immigration and English-speaking skills, and the variable of “foreign-born population” does not account for the children of immigrants who may struggle with their English-speaking skills and educational attainment. It is also important to note that the variable, while not at a p-value of less than 0.05, was somewhat significant at a p-value of 0.083. Further research should look at this relationship and the significance of immigration in affecting various factors that could impact educational attainment (i.e. poverty, English-speaking skills), as well as the types of immigration and minority status that are common for each ethnic group (Ogbu 1998).

Limitations

There are several limitations to my study. One limitation is that the ethnic groups that I looked at was not an exhaustive list of all Asian-American ethnic groups; however, there was limited data on other ethnic groups until very recently, so it would have been difficult to include all ethnic groups in my research. Another limitation is that I only look at monoethnic groups rather than people who may identify with multiple ethnicities. This was for the sake of simplicity of interpretation, as well as a lack of data on mixed ethnic groups. Thirdly, the data I used was second-hand data, meaning that I did not survey individuals myself and instead used data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey that was aggregated at the group level. However, this was somewhat helpful in my research, as I would most likely not have been able to gather enough data to have drawn significant conclusions. Lastly, one more limitation is that my dependent variable was negatively skewed, which is a violation of the normality assumption under regression. This was accounted for through transforming my dependent variable to normalize it in supplementary GLS analyses and finding results consistent with my negatively skewed dependent variable.

Conclusion

The findings of this study are important in dismantling the model minority myth. By providing insight into the disparities in educational attainment of various Asian-American ethnic groups, we can begin to recognize and understand the complexity and uniqueness of each ethnic groups’ experiences in America and their heterogeneous nature. The achievement gap had not decreased within the six years of data; in fact, it slightly increased, and the gap between the highest-attaining ethnic group (Taiwanese) and lowest-attaining ethnic group (Burmese) in the most recent year of data (2018) was 46.5 percent. Not only do we need to disprove the model minority myth, we also need to look into why the education gap persists within this community so that we can provide the necessary resources and tools for these ethnic groups to succeed. Based on my regression, variables that have a significant impact on educational attainment are unemployment rates, food stamp/SNAP benefits, and English-speaking ability. These variables should be further researched so that we can work to narrow the achievement gap within the Asian-American community and potentially apply similar solutions to other racial groups.

Future Research

Future research should look at how individuals who identify with two or more Asian ethnic groups and mixed-race Asian-Americans compare to other Asian-American ethnic groups. In Herman's (2009) research, she found that mixed-race individuals who identified closer to white or Asian achieve at higher rates than those who identified closer to black or Hispanic. This should be further investigated to look into multi-ethnic individuals' academic achievement as well as to determine how multiracial individuals are vulnerable to stereotype threat. I would hypothesize that the relationship between academic achievement and self-identification is much more complicated than Herman (2009) poses, especially for multi-ethnic individuals who still identify under the same race, given the fluctuation in the educational attainment of ethnic groups within one race. Future research could also look at the different types of minority status as described by Ogbu (1998) to depict the differences in immigration experiences among various ethnic groups. Particularly within the Asian-American community, different ethnic groups have historically had varying immigration processes and therefore contrasting minority statuses; Cambodian, Hmong, and Vietnamese people, for example, are among the most common groups to come to the U.S. as refugees, which is a vastly different experience than those who immigrated here for work, school, or other opportunities (Ogbu 1998).

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