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A Case Study of Asian Indian Twin High Achievers

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Introduction & key definitions

Multicultural lives are all around us and we must embrace our diversity. It is increasingly important to understand ethnic and immigrant variation in the United States. We are a nation of immigrants. One in four residents is foreign-born or native born with at least one foreign-born parent. The definition of a foreign-born resident is anyone who is not a U.S. citizen at birth. The definition of a native-born resident is anyone born in the United States. The definition of a first-generation resident is anyone who is foreign born. Second and third generation residents have a foreign–born parent or grandparent (respectively). The Asian Indian twins in this case study are foreign–born first generation residents. The United States Census Bureau estimates that in 2013, 38% of the population is considered a minority (US Census Bureau, 2013). It estimates that by 2060, this will increase to 56%. According to Tseng (2016), Asian Americans represent a rapidly growing

India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam, and several other countries).

Immigrants are a part of the United States and their journey is very important. It is the time now to discuss the shifting cultural – community contexts (Stein & Garcia Coll, 2016). The first wave of Asian Indian American immigrants were from middle class professionals. They were admitted into the United States by the Hart–Celler Act of 1965 (Rangasmy, 2000). Occupational preferences category were included in the Hart–Celler Act, which favored doctors, nurses, and engineers, who were in high demand. Even if the immigration growth remains constant by current standards, the Asian American population will have increased by 79% between 2000 and 2050 (Ortman & Gauneri, 2009).

Tuan (1998) stated that Asian Americans are in the "model minority." In one study of high school students in the Southeastern United States, over 99% of Asian Americans, which included East, South, Indian, and Chinese Americans, were reported to have been stereotyped as model minorities (Thompson & Kiang, 2010).

The context and research objectives

With an intent to improve educational systems, we are often inclined to look at other countries and wonder why the people of Asian countries consistently perform well in school while holding knowledge and education at high esteem. Therefore, in this case study, we consider the following research questions to understand how "best" students study and perform:

1. What are the cultural values of Asian Indian high–achieving students?
2. How do high–achievers attain their high scores?
3. How can our society value education in a way that promotes high–achievement?

A high–achiever is anyone who has scored at the top of his/her class in regard to grade point average (GPA) and standardized test scores. What this study is hoping to achieve is an understanding of high–achievers' drive, motivation, and parental support that aids in their success. How can future students become like these high–achievers? How can educators motivate their students to achieve high marks? Are there underlining philosophies that guide high achievers?

The researcher chose this rationale because of a fascination with the respect and honor that Asian cultures place on education. After traveling to China numerous times, the researcher is enthralled that teachers are valued at the top of society in Asian countries. This fascination leads the context, methodology, and framework for this case study.

The researcher is a doctoral candidate from a large public university in the southern United States. While completing her Master's degree, the researcher focused on English as a Second Language and wrote her dissertation on Chinese language learners. This aided in her knowledge of Asian

The researcher has also spoken with Dr. Tom Fischgrund, the author of the book, *1600 Perfect Score: The 7 Secrets of Acing the SAT* (2003). This text is a monumental piece of literature in which Fischgrund (2003) surveyed 160 students who achieved a perfect score on the Scholastic Aptitude Test. In the interview, Fischgrund stated that he had not asked questions in regard to ethnic nor immigrant status. He also stated that there is not enough research on immigrants who perform well on standardized tests. Thus, the focus of this case study became clearer because there is a need and purpose for this research.

Reason for achievement

A number of cultural factors influence the educational success of Asian Americans (Kao & Thompson, 2003). This may stem from high parental expectations of educational success, a characteristic that seems to transcend socioeconomic class (Louie, 2004). Kao and Tienda (1995) labeled the "immigrant optimism hypothesis," which finds that immigrant youth, many of whom are Asian, are more likely to believe in the value of education for future success and to do better in school. Asian American cultural values regarding hard work, family, and education enable their success (Lee, 2009).

Kao and Tienda (1995) also state that children of immigrant parents do well in school because they benefit from their parent's recent arrival via their optimism about opportunities in the United States. There are specific cultural values and beliefs that immigrants use to enhance their achievement in America (Kim, 2002).

Rivas–Drake (2014) stated that "recognizing their Asian heritage and establishing a positive sense of ethnic or cultural identity has widely beneficial consequences for youth development, including academic, health, and psychosocial adjustment." Many immigrants hide their heritage because they want to assimilate into American culture. However, studies have shown that ethnic identity is important in one's overall sense of self.

Parents who attend school events, enroll children in classes outside school, or take children on outings may be more motivated or better informed about their child's needs (Glick, 2007). The participants in this research study are both violinists in a Chamber Orchestra in a high school in Southern United States. They have studied the violin since third grade and partake in concerts held twice a year. Their parents have attended many of their concerts and have supported ventures of their daughters.

