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Robert C. Brown graduated from Indiana University Bloomington in May 1999 with a M.S. in Higher Education and Student Affairs. While at IU, he served as an Assistant Coordinator at Briscoe Residence Center and as Co-Director of Outreach for the IUSPA. He graduated from the University of Kentucky in 1997 with a B.S. in Mathematics.

Myrna Hernandez graduated from Indiana University Bloomington in May 1999 with a M.S. in Higher Education and Student Affairs. While a graduate student, she held assistantships as an Assistant Coordinator at Briscoe Residence Center and in the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Bloomington Chancellor. She also completed her undergraduate work at Indiana University Bloomington in 1994 with a B.S. in Secondary Education and Spanish.

Tania Mitchell graduated with a M.S. in Higher Education and Student Affairs in 1999 from Indiana University Bloomington and from Baylor University in 1995 with a B.A. in Political Science and Communications. While at IU, she served as a Diversity Education Specialist and was a 1998 recipient of the Elizabeth A. Greenleaf Fellowship. In the fall of 1999 Tania will begin working towards a doctorate in Social Justice Education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Christopher R. Turner graduated from Indiana University Bloomington with a M.S. in Higher Education and Student Affairs. While at IU, Christopher held assistantships as an Assistant Coordinator in Foster Quadrangle and as the Assistant to the Vice President for Public Affairs and Governmental Relations. He earned his B.A. in Vocal Performance with supporting studies in Communications at Wichita State University in 1997.

ASIAN WOMEN AND ACADEMIC CONFIDENCE

Robert W. Andrews, Jennifer Herman, Jessica L. Osit

Through qualitative analysis, this study attempts to understand the perceived academic confidence among Asian, international, female, university students. Results revealed that perceived academic confidence is relatively high; however, multiple barriers are found to create unique challenges for social integration on campus, thus influencing the college experience for this population. Finally, implications for student affairs practitioners are discussed.

Introduction

Institutions of higher education are a part of the growing global community in which cross-cultural exchange has become commonplace. With increasing numbers of international students flooding American colleges and universities to pursue their education (Hayes & Lin, 1994), it has become imperative for these institutions to explore and understand the multiple stressors that exist in this population's experience (Adelman, 1988; Boyer & Sedlacek, 1988; Cross, 1995; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Lin & Yi, 1997). International students have unique adjustment and transition issues that impact their academic confidence and achievement (Boyer & Sedlacek, 1988; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Lin & Yi, 1997). The examination of international students from South and East Asian nations is particularly critical since they constitute approximately one-half of all international students in the United States (Lin & Yi, 1997). Perceived academic confidence has been shown to be a strong predictor of academic persistence and achievement, thus, it is essential to explore these perceptions among Asian international students in order to improve strategies to help them persist and succeed (Bennett & Okinaka, 1990; Boyer & Sedlacek, 1988; House, 1992; House & Prion, 1998; Smedley, Myers & Harrell, 1993).

This qualitative study examines the perceptions of academic confidence among female, Asian, international students at a large, Midwestern, public, Research I institution. The authors explore three research questions:

- 1) Does having an Asian international and female identity influence perceived academic confidence?
- 2) What are the cultural barriers and social adjustments involved in these students' transition to higher education in the United States?
- 3) What role do campus environments play in the support or development of their academic confidence?

Specifically considered are the perceived effects that an international center, residence halls, and the classroom experience have on this confidence.

Literature Review

Academic Confidence

According to House (1992), academic self-concept refers to a "student's perception of his or her academic abilities" and is influenced by the experiences that students have within the context of campus (p. 5). Recent studies have linked positive academic self-confidence and students' expectations for performance to college persistence (House, 1992; House & Prion, 1998). House (1992) found that student-expectation of grade-performance was significant in determining actual grades, this highlights the impact self-confidence can have on student achievement (see also House & Prion, 1998). When students experience conflict between perceived ability and actual achievement, stress can be the result (Smedley, et al., 1993).

