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When White Is Just Alright: How Immigrants Redefine Achievement and Reconfigure the Ethnoracial Hierarchy

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Abstract

Research on immigration, educational achievement, and ethnoraciality has followed the lead of racialization and assimilation theories by focusing empirical attention on the immigrant-origin population (immigrants and their children), while overlooking the effect of an immigrant presence on the third-plus generation (U.S.-born individuals of U.S.-born parents), especially its white members. We depart from this approach by placing third-plus-generation individuals at center stage to examine how they adjust to norms defined by the immigrant-origin population. We draw on fieldwork in Cupertino, California, a high-skilled immigrant gateway, where an Asian immigrant-origin population has established and enforces an amplified version of high-achievement norms. The resulting ethnoracial encoding of academic achievement constructs whiteness as having lesser-than status. Asianness stands for high-achievement, hard work, and success; whiteness, in contrast, represents low-achievement, laziness, and academic mediocrity. We argue that immigrants can serve as a foil against which the meaning and status of an ethnoracial category is recast, upending how the category is deployed in daily life. Our findings call into question the position that treats the third-plus generation, especially whites, as the benchmark population that sets achievement norms and to which all other populations adjust.

Keywords

achievement, assimilation, immigration, race, whiteness

The United States is in the midst of the largest, most ethnoracially and socioeconomically diverse wave of immigration in its history. Social scientists seeking to understand the implications of the associated changes for educational achievement and ethnoraciality have followed the lead of theoretical traditions that explain how minorities become racialized (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Omi and Winant 1994) or how immigrant-origin populations (immigrants and their children) assimilate to various ethnoracial and class segments of U.S. society (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993). Empirical research tends to treat the third-plus generation (U.S.-born individuals of U.S.-born parents), and particularly whites, as the standard

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bearers of achievement against which to judge the immigrant-origin population.

Assuming the superordinate position of third-plus-generation whites may make sense if minorities have a low socioeconomic origin. But minorities in the United States today are socioeconomically diverse, owing in large measure to the influx of high-skilled immigrants from South and East Asia. The demand for formal skills in a post-industrial economy is attracting large numbers of Asian[1] immigrants whose education and income often surpass that of native-born whites (Chiswick 2011; Pew Research Center 2012; Sakamoto, Goyette, and Kim 2009). Rather than just living in urban ethnic enclaves, as was typical of earlier waves of immigrants, high-skilled Asian immigrants are settling in suburbs alongside middle- and upper-middle-class whites (Alba et al. 1999; Iceland 2009; Li 2009; Pew Research Center 2012). If whiteness represents academic success in contexts where whites are clearly superordinate numerically or socioeconomically, how is achievement ethnoracially encoded[2] in middle- and upper-middle-class contexts where immigrants' socioeconomic status matches or even exceeds that of native-born whites?

Drawing on recent theorizing that accounts for the possibility of immigrant-origin populations influencing the host society (Alba and Nee 2003; Orum 2005), we spotlight the effect that an immigrant-origin population has on the experiences of third-plus-generation individuals. We do not start from the assumption that one group stands alone in defining norms of achievement. Rather, we show how, in light of a large immigrant presence, these norms are constructed, altered, and contested. We utilize fieldwork in the city of Cupertino, an upper-middle-class, high-skilled immigrant destination in California's Silicon Valley, to show that the large population of high-skilled immigrants from East and South Asia has established and enforces an amplified version of high-achievement norms that eclipses an already high existing standard. In the process, the traditional link between ethnoracial identity and academic achievement is turned on its head. In Cupertino, Asianness is intimately associated with high achievement, hard work, and academic success. Whiteness, in contrast, stands for lower-achievement, laziness, and academic mediocrity. This understanding of ethnoracial categories in relation to academic achievement is widespread. It informs how third-plus-generation individuals see themselves, how teachers view third-plus-generation students, the childrearing strategies that parents employ, and expectations for achievement among all parties.

Empirically, our work shows how the heavy presence of an immigrant-origin population changes the meaning and status of an ethnoracial category from its previously established position. We argue that the processes determining which groups define and enforce norms of achievement are conditional. The immigrant-origin population—particularly when it is large and concentrated, and when its socioeconomic status rivals or even trumps that of the dominant group—may define the norms, serving as a reference group against which individuals judge the third-plus generation. Our findings call into question the largely taken-for-granted analytic position that treats the third-plus generation, and especially its white members, as the norm-setting population to which immigrant-origin groups adjust. More generally, we argue that an essential step in advancing an understanding of the evolving character of U.S. society, whether it is characterized by a single mainstream or ethnoracial and class segments, is to examine how its most generationally established occupants adjust to immigration-driven change.

ETHNORACIALLY MARKED ACHIEVEMENT

Academic achievement is significantly bound up with ethnoracial identity. Research on the link between the two is characterized by a preoccupation with minority outcomes, treating whites as the standard bearers of academic achievement against which to compare

minority achievement. Scholars have paid significant attention to the achievement gap, shorthand for disparities in educational outcomes between blacks and whites, Latinos and whites, and recent immigrants and whites (see, e.g., Cameron and Heckman 2001; Ladson-Billings 2006; Reardon and Galindo 2009; for an extensive review, see Kao and Thompson 2003). These disparities are animated in the everyday ways in which individuals connect ethnoracial categories to achievement, where whiteness represents competence and academic success, and blackness and Latinoness stand for the opposite (see, e.g., Fiske et al. 2002; Fryer and Torelli 2010; Louie 2004; Stanton-Salazar 2001; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova 2008; for a review, see Warikoo and Carter 2009).[3]

If there is a notable exception to the definition of minorities as lower achieving, it is the Asian model minority. According to the stereotype, Asians avoid the negative outcomes associated with other minority groups because they possess the cultural orientation and work ethic that other non-whites supposedly lack (Hurh and Kim 1989; Kao 1995; Kim 1999). Historically, Asians' model minority position was a result of "racial triangulation," wherein whites viewed Asians as an acceptable minority relative to blacks (and Latinos), but certainly not on par with whites (Kim 1999). Put another way, assessment of Asians as a model minority is rooted in comparisons between Asians and other minority groups, but it does not challenge the meaning and status of whiteness.

Broad theoretical traditions of inter-ethnoracial group contact treat whites as a superordinate reference population against which minority groups are positioned in the ethnoracial order. In the racialization tradition (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Omi and Winant 1994), a historically rooted racial social system defined by white hegemony relegates minorities to a subordinate status that produces negative life chances. The presence of minorities, including immigrants, reinforces the superordinate position of whites (Massey 2007). Although often portrayed in contrast to the racialization tradition, assimilation theories likewise point to changes that minority immigrant-origin populations undergo, but offer no account of how generationally established populations may change as a result of contact with immigrant-origin individuals (Gordon 1964; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993). These theories treat third-plus-generation whites, in particular, as gatekeepers to belonging. Segmented assimilation (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993), the most prominent version of the theory developed to explain experiences of the post-1965 wave of immigrants, treats the third-plus generation as a central part of the context of reception that determines the ethnoracial and class segments of U.S. society into which today's immigrant-origin population will assimilate (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

These theoretical traditions, and the studies they inform, tend to gloss over how class diversity within ethnoracial groups and immigrant populations produces variation in the meaning and enactment of ethnoracial categories, including whiteness. For example, low-class status among whites is associated with failure more than success in some settings (Wray 2006). In Atlanta, blacks view whites in a poor, predominantly black neighborhood as deficient because of their inability to capitalize on their whiteness for socioeconomic gain (McDermott 2006). Similarly, whiteness in Detroit is highly visible and class inflected (Hartigan 1999).