Methodology

The framework for this case study is single and holistic (Yin, 2009). The twins are single because they are interviewed individually. For example, they have similar values and are thus considered singular. The reason the case is holistic is because the researcher is looking at similarities. The researcher is studying the common experiences of twin Asian Indian high–achievers. The typology

(pseudonym), was first found out on the school system's webpage. The researcher was browsing the website and saw the announcement that "Priya Balamurugan obtained a perfect ACT score." The announcement included a short biography of Priya including that she was a violinist in the Chamber Orchestra in a high school in Southern United States. The researcher is a violist and Orchestra Director and her husband is a bassist and Orchestra Director. The researcher's husband teaches these twins and they are violinists in his Orchestra class.

The design of this research study was conducted using purposeful sampling. The typology of the sampling strategy in this qualitative inquiry was theory based, homogeneous, and maximum variation because of the unique culture of Asian Indian students in this study (Miles & Huberman, 2013). In regard to the review of literature, the Asian Indian people value education and have respect for teachers. The reason the sampling strategy was homogeneous is because the students are twins. Their parents were also interviewed and thus, the family included homogeneous members. The reason that the sampling strategy was also a snowball strategy was because the students were found as a referral. The researcher's husband teaches the twins violin in their Talented Music class at a high school in Southern United States. The researcher's husband has also met with the parents in Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings.

The researcher's role in this particular research is of an interpreter (Stake, 2010). Creswell (2017) states that case study research is defined as a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real–life, contemporary bounded system over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information.

Data Collection

On Saturday, February 25, 2017, I interviewed Priya Balamurugan for thirty (30) minutes, her twin sister, Parvathy Balamurugan for thirty (30) minutes, and their parents for another thirty (30) minutes. For the purpose of this activity, I will use the data only from Priya's interview. However, for the mini case study I will synthesize all of the interviews. The interview was at the Balamurugan's residence. The first interview was of Priya from 10:15 am. – 10:45 am. The second interview was of Parvathy (Par) from 10:45 am. – 11:15 am. The third interview was of their parents, Sreetha and Subremanen. An interview protocol included the questions asked for all three interviewees. All three interviews were transcribed (see Table 1 in the appendix as a pdf file available for download at the end of this article). The purpose of the interview was to gain information on how high achieving students are motivated and use certain study strategies.

Analysis

The codes that are present in the analysis of the interview include getting a *perfect ACT score* (36). For example, Priya stated that, "I practiced more than I had before, so I guess that is why I got a good score." Priya spoke about her *parent's involvement* at a young age. For example, Priya stated that, "I have to really thank my parents, because since we were little, they would make us practice.

very important and it's really important to thank your teacher."

The largest cluster of codes including putting *effort into education.* This is a cluster because Priya mentioned this numerous times throughout the interview. The label that is representative for these themes includes: "EFFORT". For example, Priya states that, "Even for standardized tests, if you get a high score, people think you are smart; but not really. Standardized tests are how much you prepare, how much you practice, how much you know." She mentions throughout the interview that hard work pays off and that there is a misconception between intellect and hard work. She stated that, "The misconception between intellect and hard work is the exact opposite. The people who are doing well are doing well because they are working hard. The other people aren't doing well because they are not working hard. I don't like when people think that those that get good grades do it effortlessly. I put a lot of effort into this."

Findings

The interviewees include Priya, Parvathy, and their parents. The twins are both "Number 1" in their junior class at a high school in Southeast Louisiana. The high school calculates scores based on GPA and test scores. Priya received a perfect American College Test (ACT) score in December, 2016. The perfect score is a thirty – six (36).

Priya was born in Travandrum, India. She has an identical twin sister named Parvathy and they are the only children of Bala (short for Subremananen) and Sreetha Balamurugan. The girls were born in India and later moved to the United States. They were born in Trivandru, which is a city in the state of Kerala, India. Their parents speak Tamil at home, but the girls answer back in English. At the age of two (2) months old, Bala and Sreetha parents moved to New Mexico as post – graduate students. They both have Ph.D.'s in Chemistry and moved to Baton Rouge when the twins were three (3) years old. Their parents have worked at Louisiana State University (LSU) as post – doctoral students in Chemistry since 2003.

Priya Balamurugan and her family do not mind if I use her full name in any documents. Thus, actual names are used of the respondents. Priya was dressed in a blue dress shirt and pants. Her demeanor is shy and very respectful. Her personality can be described as nice and driven. Her twin sister, Parvathy, received a thirty – three (33) on the ACT. I spent thirty (30) minutes interviewing her as well and will use the data in the "mini" case study for this course.