Boyer and Sedlacek (1988) found that international students succeed at a higher rate when they demonstrate high academic confidence and can benefit from a strong support person. Moreover, research has found that Asian students who exhibit higher levels of academic confidence can cope more readily with the social demands of the college environment (Fuerters & Sedlacek, 1994). In sum, academic confidence plays a critical role in determining a positive college experience, both academically and socially for Asian international students.

Gender Influences on Academic Ability and Self-confidence

Despite the fact that women now attend college at a higher rate than men, research has consistently indicated that women express lower levels of academic confidence (Frieze & Hanusa, 1984, as cited in Astin & Sax, 1996). Women also tend to be modest when determining academic performance expectations (Daubman, Heatherington, & Aln, 1992). Women in college who perceive gender bias report lower expectations in their ability to be successful in their education (Ancis & Phillips, 1996). "Female international students place a greater emphasis on their academic concerns [and] question their self-efficacy [more]... than do men" (Lee, Abd-ella, & Burks, 1981; Manese, et al., 1988, as cited in Sheehan & Pearson, 1995). Despite Hayes and Lin (1994) found that female international students are more likely to utilize support services and seem to have a superior understanding of the support opportunities on campus. However, another study found that Asian women students were more likely to be dissatisfied with the university's support (Wang, Sedlacek, & Westbrook, 1992).

Asian International Student Adjustment Issues

Moving to another country results in the tendency for many international students to lose the shared identity that comes from being with family and peers, to feel less confident, and to become highly stressed (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Sheehan & Pearson, 1995). For these reasons, Zhang & Rentz (1996) found Asian students to be at particular risk for social adjustment issues. Adelman (1988) argues that the ability to cope with cultural change is linked to the social landscape and environment. The more that an international student's home culture is unlike American culture, the more difficult time she or he will have adapting to the American college or university environment (Surdam & Collins, 1984). These cultural mismatches result in stress, depression, frustration, fear, and pessimism among many international students (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Zhang & Rentz, 1996). The resulting experience is characterized by many as "culture shock" (Adelman, 1998; Cross, 1995).

This stress reaction to change acts as a "physical and psychological disorientation" which can undermine an international student's sense of mastery and self-esteem (Adelman, 1998). As a result of the sense of loss and tension that accompanies this transition, international students often experience a diminished sense of confidence (Hayes & Lin, 1994). Consequently, as reported by several researchers, academic success and persistence tend to be negatively correlated with slow adjustment to the university environment (Boyer & Sedlacek, 1988; Schram & Lauver, 1988).

Many academic problems experienced by international students are directly related to their efforts to adjust to the new environment both inside and outside the classroom (Hayes & Lin, 1994). Asian students are often misunderstood in the classroom environment because they fail to participate or share contradictory opinions, resulting in part from the typically Asian emphasis on harmony and respect for authorities (Lin & Yi, 1997; Selvadurai, 1992). Adjustment to American instructional style can be understandably slow for Asian students, since they are not accustomed to the discussion format (Selvadurai, 1992; Sheehan & Pearson, 1995). It is interesting to note that Yan and Gaier (1994) also found that East Asian students judged effort to be more important than ability in the determination of academic success and failure, whereas American students placed more emphasis on ability.

Most studies conclude that English language skills are a key "ingredient to success in college for international students" (Aper & Currey, 1996, p. 41). Research indicates that language proficiency is the most frequently encountered barrier to academic success for international students, despite the fact that most international students are required to pass standardized English-proficiency examinations (Selvadurai, 1992). Sheehan and Pearson (1995) noted that a lack of English proficiency was particularly prevalent among students from

Asia, as a result of fewer opportunities to practice English in their home countries. Many Asian students have difficulty articulating their knowledge in essays and research papers and often find test instructions difficult to comprehend because of insufficient English language skills (Lin & Yi, 1997). Language barriers often cause these students to be perceived as shy or passive when, in reality, they may be having a difficult time understanding questions, exams, and discussion expectations (Sheehan & Pearson, 1995). In addition to complicating academic demands, perceived English language inadequacies can also prevent students from forging social relationships (Hayes & Lin, 1994, Heikenheimo & Shute, 1986).