Immigration also muddies assumptions about the norm-setting position of whiteness. Historically, immigrants and their children proved themselves as fully white—gaining an economic, political, and social foothold—in part by subordinating blacks (Ignatiev 1995; Jacobson 1998; Roediger 1991, 2005). But research on contemporary immigrant populations shows that whites may not be guiding efforts to belong, especially when it comes to academic achievement. Second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese adolescents in Los Angeles seldom, if ever, make reference to

native-born whites in how they define academic success (Lee 2012; Lee and Zhou 2013; Zhou et al. 2008). Instead, their fellow immigrant-origin Asians set the norms for success, and the evaluative frame through which they judge achievement therefore confers an advantage over whites. Similarly, New York City's second-generation immigrant population does not reference whites for strategies to get ahead in school and work or as the standard of achievement. Instead, the second generation, especially those of Chinese origin, draw on achievement norms they define for themselves (Kasinitz et al. 2008; Tran 2011). In some settings, immigrants look to historically subordinate groups as models of success. Longitudinal ethnographic work among second-generation Mexican Americans in New York shows that some adolescents identify as Black-Mexicans: Mexican-descent youth who describe themselves as ethnoracially black, engage in habits they consider black (e.g., music and clothing), and deploy this adopted black culture as a way of becoming *upwardly* mobile (Smith 2012).

These studies suggest that although whites' superordinate position remains firm in the U.S. racial social system (Bonilla-Silva 1997), they are not universally the benchmark population against which individuals judge what it means to be high-achieving. Because the ethnoracial encoding of academic success is a relative process that depends on comparisons between two or more groups (Barth 1969), the varying benchmarks and strategies that immigrant-origin populations use to get ahead in school and beyond may have direct bearing on the meaning and status of whiteness. We examine this issue by breaking from the literature's orthodoxy of studying how the immigrant-origin population adjusts to a new context. Instead, we focus on how the third-plus generation adjusts to a context that has changed because of immigration.

Theories that highlight the potential influence of immigrant-origin populations on established individuals and institutions inform our approach. In particular, Alba and Nee's (2003) new assimilation theory returns to an older formulation of the theory (Park and Burgess [1921] 1969), offering a definition that is neutral about the direction of change that assimilation produces. They define assimilation as "the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences" (Alba and Nee 2003:11). According to Alba and Nee (2003:12), over time, the mainstream, "that part of society within which ethnic and racial origins have at most minor impacts," changes as immigrants and their descendants become part of it. Instead of treating assimilation as a process of group absorption, as do previous iterations of assimilation theory, or assuming that whiteness stands as an unshakable superordinate category, as does the racialization tradition, Alba and Nee (2003) treat assimilation as a process of group convergence. Similarly, Orum (2005) theorizes that immigrant-origin groups leave an imprint on the host society by taking on leadership positions (chains of command) in nonethnic institutions and by using ethnic organizations to influence life outside the ethnic community (spheres of influence). These theories guide our approach in that they articulate the possibility that immigrant-origin groups meaningfully influence the third-plus generation.

Our examination of the experiences of the third-plus generation shows how immigration-driven compositional change produces ethnoracially encoded achievement norms that shape the meaning and deployment of ethnoracial categories. In the past, immigrants have shaped the meaning of ethnoracial categories by fitting into established categories (Ignatiev 1995; Jacobson 1998; Roediger 1991, 2005) and by serving as a foil that further establishes the meaning and status of existing categories (Haney-López 1996; Loewen 1971; Motomura 2006). Studies show how immigration-driven change in population composition produces corresponding changes in urban politics (Horton 1995; Min 2008; O'Connor 1995), neighborhoods (Taub and Wilson 2007; Tran 2011), and school culture (Carter 2005; Warikoo 2011), which challenges the status quo and is often resisted by third-plus-generation individuals. In our study, the presence of immigrants does not just challenge the status

quo, it flips the meaning and status of an ethnoracial category in relation to how it operates in an important realm of life: educational achievement. Whereas whiteness is typically associated with high achievement, we find that whiteness in Cupertino suggests the very same characteristics usually assigned to nonwhite minorities. Moreover, breaking from the model minority stereotype, Asians are a model only in that they set the norms of academic achievement by which whites are evaluated. Our findings suggest that an immigrant-origin population, when in large and concentrated numbers and of high socioeconomic status, can assert its own norms of achievement that ultimately usurp those previously in place. As a result, individuals who, by virtue of their ethnoracial and class status, once occupied a superordinate status in academic achievement become marked outsiders who are unable to conform to a new set of achievement norms defined by the immigrant-origin population. More broadly, our work points to how immigrant-origin populations can redefine ethnoracial categories, not just through their absorption into these categories, but also by serving as a comparison that alters the traditional relationship between ethnoraciality and achievement.

METHODS AND SETTING

We draw on analysis of 71 in-depth interviews—61 with third-plus-generation individuals and another 10 with key informants—in Cupertino, California, a suburban city in the west portion of the Santa Clara Valley, better known as Silicon Valley. We define *third-plus generation* as U.S.-born individuals of U.S.-born parents. The third-plus generation captures the set of individuals to whom the post-1965 immigrants and their second-generation children assimilate, according to most contemporary studies (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993).

The primary sample selection criterion was generation-since-immigration. We selected individuals if they were U.S.-born to U.S.-born parents. As the segmented assimilation perspective notes, immigrants and their children assimilate to a society diverse in its ethnoracial and class origins. We thus include white and non-white (Japanese- and Chinese-American and multiracial) third-plus-generation individuals in our sample. Our presentation of data and our analysis use the categories that operate in Cupertino, where white generally stands for *third-plus-generation* whites and Asian stands for *immigrant-origin* Asians. We note where our use of these descriptors departs from these implied meanings.

We identified interview respondents through snowball sampling. We found our initial set of respondents from the Cupertino Block Leaders Program, which includes more than 200 individuals who serve as liaisons between the city government and their neighborhoods. Roughly one-third of neighborhoods have an individual designated as a block leader. The head of the program sent out an e-mail on our behalf to block leaders soliciting help in finding respondents. Block leaders then referred us to potential respondents in their neighborhoods. We solicited referrals from this initial sample of respondents. This sampling procedure yielded 61 third-plus-generation individual respondents. Using the Block Leaders program ensured we drew from several different networks of respondents, thus minimizing potential sample homogeneity.[4] We interviewed third-plus-generation individuals between the ages of 15 and 77 years to capture how different cohorts experience immigration-driven changes. The overwhelming majority of our third-plus-generation respondents (51 of 61) were white of European ancestry. All respondents were upper-middle class.

Interviews were geared toward capturing various dimensions of respondents' experiences in a high-skilled immigrant gateway. When the link between ethnoraciality and academic achievement emerged as a highly salient theme in our initial interviews, we sought to interview third-plus-generation individuals with Asian ancestry. We aimed to understand any potential similarities or differences in their experiences of the ethnoracial encoding of achievement in view of their

Asian ancestry and the fact that they are several generations removed from an immigrant generation. Our sample thus includes 10 people who have Asian ancestry (four of whom were multiracial)[5] and were U.S.-born to U.S.-born parents. All trace their U.S. origins to earlier waves of Chinese and Japanese immigrants.

