



Asian American Educational Attainment and Earning Power in Post-Racial America



This policy brief contextualizes the most recent data on mobility of Asian American students within the K to Ph.D. educational system in the new, so-called, colorblind post-racial America. Achievement data on Asian Americans are often presented in the same breath with Whites when compared to the academic achievement of African Americans and Latina/os. This reinforces the model minority stereotype of Asian Americans that presumes school success. The effect of this stereotype perpetuates notions that Asian Americans no longer encounter racial discrimination, as well as the notion that institutional barriers faced by Asian Americans are somehow less important than those faced by other racial groups.

Without a comprehensive understanding about the Asian American population, it is easy for individuals to dismiss their needs, which serves as a trap to unknowingly participate in the model minority post-racial thesis. This brief concerns itself with the ways in which the presumed post-racial model minority construct impacts the education and economic mobility of many Asian Americans, and offers policy recommendations for research and educational leadership.

Data Source

Drawing from the March Supplement of the Census 2010 Current Population Survey (CPS), this report disaggregates educational attainment and earning power for Asian Americans across various social categories (race, class, gender, and citizenship).

The 2010 CPS March Supplement, referred to as the Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) was given to 77,000 households with a response rate of over 91.5%. The findings in this report can be found in Covarrubias, A, and Liou, D. D. (2014), "Asian American Education and Income Attainment in the Era of Post-Racial America." *Teachers College Record*, 116(6) p. -

<http://www.tcrecord.org> ID Number: 17279, Date Accessed: 7/23/2014.



Finding #1: Asian Americans are Diverse and Heterogeneous

Our findings point to broad internal differences within Asian American communities revealed at the intersections between educational attainment, race, class, gender, and immigration status – the heterogeneity of this racial group allows for a multiplicity of experiences that are manifested in both educational outcomes and earning power.

Finding #2: Social Economic Status Matters in How Well Asian Americans Do in Schools

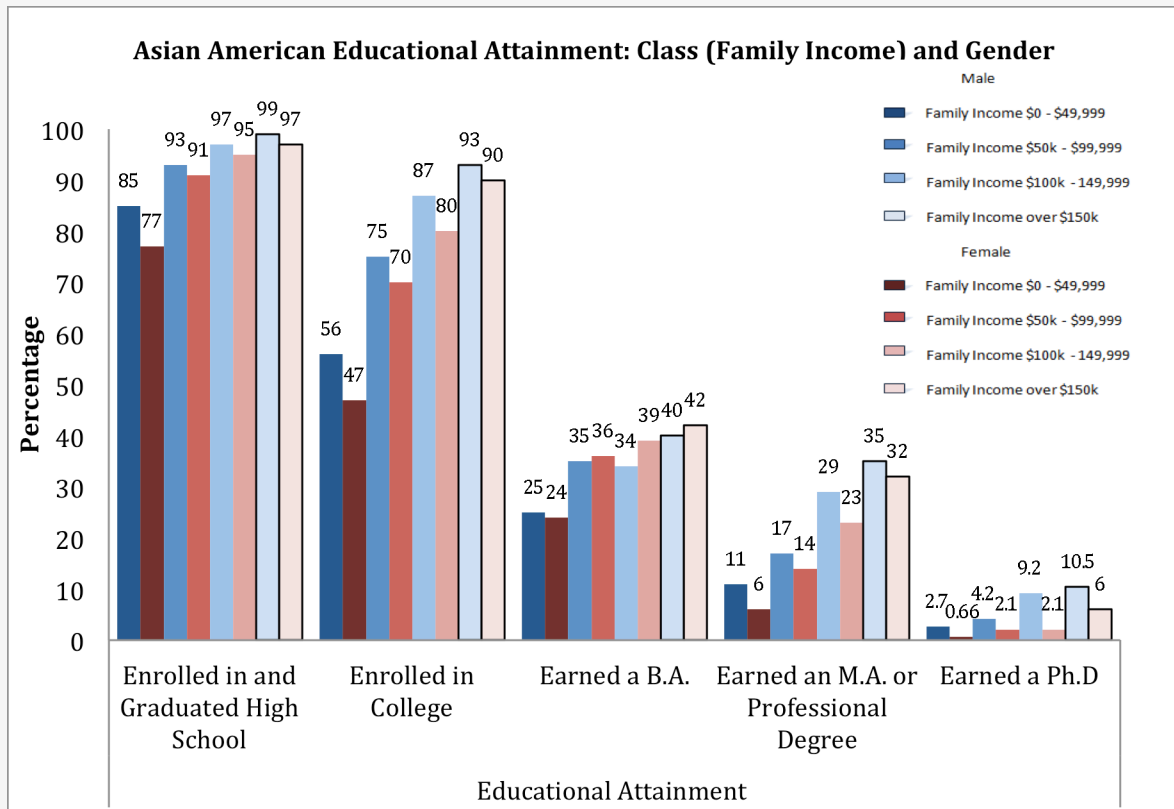
Upon disaggregating the Asian American educational pipeline by class, we find that Asian Americans living within worse economic conditions have lower educational outcomes when compared to those of higher means (figure 1).