International students often develop a sense of alienation from the host environment due to feeling excluded based upon their alien immigration status (Selvadurai, 1992). A lack of understanding of the host country's academic norms or undergraduate culture also contributes to a sense of isolation in the academic setting (Lin & Yi, 1997). Heikenheimo & Shute (1986) found that international students who typically do not interact with host-nationals report more problems related to cultural, academic, and social adjustments.

Racial discrimination, language barriers, and dietary changes (Lin & Yi, 1997), which can lead to misunderstanding and loneliness also contribute to stress among international students. Smedley, et al. (1993) reported pressures related to minority status may exacerbate low academic confidence, as negative campus climate for ethnic minorities fosters feelings of social alienation and dissatisfaction. Feelings of isolation in both social and academic spheres have negative implications for international students' self-esteem and academic confidence (Heikenheimo & Shute, 1986; Lin & Yi, 1997). Despite these adjustment issues, Boyer & Sedlacek (1988) indicate that international students have been found to have superior academic skills and high educational goals. Support networks seem to be the best means to mitigate the effects of a difficult transition for international students.

Social Support Networks and Program Interventions

For international students, social webs operate as means to promote home values, reaffirm common experiences, care for homesickness, and work through adjustment issues (Adelman, 1988; Cross, 1995; Lin & Yi, 1997). Wan, Chupman, and Briggs, (1992) found that interventions to improve students' perceived English skills and social support networks proved the most promising in academic stress reduction. Cross (1990) found that "enclaves of co-nationals are common among Asian student groups in the US; they provide the student with friendships, a reference group, and support for his or her cultural identity and values" (p. 676). (A "co-national" is someone who shares the national origin of the individual(s) being referred to.) Adelman (1988) argued

that, in addition to the security it fosters outside the academic sphere, social support functions to bolster academic confidence and perceptions of control.

Boyer and Sedlacek (1988) reported that a variety of services such as counseling, mentoring programs, and educational workshops help persistence. Friendship networks, international student clubs, international coffee hours, social events (Selvadurai, 1992) and workshops on study skills or taxes are suggested as useful means to facilitate the involvement of international students and their interaction with American students (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Selvadurai, 1992). Student groups are seen as informal "self-help" groups, where common issues can be discussed and support can be given (Adelman, 1988).

This study attempts to understand the intersection of the identity of being female, Asian, and a non-citizen with a student's academic self-concept, and attempts to determine the role that these students perceive certain campus environments to play in their academic confidence. Based on previous research findings, the authors hypothesize:

- 1) Gender and ethnic identity will influence academic confidence.
- 2) Multiple barriers and social adjustment issues will exist for the participants.
- 3) Select campus environments will foster academic confidence whereas the classroom setting will mitigate such feelings.

The authors hope that the current study will encourage further investigation into the special needs of female, Asian, international students and, consequently, improve the quality of their college experience in the United States.

Method

Participants

The sample was composed of self-selected undergraduate (six) and graduate (five) female, Asian, international, degree-seeking students, for a total of 11 participants. Potential participants were identified and solicited through four channels:

- 1) the Office of International Student Services
- 2) international student groups
- 3) a residence hall which houses a high concentration of international students
- 4) graduate students in the School of Education

Undergraduate and graduate students from South and East Asia were included in the sample based on convenience and campus demographics. The participants' native languages included Japanese, Chinese, Indonesian, Mandarin Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean, Malay and English. The average age of these students was 24 (mode= 21). A diverse group

of academic majors was reported in the study, permitting a wide range of perspectives in regards to the classroom setting and curricular demands.