We also interviewed 10 informants who were familiar with the city: teachers, school administrators, and city officials. Our observation of the link between ethnoraciality and academic achievement led us to focus our informant interviews on high school teachers and individuals involved in the PTA and school board.[6] These interviews provided a better understanding of the historical and present-day context in which intergroup dynamics unfolded.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service. We analyzed the transcribed interviews using Atlas.ti, a qualitative software package that allows users to attach coding categories to blocks of text and compare interview responses across interviews. We offered each respondent a cash payment of $45.

Setting

We selected Cupertino as a research site for theoretical reasons. Cupertino is a high-skilled immigrant gateway, where both the immigrant-origin and third-plus-generation populations are upper-middle class. The large proportion of foreign-born Cupertino residents, combined with the city's elevated socioeconomic status, allow for potential refinements to theories of intergroup relations, which generally assume that immigrant-origin groups are both numeric and status minorities relative to host populations. Neither of these conditions holds true in Cupertino, which allows us to examine how intergroup dynamics play out when key assumptions embedded in these theories are absent.

Cupertino's economic and demographic trajectories mirror those of Silicon Valley. Until the 1970s, the city's landscape and economy was primarily defined by agriculture and was populated by French, Italian, Portuguese, Irish, Mexican, and some Japanese agriculturalists. The city's residential population began growing in the middle of the twentieth century. Because of its location relative to major technology and engineering firms, Cupertino became a popular home to many of the region's educated whites, who helped to establish a highly regarded public school system. Cupertino's move from agriculture to technology, and from rural to suburban, was spurred by the establishment of Apple Computer in the city and the company's dramatic growth in the 1980s. In the 1990s, other large technology firms, such as Symantec and Tandem, established headquarters there, solidifying Cupertino's identity as a technology hub.

The growth of Silicon Valley's technology industry in the late 1980s attracted international migrants, especially people from South and East Asia (Saxenian 1999). These migrants moved to Cupertino in large numbers because of its long-standing reputation for exceptional public schools.[7] As a result, Cupertino's demographics changed at a dizzying pace. According to U.S. Census data (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1990), in 1990, just 22 percent of Cupertino residents were born in another country, 74 percent were white, and 23 percent were Asian. Today, 49 percent of Cupertino residents are foreign-born, whites make up just 29 percent of the total population, and Asians comprise 63 percent of Cupertino residents (see Table 1). The demographic dominance of Asians is even more apparent among younger residents. Asians represent 70 percent of students in Cupertino's elementary schools, whites comprise 23 percent, and Latinos make up just 5 percent.[8] Cupertino is an upper-middle-class city, as indicated by its high median household income ($120,201), large percentage of residents who have a bachelor's degree or higher (74.7 percent), high proportion of workers in managerial and professional jobs (74.9 percent), and high median home-sales price ($1,002,200). Politically, the city's Asian population, both U.S.- and foreign-born, has gained a strong foothold (Lai 2011; Li and Park 2006). During our fieldwork, a

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Cupertino, CA, Silicon Valley, and the United States

	Cupertino, CA	Silicon Valley (Santa Clara County)	United States
Total Population	58,302	1,781,642	308,745,538
Race/Ethnicity (%)[a]			
White (non-Hispanic)	29.3	35.2	63.8
Black/African American	.6	2.4	12.2
Hispanic/Latino	3.6	26.9	16.4
Asian	63.2	31.7	4.7
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	.1	.4	.2
Two or More Races	3.0	3.0	1.9
Native-Born (%)	51.1	63.0	87.3
Foreign-Born (%)	48.9	37.0	12.7
Top Three Countries of Birth of Foreign-Born	India China Taiwan	Mexico China Philippines	Mexico Philippines India
Median Household Income (in 2009)	$120,201	$86,850	$51,914
Bachelor's Degree or More (age 25 and older) (%)	74.7	45.3	27.9
In Managerial or Professional Occupations (employed, age 16 and older) (%)	74.9	49.1	35.3
Median Home Price	$1,002,200	$520,300	$181,800

Note: Total population and race/ethnicity come from the 2010 U.S. Census; median home price is based on sales price for April 2012 (zillow.com 2013); all other variables come from 2006 to 2010 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2011).
[a]We report the proportion of the total populations only from the major ethnoracial groups. The percentages thus do not add to 100.

majority of Cupertino's city council, including its mayor, was of Asian origin.

In this setting, the ethnoracial encoding of achievement is well defined and a central dimension of life. But there are seldom, if ever, instances of overt inter-ethnoracial conflict. Intergroup contact is defined by civility. However, friendships between third-plus-generation and immigrant-origin individuals are rare. When they do occur, the immigrant-origin individual tends to have resided in the community for an extended period of time. Youth make friends across ethnoracial and, occasionally, immigrant-generational lines. But intergroup friendships are generally between third-plus-generation individuals. According to our interviewees, intergroup dating and marriage is an unremarkable occurrence, but it is much more likely to occur among third-plus-generation individuals than between third-plus-generation and immigrant-origin individuals. Friendship groupings undergo some reconfiguration in the high school years, with third-plus-generation whites and third-plus-generation Asians forming bonds, and East and South Asian immigrant-origin students forming their own respective cliques.

Cupertino's Asian-origin population constitutes a numerical majority, but there is diversity within this population. According to 2010 Census data (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2010), Chinese and Asian Indians each make up slightly more than one-third of the Asian-origin population, and Taiwanese (6.8 percent), Korean (7.5 percent), and Japanese (5.4 percent) individuals each comprise a nontrivial proportion of Asians. Respondents occasionally identified differences between Asian-origin subgroups, typically stating that Indians are easier to relate to because they are often native English speakers and seem more

culturally similar to Americans than do East Asians (the latter perception is likely the result of the former). However, when it came to academic achievement, respondents referred to East and South Asians simply as "Asians" who, together, define academic success.

FINDINGS

The ethnoracial encoding of academic achievement in Cupertino provides impetus for, and continuation of, a construction of whiteness as having a lesser-than status. How our respondents discuss adapting to a rising standard of achievement set by the Asian immigrant-origin population indicates their recognition of deep changes in ethnoracial status that are most apparent in schools but extend into neighborhood and home life as well.

When Immigrants Define Norms of Achievement for the Third-Plus Generation

By most standards, Cupertino is a community that breeds success. Its residents are highly educated and relatively well off, its schools are some of the best in California, and the crime rate is extremely low.[9] For the third-plus-generation individuals we interviewed, regardless of ethnoracial background, it is the norm that children attend college, enter a professional career, and eventually attain upper-middle-class status. Third-plus-generation parents practice concerted cultivation (Lareau 2003) in preparing their children for this trajectory: they are involved in their children's educational pursuits; they enroll their children in organized leisure activities like sports, dance, and music; and they have peer-like relationships with their children that prepare them early for life in the adult world.

College attendance and a professional career are not definitive markers of perceived high achievement in Cupertino, however. Success requires much more in this context. In schools, students boast more about how little they sleep and how hard they work than about their weekend exploits. SAT scores, grade point averages, and cerebral extracurricular activities (e.g., debate, student government, and Future Business Leaders of America) form the basis of student popularity. These are the accomplishments and activities that students and parents deem worthwhile and, importantly, are highly associated with the Asian immigrant-origin population.