Finding #3: Women and Men Experience Schooling Differently

For both high school completion and college enrollment, men have much higher outcomes. We found lower outcomes for women in almost all income groups, except for baccalaureate degrees, where they typically earn more. Also, men consistently have more graduate

Peeling back the layers on a diverse population: Asian American males make much more than their female counterparts for the same and even lesser educational attainment levels.

Figure 1: Class (Family Income) and Gender





or professional degrees, and doctorates. The associate degree attainment rates (not shown here) are much less predictable, as both groups earn the same number of degrees in two of the income groups, and women earn slightly more degrees in the other two. Overall, men are more likely than women to earn some type of degree in all income groups, but they are also more likely to leave college without any degree. These outcomes document an interactional effect of gender, class, and race on educational attainment patterns for Asian Americans.

Finding #4: Citizenship Impacts Educational Outcomes
Citizenship status too plays a critical role in educational outcomes: undocumented Asian American residents have by far the lowest high school attainment rates when compared to US born and foreign-born naturalized citizens of Asian

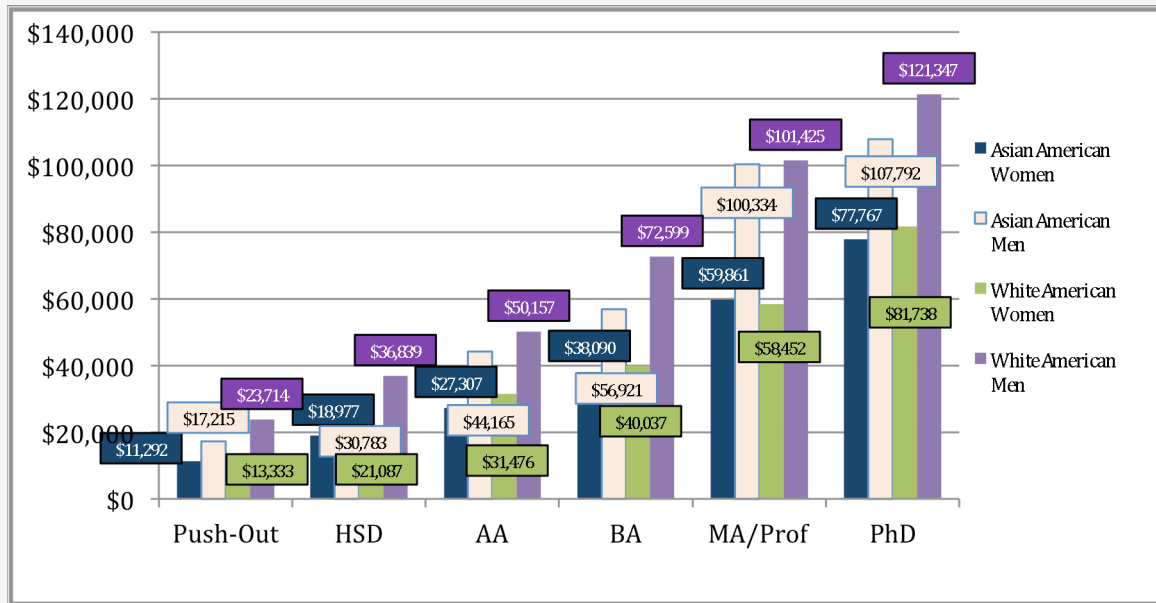
descent. While the associate degree attainment rate for Asian American women is highest (26%) among the undocumented, their baccalaureate degree attainment rate is the lowest (21%) among Asian American women, and their graduate / professional degree attainment is highest (19%) among the three groups examined. However, both men and women who are undocumented earn no reportable doctorate degrees.