Procedure

The participants were interviewed on two separate occasions for a period of 30-45 minutes each. The interviews were conducted by a team of two researchers and were audiotaped. A broad range of topics including English language skills, adjustment and coping strategies, academic ability and confidence, perceptions of identity, support networks, and perceptions of campus environments were explored in the interviews. The interviews collected demographic information and inquiries into students' perceptions about previous experiences before entering the college environment. In addition, participants were asked specific questions about their perceptions of the international center, residence halls, and the classroom experience at the institution studied. Pseudonyms were used in the findings to protect the identity of the participants.

In order to best assure that the interview questions would be understood by a population which may not speak English as a native language, the researchers utilized a certified English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) instructor as a consultant in the construction of the interview instruments.

Institutional Environments

The International Center serves a number of social and administrative functions. The student's first experience with the international center is upon initial arrival to the campus. All students must participate in a mandatory international student orientation. Throughout the year, a number of other informational sessions are held on such subjects as study skills, tax preparation, and other special topics.

The residence hall system at this university consists of 10 residence centers which predominantly house undergraduate students. Housing is an option for students throughout their undergraduate career, but is not guaranteed. The population of each center ranges from 600-1300 students, and is comprised mostly of freshmen living in single-sex communities and floors.

The classroom environment at the institution varies in class size, gender distribution, and faculty-student contact. Undergraduate students frequently attend large lecture-style classes whereas graduate students study predominantly in a small, discussion-format class environment.

Limitations

Due to the nature, size, scope, and duration of the study, a number of limitations arose. Despite the rich and descriptive perspec-

tives presented, the small size of the sample precluded a comprehensive analysis. Furthermore, composition of the sample did not capture the full diversity of experiences present on the Asian continent.

Ideally, the sample would have included a more even distribution of participants by class year. Since development has been shown to occur between college entrance and graduation (Astin, 1993), it was difficult to control for the attitudes and perceptions of academic confidence which these students may have brought to their experience upon matriculation. Consequently, this limited the degree to which the researchers were able to determine how college environments affected these students' academic confidence. The study would have been greatly enhanced had it been conducted on a longitudinal basis, following students from entry to graduation. Moreover, the strict criteria under which graduate students are admitted to the university may also indicate higher academic confidence among these participants.

The self-selecting nature of the participant pool may have similarly affected the results. The participants' voluntary participation in the study may, in itself, have indicated high levels of confidence. Those students with low academic confidence, poorer English language skills, or less-assertive personalities may have been reluctant to open themselves to such a high level of self-disclosure.

The composition of the research team may have been a particularly strong factor in inhibiting participants' self-disclosure. Since all researchers are White, U.S. citizens, and one of the researchers is male, the dynamic this may have created could have affected the nature of participants' responses.

Results

Through the data analysis, six emergent themes were found critical to understanding the experiences of Asian, international women on campus. The following themes were discovered in 22 interviews: 1) the academically self-confident student vs. the "good" student, 2) the classroom (participation and professor interaction), 3) the language barrier, 4) awareness of stereotypes and differential treatment based upon gender and ethnicity, 5) making American friends, and 6) experiences and perceptions of the international student center and residence halls.

The Academically Self-confident Student vs. the "Good Student"

The average self-reported grade point average of participants was approximated at 3.57 on a 4.0 scale, with a median GPA of 3.68. This high achievement is congruent with the participants' purported confidence in academic work. The majority of women, when asked if they were confident in their academics, asserted that they were indeed confident. Mary, a Singaporean student, explained, "I'm pretty

confident...I think...if I really do have the motivation and I can be hardworking I'm sure I can do well." On the other hand, Rose, a Taiwanese student explained, "I don't think I succeed in my classes. ... Most of the time I feel bad, because I struggle with school work and communication." Rose, in particular, attributed her academic difficulties to her insufficient English language skills. 5 out of the 11 women in the study initially reported a high level of academic confidence.