Good schools and norms of high academic achievement defined Cupertino when the city was overwhelmingly white, and long before large numbers of Asian immigrants settled there. But residents who have lived and worked in the city over several decades noted a significant shift since the arrival of high-skilled Asian immigrants. Standards of academic achievement have significantly elevated, while nonacademic activities—sports, in particular—have fallen to the wayside and are now considered indulgences rather than résumé builders. A coach at one of the high schools described the extent of immigrant-driven change:

> I started here in [the late '60s]. The ethnicity was completely different. It was white and Hispanic. Middle-class white and Hispanic . . . and it was not working class, but professional type of stuff. And the expectations were of hard work and you grind in school and work hard in athletics and that type of thing. . . . Well, [about 20 years ago] there started being an influx of Asians. And the expectation was more academic and less athletic. And that's not a dig, it's just that that's the way it happened.

Another faculty member, who is also an alumnus of the school, agreed:

> R: Football was very strong here until about the early '90s.
>
> *Q: What changed?*
>
> R: Oh, the demographics changed. The size of the kids changed. The interests of kids changed. This has always been known as an academic school since it was founded, but the academics have gotten stronger and stronger and stronger.

These changes define respondents' perceptions of the city today. We began each interview by asking respondents how they would describe Cupertino to someone who has never visited the city. Their answers almost invariably defined Cupertino in reference to the high quality of the schools, the large Asian population, and the central role that this population plays in garnering the schools' reputation for extremely high academic achievement. The description of the city provided by Sarah Schwarz,[10] a 53-year-old Asian homemaker, was typical:

> I would say it's a great community; it's a great place to raise kids. I think anybody coming in, at least potentially looking at it as a place to live, would need to know that it's highly Asian—lots of Chinese families, East Indian families, and there is a mix. But I think, because of the heavy influence of the Asian population, it's a very competitive academic atmosphere for kids. . . . It's just a phenomenal school system. But it's very competitive. So if that's a worry for you, if you don't think your children can handle a very multicultural, multiracial, multiethnic community, maybe it's not the place for you. If you're looking for some place with [an] excellent school system that's going to provide your kids with a really good background and start for college, it's an excellent place to be.

The link that respondents drew between the Asian population and the quality of schools was sometimes subtle, but generally explicit, as with the following comments by Taylor Hawkins, a 19-year-old white junior-college student:

> It's very surprising to people outside of the area. I think [Cupertino is] more competitive. I don't know if that's the stereotype or if it's true, but it seems more competitive when there's more foreigners. And actually I think that's true. Because now that I'm in college a lot of the people who migrate here straight from Asian countries—they have a very different practice of learning. So I think it is actually true that they make it more competitive.

Although respondents reported that the degree of competition in Cupertino is exceptional, arguably even physically and psychologically unhealthy, they also reported that students subscribe to a norm of high academic achievement and encourage its continuance. Reflecting on her high school years in Cupertino, Sasha Fong, a 20-year-old biracial (Asian and white) college student explained:

> A lot of people became more competitive to be more well-rounded. So people were pushing community service, clubs . . . extracurricular stuff. So people put a lot on their plate when it came to . . . especially college acceptance time. . . . I remember some girl . . . it was just so competitive and stressful that a girl eventually did commit suicide over her SAT book. . . . It's not like that's a regular occurrence, but it has been a problem, almost like people are very competitive here in wanting to be the best. And a lot of that actually has to do with parents, too, and the stress that they put on kids. So my parents were really good about that, keeping it as an open conversation, not getting mad if [I] got lower than a B or something. But some kids would really, really freak out and it was kind of surprising because you have to expect there's some bad parts. You can't always be the perfect student. So, definitely a lot of competition at school. I would say even less in sports in this area. . . . School was [the] number one priority for a lot of people. So it was stressful.

This sort of drive may exist among a select group of students in any given high school, but our respondents described a hyper-achievement mindset as pervasive in Cupertino.

In addition, immigrant-origin Asians define academic achievement beyond high school. Whereas college attendance is a definitive marker of success in many immigrant destinations (Kasinitz et al. 2008; Portes and Rumbaut 2001), it is an expectation in Cupertino. Moreover, people in the city define success by what *kind* of college a student attends. Teachers, key informants, and third-plus-generation respondents all easily recited

the list of schools seen as acceptable to immigrant-origin Asian families: Stanford, UC-Berkeley, UCLA, and Ivy League schools. The reach for these academic brass rings involves activities in which third-plus-generation individuals rarely partake but that are commonplace and sometimes the only activities outside of school that Asian immigrant-origin parents allow: after-school tutoring, summer school, music lessons, and weekend language school. The names of SAT preparation companies that proliferate in Cupertino, such as Ivy Math and Ivy Review (written in English and Chinese characters), entice parents who dream of sending their children to an elite school. Our respondents saw the high degree of pressure as integral in setting the rigorous culture of academic achievement.

Ethnoracial Encoding of Academic Achievement

In ethnoracially mixed settings, norms about academic achievement are usually explicitly defined in ethnoracial terms. Normally, whiteness is tightly coupled with notions of success relative to other ethnoracial categories (Ferguson, Ludwig, and Rich 2001; Fryer and Torelli 2010). Asians, the putative model minority, stand as an exception compared to other non-whites (Hurh and Kim 1989; Kao 1995; Kibria 2003). If the stereotype is a knock on the status of any group, it is other minorities (Kim 1999). But Cupertino is an Asian/white city (63 and 29 percent of the total population, respectively), with no other notable minority population to compare to Asians, relative to whites. Asians are thus not a minority; here, they are a model in the sense that norms of academic achievement coded as Asian prevail, reducing the status of whiteness.

Respondents—both third-plus-generation individuals and key informants—articulated ethnoracially encoded notions of success. When asked to characterize the schools in Cupertino, they noted that stereotypes of students connect ethnoracial origin to academic ability and achievement. In a twist on the "acting white"[11] theme, stereotypes assigned to Cupertino whites closely align with stereotypes about ethnoracial minorities in other settings. According to our respondents, whites are more likely to participate in sports, less academically oriented, underrepresented in advanced placement (AP) classes, overrepresented in remedial classes, and more likely to get in trouble, including dabbling in alcohol and drugs. Mike Peterson, a 22-year-old white recent college graduate, described the prevailing stereotypes:

> I would almost say [Asian immigration] kind of brought about the stereotype, at least [in high school]. The Asian kids and the Indian kids were really smart and they were really good at math and they were always going to do really well in the AP classes, whereas the white kids were less academically oriented. And they did okay, but they didn't put in as much effort. Some of that in some cases was true but it almost did become a stereotype kind of thing.

Respondents were aware that Cupertino is atypical in how academic success is ethnoracially defined, but comparisons between Cupertino and other settings only made the dynamics in Cupertino more apparent. Mark Estes, a 56-year-old white chemist, moved to Cupertino from a small, mostly Latino city in California's Central Valley in the 1990s. Moving from a context where whiteness was synonymous with academic success to one where it stood for scholastic mediocrity was especially jarring for his daughter:

> I mean, [the Central Valley city], where we came from, was probably about 60 percent Hispanic. So you had that culture which was a lot different than our culture in a lot of ways, and it's different than the Asian culture here. . . . First of all, the Hispanic community has just the reverse opinion [from Asians in their approach to school] (chuckling). They put more emphasis on family, so there is more time to play, there is more time to just grow and kick around like kids. And

> education is, "Yeah, well, that's nice but you don't need it." Where the Asian community is just totally the opposite. I mean, that's the whole driving thing. . . . And it was hard for our daughter because she went from the Hispanic community, where the white kids were the smart ones, because we do think highly of education. But so she was considered an overachiever—got A's and B's in everything down there. When we moved here, then she became the dumb kid, and it was just a really inverse situation for her.