This demonstrates complicated intersectional effects that are not always predictable using traditional constructions: In some cases women perform better than men, and in other cases men perform better; in some instances being a citizen is associated with higher attainment rates, whereas in others undocumented residents have higher outcome rates.

Finding #5: Challenges of Educational Attainment as a Pathway to Combat Racial and Income Inequities

This more nuanced examination allows us to challenge homogenizing representations of Asian Americans as uniformly high achievers. We find that race continues to leave a detrimental impression on the earning power of Asian Americans despite their high educational outcomes as an aggregated group. Indeed, at most education levels, Asian Americans report lesser individual average earnings than their White counterparts (see figure 2). In addition, there is a clear gender difference that jumps out from this data: Asian American males make much more than their female counterparts for the same and even lesser educational attainment levels; the gender difference is even more dramatic between White American men and White American women¹.

Figure 2: Earning Power by Educational Attainment and Gender



The multiplicity of experiences that arise within such a heterogeneous group necessitate that we utilize an intersectional analysis to develop specifically responsive policy and institutional practices. Our data reveals that educational attainment is not a straightforward and equitable determinant for an increase in earning power for Asian Americans. Race, especially at its intersection with gender, is an important factor in the income gap between Asian Americans and White Americans.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

For the fastest growing immigrant population in the U.S., our findings raise concerns about how Asian Americans continue to be perceived, represented, and neglected within the educational system, public discourse, and in policy areas such as labor rights, equal pay, affirmative action, and civil rights. Despite the persistence of the model minority myth in the supposed post-racial era, Asian American heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity of experiences call for a more nuanced intersectional analysis and policy framework. In spite of the stereotypes, Asian American educational experiences are not uniform.

The generalization that all Asian Americans will perform at the highest levels leaves those that do not meet this expectation vulnerable to academic underperformance and limited support services. Furthermore, our data on earning power illustrates that race is a significant liability for this population, and that gender plays an equally important role in depressing the wages of Asian American women.

This study reveals that scholars and policy-makers need to study and consider the intersectional effects that intersecting social constructions have on educational attainment, earning power, and resource allocation for a diverse, fast-growing Asian American population. In conclusion we offer several recommendations to address the disparities found in our study.

Recommendations

Educational scholars and activists should:

- Intentionally re-conceptualize Asian American educational experiences from non-stereotypical perspectives while addressing social inequities
- Utilize intersectional analyses to fully capture Asian American inter-group and intra-group diversity
- Include Asian Americans in issues of social inequity more broadly
- Invest in research on Asian American educational experiences and outcomes. There is a dearth of research on Asian Americans, both in range and depth that can be alleviated through targeted funding
- Utilize an intersectional policy and leadership framework for equity projects that builds cross group coalitions and intersectional affirmative actions.

Footnotes:

¹The gender gap in earning power was wider for White Americans than Asian Americans in both absolute numbers and as a ratio of women's earnings/men's earnings. While other data may show conflicting results, this data is specific to our sample, which is impacted by data source (Census CPS), time frame, analytical methodology, and data collection decisions. Methodological questions are addressed in the original *Teachers College Record* article.

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Alejandro Covarrubias, community scholar at the Institute of Service-Learning, Power, & Intersectional Research, uses intersectional theory to examine education policy implications of institutionalized privilege and oppression on different socially constructed groups. His current work studies the impact of intersectional subordination on the educational outcomes of diverse groups, including Asian Americans, people of Mexican origin, undocumented populations, and working-class individuals in distinct racialized spaces. Dr. Covarrubias has also researched the experiences of students who have been pushed out of high school, the alternative educational settings that reengage them, and the linkages to the failed "war on drugs."

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This policy paper was released by the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF). AALDEF, founded in 1974, is a national organization that protects and promotes the civil rights of Asian Americans. By combining litigation, advocacy, education, and organizing, AALDEF works with Asian American communities across the country to secure human rights for all.

Institute of Service-Learning, Power & Intersectional Research (INSPIRE) is a non-profit that works to create equitable and reciprocal relationships between local universities and community-based organizations for the purpose of carrying-out community-centered, participatory action research, meaningful service-learning projects, and research-based educational programming.

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