The espoused confidence of these women became less clear when asked if they were a "good student." About half of the participants said that they were not good students, and many of those same women attributed this to laziness. Hian-Kim, a Malaysian student, explains "[I'm] lazy...time management for me is a big problem. Trying to manage everything...I think I'm like all students—last minute work all of the time." Similarly, Jane, a Taiwanese student, when asked if she was a good student explained, "seriously, no. No. I'm a lazy student." The primary distinguishing factor between reported academic confidence and reported performance seemed to be based upon the difference between belief in ability and actual study practices. Some women who responded affirmatively to the question "Do you think you are a good student?", expressed this belief in tentative terms. For example Chikako, a Japanese student, responded coyly, "Oh? ... I think so." The participants made a clear distinction between academic effort and academic ability.

Some women, felt that being Asian directly affected their academic confidence. Wei-Li explained, *Asians always ask 'did I do something wrong?' first. We always do a self-reflection....Because the professor gave a low grade is that because I'm not good? Because I didn't think of those other kinds of issues like racial discrimination and gender discrimination. Now I ask other people what did you think...because previously I would just stay at home and just be very sad and cry and just try to work hard and which is not very healthy...psychologically.*

Similarly, Chikako stated, "I think I am most successful when I study well, but also when I am mentally happy." Within their discussions of student ability and effort, interactions in the classroom environment were shown to be important to the participants' experiences.

The Classroom: Participation and Professors

Most participants noted a distinction between the classroom participation of Americans compared to that of Asians, citing Americans as more talkative. Amy, a Singaporean student explained, "I think I talk [in the classroom]; I don't talk as much as Americans I think, but I talk." Furthermore, despite the fact that participants found their professors to be approachable, many perceived differential treatment in the classroom. Wei-Li explained, "Sometimes [in class] when Americans say something,

the professor will elaborate and open up questions, but sometimes when I say something, the professor just says 'mm, that's a good idea,' and the class go on. And I don't know if I didn't make the point." Mary stated that her professor "would go all out with American students to like tease them or like being harder on them...but, international students [the professor] just like whiz past...I think they don't want to be controversial." Some students believed that this difference in treatment could be attributed to miscommunication, perceived language barriers, or lack of knowledge of foreign cultures. Chikako explained, "I think sometimes they [professors] are afraid that I wouldn't understand them because of English problem. And sometimes they ask questions about 'in your country...?' so, they look at us differently, but they don't bother me." The theme of English mastery and communication difficulty emerged as a common thread for these students both in and out of the classroom.

The Language Barrier

The majority, 9 out of 11, of the participants spoke English as a second language. In fact, most did not begin speaking English until grade 7 or the age of 13. Mary explained:

Sometimes people don't understand me, that's true... I was in a bank recently and, she didn't quite understand me and she gave me this look, and [I'm]...not very happy with that. But, for the most part, people do try to take the effort to ask me to repeat myself.

Similarly, English language problems were reported to affect classroom participation, paper-writing, self-perceptions, and extra-curricular involvement. Mary reflected, "In our (international student group) committee meetings I will talk like nonstop because I feel comfortable with them...[but] when it comes to other people, especially those who are American, you feel kind of like they won't understand you." Many times other's perceptions of Asian students' ability to speak English translated into stereotypes about all Asian individuals.

Awareness of Stereotypes: The "Hardworking" Student and the "Passive" Woman

The participants were also aware of numerous other stereotypes, held by Americans, regarding Asian students and Asian women. Most participants believed stereotypes described Asian students as quiet, studious, non-aggressive and good at math. Asian women were stereotyped as meek, pure, passive, and sexually submissive. Similarly, Amy explained, "maybe they would think that Asian women are meek, sweet, more passive, more inclined to follow their man, less aggressive because of their culture, the males take care of you...." Several participants noted that many of the stereotypes were also widely held among Asian students themselves, specifically stereotypes about language. Amy related, "the biggest stereotype is that we don't speak English...I feel like I suffer

the same stereotype because I look at Asian and assume that person can't speak good English too; which is really horrible, because I am Asian, you know what I mean?" Stereotypes were just one of the mechanisms by which these students felt they were perceived differently by host-nationals, is someone from the country which hosts the international student. An American is a host-national to a Singaporean when a Singaporean visits/studies in the U.S.. Experiences concerning gender and ethnicity were examined to identify social adjustment and academic difficulty.