Ethnoracially coded definitions of academic achievement are embedded in taken-for-granted understandings of success and failure, including the everyday lexicon. Students and teachers, for example, reported that high school students' colloquialisms reflect the prevailing ethnoracial order when it comes to academic achievement. An "Asian fail" means receiving a B or B+ grade on a school assignment, and a "white fail" signifies receiving an F grade, indicating that Asians' standard of school success is much higher than the conventional or, in this case, white standard. Students casually use ethnoracial categories as shorthand for academic commitment. For instance, a teacher we interviewed recounted hearing an exchange between two students as they discussed their course schedule: "Somebody will ask them, 'Well, are you taking AP?' [and the student responds] 'Oh no, I'm white.'" The implication is that the ethnoracial label alone is enough from which to infer a student's approach to school.

The strong attachment of academic achievement to ethnoracial categories was even clearer when respondents explained the nuances of what it means to be white or Asian, which is not exclusively connected to phenotype or ancestry. Students may recode individuals who are phenotypically white if they display a commitment to academic pursuits that is more typically associated with Asianness. Likewise, Asians who break stereotypes by taking a more easy-going approach to life—participating in nonacademic activities outside of school, going to parties, drinking alcohol, and dabbling in drugs—can be recoded as white. As Angelica Mills, a 17-year-old high school student who is white with some Asian ancestry (her paternal grandmother is Japanese), explained:

> If you're really studious and you're white, you're called "Asian at heart." . . . Just like there's the white people who act Asian, there's the Asians who act white. They're the Asians who party. It's definitely a smaller percentage. I'd say there's only 20 percent of the school who actively goes to party or drinking and smoking and stuff. There's people who socialize and they do community service on the weekends and have sleepovers with friends. There's not as big of a population, but you can find it.

Acting Asian is more than a purely ethnoracial reference. It refers to an Asian *immigrant-origin* approach to academic achievement. Highlighting the relationship between immigrant-generation and ethnoracial identity, respondents pointed out that the Asian students most likely to act white are those whose families have been in the United States for several generations—people who are part of the third-plus generation. Respondents, regardless of ethnoracial background, asserted that third-plus-generation individuals of Asian ancestry do not qualify as authentically Asian, partly due to their more relaxed approach to school.[12] When we asked if they noticed any differences among Asians, white and Asian respondents alike consistently identified third-plus-generation Asians as "Americanized" or "whitewashed." These terms refer to an approach to school and adolescence less like the one associated with *immigrant-origin* Asians and more like the stereotypical approach pursued by whites. Although hierarchical changes are articulated in ethnoracial terms, they manifest through differences in generation-since-immigration.

Cupertino is similar to other settings where students and teachers associate school performance with ethnoracial background (Ferguson

et al. 2001; Fryer and Torelli 2010; Neal-Barnett 2001; Tyson et al. 2005). What sets Cupertino apart is that the category so often associated with academic success (i.e., white) is inverted relative to its generally accepted meaning. In this context, acting white means being *less* academically oriented and therefore lower status.

Effects of Ethnoracially Encoded Assumptions about Academic Ability

The inverted academic ethnoracial hierarchy is consequential for the people we interviewed, shaping their daily experiences. Third-plus-generation respondents, both white and Asian, reported feeling the weight of the meaning attached to their ethnoracial groups. They reported that teachers and fellow students have strong expectations because of their ethnoracial background. Several young respondents, like Kara Chang, a 17-year-old Asian high school student, noted how these expectations operate in a general sense:

> I feel like [teachers] had a little bit more leeway for the non-Asian kids because . . . maybe because they need to pass the class or something, I don't know. But what I feel is the general consensus is that we just maybe assume—which is negative and that's bad—but like that [white students] may not be as smart as the Asian kids.

Teachers themselves contribute to the ethnoracial encoding of academic success by making assumptions about students' intellectual abilities based on ethnoracial background. The teachers we interviewed were careful to point out that they go to great lengths to squelch students' use of ethnoracial language to describe academic achievement. But they were also open about the prevalence of ethnoracial stereotypes that define Asians as smart and whites as less academically able. One high school teacher said that teachers openly rejoice with each other (but not in the presence of students) if there is a white student in an AP class, precisely because it is such a rare occurrence. All teachers endorsed that immigrant-origin Asian students are more serious, engaged, and focused than their white peers. Teachers' readings of these patterns informed their own expectations of students. According to one teacher,

> Oh, it's just a reversal of roles! I mean whites usually kind of get to sit at the top of the heap for whatever reason, whether they mean to or desire to or meant to. And it's just kind of interesting to see. You look at someone who is white and you kind of assume that they're probably not the best student, and then . . . okay, a group of students have just walked in and, as the teacher, I try not to stereotype of course, but after awhile, I guess I just assume . . . even I am beginning to assume, right now, that when kids walk into the classroom, the white kids probably aren't going to be my very, very best students. They may do great work, but they won't turn it all in or something. If I were to go back and look at the grades I've given . . . I'm sure that the GPA for the white kids I've had would be lower than the GPA for the Asian kids I've had. I'm sure of it.

Teachers often contribute to the reproduction of the ethnoracial order, especially when they are members of the superordinate group (Ferguson 2003). But in this setting, the connection between high achievement and Asianness is so powerful that the teachers we interviewed endorsed the association despite not being Asian themselves.

The young people we interviewed were keenly aware of these stereotypes and felt they pose a challenge to their experiences in school. With so many high-achieving peers, students stressed how difficult it is to measure up. For third-plus-generation students, ethnoracially defined expectations add weight to the stress. As Mike Peterson reported:

> I don't know if it was necessarily hard, but it was always interesting battling the stereotype of white people aren't as driven, they're not quite as smart. . . . "They don't have that same pressure so they don't apply themselves as

much"—there was always a little bit of that kind of in the back of my mind like, "Oh I'm competing against all these other people." So in that way it was kind of challenging. And part of that was because I didn't really take any AP classes and that was shocking I would guess to some people. They were like, "You haven't taken any AP class ever?" And I was like, "No." I did other things. So it was interesting to have that kind of difference. . . . But, yeah, there was a little bit of having to prove yourself and do that, yeah.

Stereotypes about whites as less academically able can be particularly frustrating for white students who excel in school. Even if these students are "acting Asian" by doing well, they are aware that their whiteness marks them as academic laggards. Angelica Mills, a top student, recounted an instance in which she believed her appearance led classmates to snub her when she tried to provide input on the answer to an exam question:

> I've gotten a lot of feeling like I'm not taken seriously because I'm a preppy white girl. Or, I don't know what they would call me, but I know that after a chemistry test last year, we were all comparing answers that we got on the test afterwards and they were like, "Oh, what did you get for that one? What did you get for that one?" to each other. I said, "Oh. I know how to do that one." And they were like, "Oh, okay," (dismissive tone) and then asked their other friend anyway. It was two Indian guys, and I was like, "Do you not think that I know the answer?" And he's like, "Well, I just wanted to see what he had to say." And I was like, "Is it because I'm white that you don't think that I know?" And he's like, "Well, I don't know if you know or not." [I said,] "Could I just give it a shot?" I guess I constantly feel like I have to prove people wrong. I don't necessarily care if other people think that I'm really smart, but it's kind of nice when they see my tests when I get them back.

