

Asian-American students have strong academic support—but is it too much?

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Despite having the strongest academic support from parents, teachers, and friends, second-generation Asian American adolescents benefit much less from these supports than others, finds a study by NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development.

The findings, published in the *Asian American Journal of Psychology*, suggest that [support](#) may be experienced as pressure and that stereotyping Asian Americans as high achievers can be problematic.

"The tension produced from immigrant parents' high expectations and their children's efforts to fulfill these expectations might exacerbate the academic pressures experienced by second-generation Asian Americans," said Hua-Yu Sebastian Cherng, assistant professor of international education at NYU Steinhardt and author of the study.

Support from parents, friends, and teachers is a vital resource for adolescents when they form their own academic expectations. High academic expectations and support from others are linked with students having higher expectations for themselves and other important academic outcomes, such as getting good grades or going to college.

However, academic social support and its benefits are not necessarily uniform across students of different racial and generational backgrounds. In the case of Asian American youth, scholars have described two theories that may shape the academic expectations of Asian Americans: the Immigrant Bargain and the Model Minority

Stereotype. The Immigrant Bargain explains how immigrant children, who are aware of their parents' sacrifices, feel obligated to be successful in order to justify the hardships experienced by their parents. The Model Minority Stereotype constructs Asian American identity around high academic achievement.

In this study, Cherng and his co-author, NYU Steinhardt doctoral [student](#) Jia-Lin Liu, sought to understand whether academic social support from parents, friends, and teachers actually helps Asian American students or compounds the pressure that the youth experience.

The researchers used data from the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002, a nationally representative dataset of 15,360 high school students. They looked at information reported by the students, students' parents, and teachers during the students' sophomore year, including whether parents and teachers expected students to go to college. This information was linked to academic expectations reported by students in their senior year of high school - specifically, whether they anticipated completing a college degree. The researchers also looked at demographics, such as race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and immigration status (first-generation, second-generation, and third-generation and beyond).

They found that academic social support was an important ingredient in the formation of college-going expectations and that second-generation Asian Americans had the strongest social support. However, the influence of parents, friends, and teachers was not uniform: second-generation Asian Americans benefited less - or sometimes not at all - from academic social support despite having parents and teachers with the highest expectations and friends who were the most academically oriented.

For example, second-generation Asian Americans who had the highest level of support actually had lower probabilities of going to college, at 74

percent, compared to their peers with lower levels of support, at 83 percent. In contrast, third-generation Whites who had the highest level of support had 3 percent higher probabilities of expecting to go to college than did their peers with less support.

In addition to second-generation Asian Americans, parents of all generations of Latino students, third-generation Black students, and second-generation White students had significantly higher academic expectations compared to [parents](#) of third-generation White students.

Teacher's academic expectations also varied on students based on students' backgrounds. Both first- and second-generation Asian Americans and White students had teachers with higher expectations compared to third-generation White students. Teachers had significantly lower expectations towards Latino and Black students from all generations.

"Although sometimes thought of as a 'positive stereotype,' the Model Minority Stereotype not only can place pressure on Asian American youth to excel, but does not fully reflect the history and achievement of Asian Americans," Cherng said. "Teachers and policymakers who believe that all Asian Americans excel can overlook the educational needs of those who need assistance."

Given the negative influence the Model Minority Stereotype can have on Asian American youth, the authors conclude that more efforts should be taken to recognize and address this issue. For example, teachers can facilitate productive dialogue about Asian American stereotypes with students and families.

Provided by New York University

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