Differential treatment

Gender

Most participants believed that men and women in the United States are treated equally. A few suggested that differences may exist, but they had not personally experienced them. Many defended the equality of the United States based on the comparison with stringent gender roles in their home countries. Su-Yung, a Korean student, stated, *correct me if I am not [sic] wrong, but I thought American women are more equal treated, most equally to men compared to any other country ...[But] it's never going to be equal... it's just that Americans are just closest than other countries.*

The vast majority of the women in the study believed that gender did not influence their experience in the United States. In response to a question regarding gender equity, three of the participants believed that women received more positive attention and kindness than men did. Many believed that there was no gender difference, or that they had not thought about this issue at all. Wei-Li stated "when I got in some trouble, I always think the first, in terms of my ethnicity not in terms of gender." However, there were participants who were less certain about the influence, or lack thereof, of gender.

Some women believed that gender might be an influence upon an individual's experience. Amy explained "Well, I don't think so, but it seems like it with all this feminism...but, just like knowing people and seeing how they interact, it's not very obvious." Some thought that men's performances were subject to higher scrutiny. Chikako argued that, "I think sometimes ... they [professors] are more easy?... If I make mistake, it's ok, but if men make mistake they [professors] don't think it's ok." The aforementioned comparison of gender roles in the United States with the participants countries of origin is clear in Su-Yung's explanation,

they [Koreans] think the girls are outsiders, and then the men are insiders...because you are going to marry out. And when you move out your name moves out...so, they always think girls are not yours...That's why they always treat girls differently because they think they are not, never going to be your family.

However, Wei-Li felt that, in the United States, women were treated more poorly than men, noting, "in the Chinese world...women have higher rights than the women here." Clearly, the participants were not in agreement regarding gender issues and experiences. However, the majority of the women agreed that being Asian impacted their academic experiences more than being a woman.

Ethnicity

Many participants spoke of their ethnicity, not their gender, as influential in how others, particularly professors and American peers, interacted with them. Acts of both overt and covert discrimination were experienced by the participants. Chikako said, "I think ... sometimes [professors] do [treat Asian students differently than other international students]. Sometimes I think they are more friendly to Europeans and Africans." Kyungoh, a Korean student, explained, "Because I have some language problems, sometimes people treat me like I'm child or stupid." Similarly, Hian-Kim articulated,

International students from Europe are more accepted, I think. They are more accepted as one of ... the same clique...because of the culture of Europe and America, it is kind of similar, whereas the culture of like Africa or Asia is quite different...I mean people will make fun of Asians who can't speak proper English, but when a person with a French accent or an Italian accent, when they can't speak proper English, they don't make fun of them; in fact, they find it...something extraordinary.

These impressions were further reinforced by some of the participants' experiences with more overt forms of racism and bias. Kyungoh described, "I was jogging the other day and some...students, they were in the car driving, shouted at me 'go back to your country'...I was scared and upset...after that I quit jogging." These feelings of difference and discrimination created a sense of segregation with American students making it difficult to form close relationships with them.

Making American Friends

Participants made fewer American friends than they had expected and desired. Most found the greatest security in relationships with co-nationals. Mary stated,

When I first came to America, I thought, ok, I'll mix with Americans and I get...a feel of American culture and make American friends, you know, but after a year I realized that all my friends were Singaporean or international students...it's just difficult...all of us have preconceived notions of each other, so I guess it's hard for us to be good friends.

Kyungoh stated, "I want more friends, especially American friends, but I don't have a chance to make friends with them...it's difficult." Lastly, many said that friendships with Americans were hindered by a difference in goals and interests; they were particularly uncomfortable at

American students' parties and with the associated presence of alcohol. Amy responded, "Finding friends is not a problem, but finding friends you really want to click with...is a big problem, especially, if you want to mix with Americans."

