



Explaining Asian Americans' academic advantage over whites

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Significance

We find that the Asian-American educational advantage over whites is attributable mainly to Asian students exerting greater academic effort and not to advantages in tested cognitive abilities or socio-demographics. We test explanations for the Asian–white gap in academic effort and find that the gap can be further attributed to (i) cultural differences in beliefs regarding the connection between effort and achievement and (ii) immigration status. Finally, we highlight the potential psychological and social costs associated with Asian-American achievement success.

Abstract

The superior academic achievement of Asian Americans is a well-documented phenomenon that lacks a widely accepted explanation. Asian Americans' advantage in this respect has been attributed to three groups of factors: (i) socio-demographic characteristics, (ii) cognitive ability, and (iii) academic effort as measured by characteristics such as attentiveness and work ethic. We combine data from two nationally representative cohort longitudinal surveys to compare Asian-American and white students in their educational trajectories from kindergarten through high school. We find that the Asian-American educational advantage is attributable mainly to Asian students exerting greater academic effort and not to advantages in tested cognitive abilities or socio-demographics. We test explanations for the Asian–white gap in academic effort and find that the gap can be further attributed to (i) cultural differences in beliefs regarding the connection between effort and achievement and (ii) immigration status. Finally, we highlight the potential psychological and social costs associated with Asian-American achievement success.

- [nongognitive skills](#) [model minority](#) [Asian advantage](#)

Footnotes

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- The authors declare no conflict of interest.
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