Although we do not have direct evidence that these stereotypes shape our respondents' academic performance, psychological research suggests the effect is likely negative. These young respondents are articulating a form of stereotype threat, which "arises when . . . performance motives are jeopardized by the awareness of an ability-impugning stereotype in a situation where that stereotype can be confirmed by low performance" (Aronson et al. 1999:31). Experimental research shows that stereotypes about Asians as smart, even when subtly invoked, can dampen the cognitive performance of whites (Aronson et al. 1999).

If whites feel they have to prove their intelligence in the face of countervailing ethnoracial stereotypes, third-plus-generation students of Asian ancestry feel pressure to live up to stereotypes that mark them as smart. Despite describing themselves as whitewashed because their ethnic ancestry is not that important in their lives and their households are more relaxed about school, respondents still feel the burden of their ethnoracial status in the high expectations that others have about Asians' academic ability. Take, for example, the experience of Melanie Soo, a 16-year-old Asian high school student, who noted that teachers expect more of her because of her phenotype:

> R: It's, if you're Asian, we expect you to be smart. If you're white, we don't expect you to do well. I think [the stereotypes are] mainly based on that. . . . All the teachers expect all the Asians to do really well. When one Asian doesn't do well, they're looked down upon in a way, because they're Asian and they're smart, automatically. I think it's tough. . . . Sometimes when I get a test back and other people ask me how I did. . . . If I didn't do that well, I'd be a little bit ashamed because they probably did really well and I'm kind of lagging on that one test or something. . . . My chemistry teacher is that way. She has expectations for Asians. I was too scared to ask her because she already had that expectation on me to know everything. I did well, but I was scared.

Q: Did she have those expectations of other students in the class like she had of you?

R: A few. But it was more directed towards me. . . . She got bugged by [the white students] a lot. They wouldn't listen to her. Sometimes they were late, or their work was late. She's really short tempered and she'd get annoyed with them easily. She didn't really respect them at all.

In Cupertino, as in most ethnoracially mixed settings, teachers and students inscribe academic achievement ethnoracially (Ferguson 2003). Here, though, the norms of academic achievement are set by the Asian immigrant-origin population in such a way that whiteness is neither invisible nor the standard by which non-whites are judged. Instead, students and teachers, despite their best efforts to the contrary, endorse whiteness as a lesser-than category when it comes to academic achievement.

Achievement Norms: Out of the Classroom and Into the Home

The influence of amplified norms of academic achievement is far reaching. It extends into the home, shaping the experiences of third-plus-generation parents. Parents' approaches to childrearing respond to the context that both they and their children negotiate. Immigrant parents often experience tension between a style of parenting informed by the norms of their homeland and the parenting their children are exposed to outside the home (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Waters 1999). Parents of school-aged children whom we interviewed had a similar experience, except, in Cupertino, the *immigrant-origin population* informs the norms that prevail outside the home. They described their own parenting style similar to Lareau's (2003) concerted cultivation. The prevailing Asian norms of parenting are a highly focused form of concerted cultivation that respondents characterized as strict, achievement-obsessed, and permissive only of activities that contribute to the academic bottom line. Respondents' discussion of these parenting styles was embedded in descriptions of their own parenting strategies that passively resist, actively distance, and reluctantly adapt to the prevailing parenting norms.

The most common response among third-plus-generation parents was to *passively resist* these norms. Much as out-groups reinterpret the source of their subordinate position to create an alternative status system that places their group on top (see, e.g., Willis 1977), our respondents took a defensive posture. They asserted that their more balanced approach to parenting was preferable to the Asian childrearing norms that prevail.[13] As they see it, children's activities should not be solely oriented toward preparing them for admission to a top college. Lori Brewer, a 40-year-old white banker, provided a critique of the Asian parenting approach that mirrors the stance taken by virtually all third-plus-generation parents whom we interviewed:

> [Asian children are] either in daycare after school or they're in tutoring or music or everything, all of the above. So they overtax their kids, they really do. They come here with this huge work ethic, over the top. I think, as Americans, we tend to want to have a more balanced childhood for our kids and we're interested in academics but we also want to have them do swimming or music or whatever. But we want down time, too. And my husband's always kind of . . . not fighting, but sort of play fighting with [our neighbors and friends from India] about homework because . . . they're just on [their son] all the time about the homework. Yeah. And so [my husband] is like, "Lay off the kid! Come on! You're going to burn him out before he's even in junior high." [Our neighbor was] like, "Yeah, when we went to [Lake] Tahoe, my husband was making [our son] do the homework." [I said,] "It's vacation!" . . . But people come here and they want to make sure that they're a success. And [our neighbor] works until 10, 11 o'clock at night. They do not eat dinner until 9. He comes home, they eat dinner and then the kids are up until 10 or 11, too. It's really weird.

Both white and Asian third-plus-generation parents practice a style of parenting that gives children the freedom to chart their own course, including choices of co- and extracurricular activities and, to some degree, the level of effort they put forth in school. Such an approach might be the unstated norm in other upper-middle-class settings (see Lareau 2003). Our respondents, however, felt they had to explicitly articulate this more relaxed parenting style and work hard to implement it precisely because it grinds against what they defined as the Asian norm-setting approach.

Other parents invoked a strategy of *active distancing* to cope with exaggerated achievement norms. These parents sought to remove their children from the context entirely by placing them in less competitive public schools, paying for private schools, or condoning children's behavior when they simply gave up on trying to compete academically. Some parents did not wait until after high school to seek out an academic context that rewards the balanced approach to academic endeavors that they value. Although rare, these parents worked every angle to place their children in the district's *less* rigorous schools, outside of Cupertino's city limits. Take, for example, Donna Williams, a 39-year-old white homemaker and former corporate manager. She was already concerned about how the school environment may affect her young children once they reach high school:

> And it's just, "Wait a second. What about our social growth, our emotional growth, this balance?" . . . So that's been frustrating for us. Looking again at a lot of this as a parent, even though I grew up here, we don't want our kids to go to the high school that we're zoned for . . . which is an excellent school. It produces amazing graduates. But, again, there's just a high level of competition, unfortunately a high level of cheating, a high level of negative parent pressure on teachers for, "Why doesn't my kid have an A?" All of this stuff over there that's, again, left out a whole piece of the development of the child. So we want our kids to go to [another high school], which is right over the bridge here. They don't have transfers to that so we're likely going to have to move within district. And my husband's business is here, and our family and everything is here. But to track our kids for the right schools that aren't so over the top with kind of just a real risky, negative approach to success—we don't want our kids to be in that.

A central part of parenting in typical middle-class, suburban settings involves buying a house in a place that has excellent public schools. Cupertino is precisely that kind of locale. Yet some third-plus-generation families flee the very Cupertino schools that, by some accounts, immigrant-origin families will do anything to get into.[14] Some third-plus-generation families in Cupertino have the means to buy their way out of a school environment in which their children would be minorities both in number and in their ability to define and achieve norms of success. In an ironic twist, a select few parents send their children to private schools with tuition as high as $32,000 a year so their children can attend a *less* academically rigorous school that has fewer immigrant-origin Asians, and which they believe provides a more balanced environment, allowing their children a better chance to thrive.