My impressions of Priya were profound. She is very well spoken and presents her ideas in a concise manner. She was such an avid reader at a young age that her parents had to tell her to "stop" reading. As a punishment for misbehaving, Priya was not given "time – out" or reduction of privileges like "no internet," or "no TV." Because Priya and her sister would read all the time, the punishment was to not read. This impression will stick with me because not many people enjoy reading as much as Priya does.

with her at a young age and always supporting her. She spoke that, "in our culture," which identifies with the Indian culture of respecting teachers and elders. She went into giving examples of an Indian dance where the students all begin the dance with three "Namastes:" one to the audience, one to their teacher, and one to themselves. She mentioned this because it is involved her culture as well as trying to prove her point that respecting teachers is important. For example, if she just said, "Yes, it is important to respect your teachers," then we would assume that it is a value. However, because Priya described her dance experience, she painted a picture of what her culture identifies to reverence. This was a very important distinction and was very monumental in the interview. I was deeply moved and have reflected on her description of the "namaste" meaning that Priya provided in the interview.

Another theme in the interview was the amount of effort she perceives that she puts into her studying. She mentioned that it started very young, even before first (1st) grade. Her parents would help her practice math. Later on, her parents stated that they would buy an entire grade of math the summer before school and complete the book before starting in August.

An underlining theme throughout the interview was the fact that she strongly believes that there is a direct correlation between hard work and high achievement. For example, she stated that, "I don't think I am good at math, but I have worked very hard at it." She mentioned that, while she identifies there might be a concept such as "talent," she gets mad when people think that she gets good grades and achieves a perfect ACT score effortlessly. Priya has reiterated that she works very hard and that is the reason she is so successful.

Data Reduction and Interpretation

The purpose of this interview was to answer the question, "How do high – achievers attain their high scores? What values do high – achievers have?" The definition of a high – achiever is anyone who has scored at the top of his/her class in regard to grade point average (GPA) and standardized test scores. What this interview is hoping to achieve is an understanding of high – achievers' drive, motivation, and parental support that aids in their success. How can future students become like these high – achievers? How can educators motivate their students to achieve high marks? How can our society value education in such a way that promotes high – achievement?

The first theme that was found in these three interviews was parental, teacher, friends, and family support.

The second theme was about their culture. Both of Priya and Par's parents are Indian and both grew up in Kerala, India, which is in the state of Travandrum. The sub themes of culture include the value of education, respecting elders, and cultural values. The cultural values include respect, empathy for teachers' jobs, importance of knowledge, Indian dance, and Hinduism.

The fourth theme is the home environment. Sub – themes include inner motivation, a calm environment, and free of distractions. Sreelatha, the twins' mom, was very important for this data because she and her husband provided a framework for their home environment and house rules.

Conclusion & future direction

This research was very informative. This was the researcher's first research course and it has been very beneficial in regard to using data for the dissertation. The interest of high – achieving students has been something life – long. The researcher has always wanted to attend an Ivy League school because of the prestige. Having a perfect ACT score will assist any student to achieving their dreams of being accepted into a good college. This research is important because standardized test scores are considered "high – stakes" testing. In 2012, the Obama Administration launched "Race to the Top" (U. S. Dept. of Ed., 2012). This competition was designed to promote achievement and awarded states with finances to continue this achievement. It's objective is to provide incentives for states and local educational agencies to implement reform strategies. There is a lot of research in the field of standardized tests. Regardless of whether it is a debatable topic about "teaching to the test," there is value to standardized tests.

In regard to the *referential* function of communication, I was able to obtain information from Priya and Parvathy in regard to their demographics. For example, questions were asked about their schooling, how many times they have taken the ACT, and the demographics of their biography (place of birth, where she has lived, who is in her family). In regard to the *emotive* function of communication, Priya revealed how passionate she is about her work ethic. For example, when she started talking about the difference between people who work hard and the people who "rely" on their intellect, her mood became very adamant. In regard to the *conative* function of communication, I noticed that I complimented her on her drive. For example, I asked the question, "How do you give advice to people who think they do not have drive? You seem to have a lot of drive." She said, "Thank you." However, I do not think she was trying to please me. I think her passion for her education was revealed after this statement.

In regard to the *metalingual* function of communication, I was able to obtain a successful interview because of the agreement of terms. For example, when I first contacted Priya's mom (Sreetha), she had a heavy accent that I had a difficult time comprehending. However, with the role of empathy and understanding, we were able to come to an agreement about meeting and it was quite successful. In regard to the *poetic* function of communication, Priya stood out as an advocate for hard work and determination. For example, when she was asked about her drive and motivation, Priya was very confident and "poetic" in her knowledge of motivation. In regard to the *phatic* function of communication, I felt that we ended on a high note. The ebb and flow was definitely that – the energy of the interview went up and down. However, the end was strong and we were able to connect as an interviewer and a respondent.

will combine the qualitative and quantitative data to used mixed methods research.

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