Active resistance also comes in the form of parent-condoned psychological retreat on the part of children. Instead of distancing themselves by moving, some parents said that their children simply opted not to try to live up to the prevailing norms of achievement. Melanie Peterson, a 51-year-old white nutritionist, spoke sympathetically about her son's negative response to the pressure to excel that comes from having a large Asian immigrant-origin population:

> The Asian population tends to value education very highly and I think that's fabulous. But they often push their kids to perform at levels that are maybe unreasonable. They go to Chinese school on Saturdays and they study extra math and they study extra this and study extra that. And I think for my kids

> sometimes it was hard to feel like they could ever keep up, or that they wanted to keep up with that level of academic pressure. There was a lot of pressure that came along with that. . . . I think that that was one of the hardest things for them because they never felt quite like they were good enough. And for one of [them], because he couldn't be good enough, he just decided to check out and not do [schoolwork] at all.

Some parents also recognize there is little they can do to change the norms set by the immigrant-origin population and *reluctantly adapt*. They implement strategies that may not conform to Asian parenting styles, but nonetheless fulfill their parenting goals of providing their children a "balanced" childhood within the constraints of these new norms. This adaptation can be seen in how parents strategize to give their children an active social life. Parents noted the difficultly they have in providing their children with leisure time outside of school hours. Serendipitous encounters with children in the neighborhood are nearly nonexistent. Even scheduled play dates are difficult to arrange. According to our respondents, their children's immigrant-origin Asian peers are either studying or fill time not spent studying with activities that contribute to academic achievement: music lessons, tutoring, language school, and cerebral extracurricular, school-sponsored activities, such as future business leaders club or chess team. Joanne Lockart, a 46-year-old white cosmetologist, homemaker, and mother of a kindergartner, described difficulty scheduling time for her daughter to play with other children, which was typical of parents with young kids:

> But, [I'll say,] "Can so and so come over for a play date?" One girl in particular, [her mother said,] "Well she can but she has Korean math on Mondays and Korean art on Wednesdays and Korean origami on Fridays. So if we can make it happen on a Tuesday or Thursday . . ." And then another little girl—we asked, can she come for a play date [and her mother said,] "Well she has Chinese school every day but she is free on the weekends." . . . But what I've found is because of fearing my own daughter will be isolated, we now have made commitments like gym class or things like that so that she has something to do. So I'm trying to coordinate between our schedule and their schedule because, unless I want her sitting home alone, we have other commitments now too. So it's quite complicated. It's not just, "let's run outside."

As Joanne's comments suggest, respondents cannot entirely reject the norms of high academic achievement, because these prevailing norms are different in degree, but not kind, to the norms that underpin their own concerted-cultivation style of parenting (Lareau 2003). Third-plus-generation individuals use passive resistance, active distancing, and reluctant adaptation to maintain some footing in lieu of merely adopting the amplified, ethnoracially encoded achievement norms that prevail and that reverse the meaning and status of whiteness in this setting.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Our fieldwork in Cupertino, California, shows how immigration can produce dramatic shifts in the ethnoracial encoding of achievement that are consequential in the lives of third-plus-generation individuals. High-skilled immigrants from East and South Asia have established and enforce an amplified version of high achievement norms in Cupertino. In the process, the traditional link between ethnoracial identity and academic achievement is turned on its head. Asianness is intimately linked with high achievement, hard work, and academic success. Whiteness, in contrast, stands for lower-achievement, laziness, and academic mediocrity. This understanding of ethnoracial categories in relation to achievement significantly shapes the experience of third-plus-generation individuals, both white and Asian. It informs how third-plus-generation individuals see themselves, how teachers

view third-plus-generation individuals, the childrearing strategies that parents employ, and expectations for achievement among all parties. Our findings call into question the largely taken-for-granted analytical position embedded in the racialization and assimilation traditions that treat the third-plus generation, especially whites, as the benchmark population that sets achievement norms. When achievements of the immigrant-origin population surpass those of whites, as our findings show, the differences register in the meaning and status of ethnoracial categories.

Comparisons between Cupertino and other instances in which immigrant-origin populations have challenged ethnoracial categories and their meaning add clarity to the importance of our findings.[15] Historically, the challenge that some immigrants posed to the connection between whiteness and achievement came from perceptions that a caffeinated work ethic led immigrant-origin groups to outgun whites economically and educationally. Whites, in response, took severe measures, which are now illegal, to preserve their position. In California, whites worked to stifle the success of Chinese and, later, Japanese workers and entrepreneurs, who were outworking them and therefore threatening their economic position. Whites mounted efforts to tax Asian immigrants and systematically exclude them from unions and trades (Daniels 1962; Saxton 1975). Federal immigration policies that barred Asians from immigrating and becoming citizens reinforced these state and local efforts (Motomura 2006). In the early part of the twentieth century, when it appeared Jews might threaten the established ethnoracial order at highly selective East Coast universities, the white Protestant elites who ran these institutions placed restrictive quotas on the number of Jews admitted. They also later shifted admissions criteria to emphasize character, thereby giving a leg up to their ethnoracial and religious brethren (Karabel 2005).[16] In these prominent historical cases, whites leveraged their ethnoracial and class privilege to systematically squash threats to the meaning and status of whiteness. In doing so, they reinforced the superordinate position of whiteness vis-à-vis non-whites.

In contrast, our findings suggest that immigrants contribute to the meaning of ethnoracial categories by recasting the traditional relationship between ethnoraciality and achievement. We argue that immigrants do not just influence existing categories, and whiteness in particular, through their absorption into them, as when some European immigrants "became white" (Ignatiev 1995; Jacobson 1998; Roediger 1991, 2005; see also Zhou 2004). Nor do they shape existing categories by merely serving as a comparison that reinforces the meaning and status of those categories. Rather, immigrants can act as a foil that contributes to upending how an existing ethnoracial category is typically deployed in daily life. Therefore, high-skilled Asian immigrants may serve as a prominent comparison that weakens the link between high achievement and whiteness, knocking whiteness from its superordinate status where achievement is concerned. Variation in the meaning of whiteness, which has generally been identified among the poor, may thus extend across the class spectrum (Hartigan 1999; McDermott 2006; Wray 2006).

To be sure, the U.S. ethnoracial system is still defined by white privilege, a fact that will likely have significant bearing on the experiences of our young respondents as they enter adulthood. The ability to claim whiteness places an individual, especially one of an elevated class status, in the most advantaged position in U.S. society (Feagin 2010). But in a country as large and regionally diverse as the United States, the way that ethnoracial categories operate depends on the geographic and historical context in which they are situated (see, e.g., Di Leonardo 1984; Loewen 1971; Marrow 2011). Although our respondents live in a society that affirms the superordinate position of whiteness in multiple ways, the immediate context that they negotiate—one in which the status-relevant task of educational achievement is highly valued—does not (Correll and Ridgeway 2003). Given that the lower status of whiteness is tied to the valued resource of education, the challenge to whiteness that high-skilled immigration poses is significant.

We cannot generalize our findings of a single setting to others, but our findings do suggest which factors may yield similar outcomes elsewhere. The first relates to the size of the immigrant-origin population. Nearly half of Cupertino residents are foreign-born and the majority are from East and South Asia. The high concentration of immigrants means the immigrant population has an enhanced ability to define the norms in this context, including norms relating to academic achievement. A large immigrant population is not enough to ensure this outcome, however. As others have shown, whites define norms of academic achievement even when they are a numerical minority in a context with poorer non-whites (Carter 2012; Perry 2002). The class status of the immigrant population also matters. Cupertino's immigrant-origin population sits at the high end of the socioeconomic distribution, making them equal in class status to whites, and enabling immigrant-origin Asians to not just use but to dominate the conventional tool of mobility: education. The fact that the third-plus generation also invests in education as a path to mobility sets up a comparison between whites and Asians in which Asians are the clear winner.

Furthermore, the ethnoracial composition of the population is important for how norms of academic achievement become ethnoracially encoded. Cupertino is a white/Asian city, where no other category figures into the ethnoracial encoding of academic achievement. Whites and Asians are the logical and only groups to compare. Thus, the encoding of Asianness as academically successful necessarily entails the relative encoding of whiteness as unsuccessful, even if the level of white academic achievement would be regarded as exemplary in other settings. If other ethnoracial categories were in the mix (e.g., Latinos and blacks), whiteness may not necessarily stand for failure. It may not stand for success either, though. One notable characteristic of the achievement gap is the fact that Asians are performing far better than all groups, including whites (Chudowsky and Chudowsky 2011). To the extent that this gap registers in ethnoracially encoded academic ability, it may be the case that, even in mixed settings, whiteness is constructed as lesser-than relative to Asianness, even if whites are not on the bottom of the achievement hierarchy.[17]

Cupertino may not stand alone in having an immigrant population that influences the third-plus-generation population so profoundly.[18] Like Cupertino in particular, and the Silicon Valley in general, the immigrant-origin population looms large in the demographic makeup of other big metropolitan areas. On average, nearly half (43 percent) of individuals in the largest quintile of these areas are either immigrants or the children of immigrants.[19] As we point out, population size alone may not be sufficient to influence the third-plus generation. But, in combination with the ethnoracial and class diversity of today's immigrant population in the biggest metropolitan areas, there is reason to believe immigrants exert at least some influence on third-plus-generation residents. Despite offering no account of how contact between these two populations within different ethnoracial and class segments of U.S. society affects the third-plus generation, segmented assimilation theory importantly emphasizes that both the host society and immigrant-origin populations are ethnoracially and class diverse (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993). How the immigrant-origin population shapes the experiences of the third-plus generation may vary by ethnoracial and class segment, and extend beyond academic achievement and into social, political, and economic realms of life.

The settlement of large numbers of immigrants throughout the United States means that immigrant-origin populations are adjusting to new and varied contexts. It also means that generationally established individuals are adjusting to contexts that immigrants define. Our study illustrates that understanding the relationship between immigration and ethnoraciality is greatly enhanced by focusing an empirical lens on the third-plus generation. Whether characterized by a single mainstream or ethnoracial and class segments, the incremental process by which immigration shapes U.S. society is observable not just in the experiences of its

newcomers, but also in the experiences of its most generationally rooted individuals. Indeed, the strategies that immigrants and their descendants employ to adjust to U.S. society force these later-generation individuals to make adjustments of their own.

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Notes

1. We use the term “Asian” to refer to South, Southeast, and East Asians.
2. We use “ethnoracially encoded,” or some variant thereof, to describe the process by which meaning is assigned to ethnoracial categories. We refrain from using the more general term “racialization” because it denotes diminished or even blocked chances in multiple dimensions of life. This is not the case for the whites we study.
3. There is variation in how minorities view academic success. See Neckerman, Lee, and Carter (1999) for a discussion of the “minority culture of mobility.”
4. Interview samples are inherently nonrandom, and efforts to obtain a random sample of interview respondents may still end up producing a biased sample (Small 2009).
5. No clear relationship between multiracial identity and achievement emerged from our interviews.
6. None of our informants were of Asian ancestry. To fully preserve their anonymity, we exclude a more detailed description of their characteristics.
7. Eight of the top 25 elementary schools that scored highest on California’s Academic Performance Index are in the Cupertino Union Elementary School District (California Department of Education 2013). The Fremont Union High School District, which serves Cupertino residents, has two high schools ranked in the state’s top 15 based on average SAT scores (*Los Angeles Times* 2013).
8. The decline in the number and percentage of whites in Cupertino was not due to a classic form of white flight, in which whites flee the neighborhoods into which minorities move (Wilson 1987). By all accounts, the overwhelming majority of whites who moved away from Cupertino were older couples, whose children are now adults, and who sold their homes to cash in on large equity gains.
9. According to the FBI’s Uniform Crime Rate, in 2010, Cupertino’s violent crime rate was 110.3 incidents per 100,000 residents, compared to California’s rate of 440.6 per 100,000 and the national rate of 403.6 per 100,000 (U.S. Department of Justice 2011).
10. We use pseudonyms to hide the identities of our respondents.
11. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) popularized the term “acting white,” an insult that black youth supposedly hurl at each other for exhibiting pro-academic achievement behaviors, which purportedly embody whiteness. The prevalence and significance of the concept has not borne out in subsequent studies that use a range of methods and data (see, e.g., Carter 2005; Cook and Ludwig 1998; Tyson, Darity, and Castellino 2005), although some work shows that student popularity and high academic achievement are inversely related among blacks in mixed settings (Fryer and Torelli 2010).
12. First- and second-generation immigrants aim similar critiques of inauthenticity at later-generation Mexican Americans (Jiménez 2010).
13. Survey research also indicates that whites are less likely to endorse traditional measures of achievement when they perceive group threat. Samson (forthcoming), for example, shows that whites place less value on grade point average as a basis for college admissions when primed with stereotypes about Asians and academic achievement.
14. Several respondents and informants described strategies that Asian immigrants employ to get into Cupertino schools, including using fake addresses, crowding into expensive and small apartments, and purchasing homes from abroad that sit empty until children are ready to start school.
15. We treat our interview respondents as individual cases (see Small 2009) but draw on comparisons with other work to provide greater empirical leverage with which to develop our theoretical claims (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994).
16. Despite being overrepresented at elite universities, Asians have a harder time gaining admission. Espenshade, Radford, and Chung (2009), for example,

show that Asian applicants to elite universities have to score 140 points higher than white applicants on the SAT to gain admission, net of other factors.

17. There is evidence that the achievement hierarchy we observe in Cupertino is becoming institutionalized. Virginia and Florida set academic achievement standards by ethnoracial background: standards for Asians are higher than for whites, and well above those for blacks and Latinos (Alvarez 2012; Shalash 2012).
18. Cupertino is similar to other settings in its ethnoracial and class makeup. Sugar Land, Texas, Irvine, California, and San Marino, California (Chowkwanyun and Segall 2009) also have large, high-skilled, Asian-origin immigrant populations, large white populations, very small numbers of non-Asian minorities, and similarly rigorous public school systems. It is possible that a dynamic similar to the one we observe in Cupertino exists in these locales, too.
19. These calculations are based on analysis of 2010 Current Population Survey data (U.S. Department of Commerce 2010). The authors thank Ariela Schachter and Patricia Seo for these calculations.

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