International Center and Residence Halls: Indifferent and Expensive

Most participants expressed either indifferent treatment at, or negative feelings about, the international center, claiming a lack of services and outreach by staff. Amy, in speaking about her experience at the international student center suggested, "I don't feel like I belong...I never felt the need to go back again." Hian-Kim offered, "They [the international center] sometimes seem 'indifferent' if you don't approach them, they won't approach you...shy students may have difficulty." On the other hand, Chikako stated, "They have very good seminars for international students, like what kind of scholarships you can find in States as international student. So...it was very, very helpful."

In terms of campus living, many chose to leave the residence halls due to the unwarranted high-cost and dissatisfaction with food services. Amy, when asked why she did not live in the residence halls, explained that it was "too expensive...besides, I like to cook and eat my own kind of food." Chikako echoed, "[The dorm is] getting more comfortable than before, but I think the cafeteria is not very good. It's very expensive and they don't have good food...I don't eat there." Some participants felt living in the residence halls hinders academic focus due to noise levels and the subsequent lack of sleep, but Rose explained, "Sometimes my friends with better English who lived there could help...now we talk about class in the library." Most however, believed these indifferent and negative feelings towards the residence halls and international center, although frustrating, did not affect their perceptions of their academic ability.

Discussion

The intersection of the participants' Asian, international, and female identities presents complex challenges and adjustments for participants. The results of the study show that two of the three initial hypotheses were not supported. When considering their gender and ethnicity, participants did not perceive these aspects of their identity to influence their academic confidence. However, they did identify multiple barriers and social adjustments in their experience on campus, supporting the second hypothesis. Finally, the campus international center, residence halls, and classrooms were not perceived to foster a positive self-perception of academic confidence. Most participants perceived a high level of confidence in their academic ability, although this was not attributable to either identity or campus environments. A review of the data reveals a number of implications for this population's experience on campus.

Academic Effort and Ability

Participants clearly distinguished between academic effort and academic ability. Yan & Gaier (1994) found East Asian students to believe that their success depends on the amount of effort they invest in their studies. Most participants stated that they were confident, particularly when they contributed the appropriate effort and had the motivation to succeed. These students placed high academic demands on themselves in their definition of a "good" student. The participants who believed they were not "good" students attributed this to laziness and lack of effort. Since these students' perceived academic confidence hinged largely on the effort they invested, it is necessary to provide environments which will not mitigate their study efforts.

Classroom Participation and Faculty Interaction

Confidence in classroom participation and interaction with professors were impacted by the participants' perceived English language mastery. This was supported by Aper and Currey (1996) who claimed that strong language skills are key determinants for success among international students. The feeling that they were going to be misunderstood, not taken seriously, or ridiculed because of their English proficiency, kept many silent in class when they first arrived on campus.

Due to a lack of familiarity with an interactive classroom environment, many Asian students find it difficult to adjust to the instructional style of American higher education. Many participants indicated that they preferred to consult professors or teaching assistants after class, rather than asking questions during class time. In order to better meet the needs of this population, faculty need to be trained to understand cultural differences and why some students may fail to participate. Campus-wide cultural awareness efforts need to include concerns of international students, as many students who perceived themselves to have mastery over the English language still encountered experiences where they were uncomfortable speaking in class due to fear of ridicule or misunderstanding.

Perceived Gender Equity in the United States and Influences of Discrimination and Stereotyping

In light of the more stringent gender roles found in their home countries, participants believed American society was fairly gender equitable. According to Ancis and Philips, (1996) women who perceive bias report lower expectations in their ability to be successful both educationally and with the facilitation of their career. This finding represents challenges to faculty and academic fields that address issues of gender discrimination in the United States (i.e., Women's Studies, Sociology, Political Science, etc.) Student affairs practitioners may face

similar difficulties in diversity programming.

In spite of experiences of discrimination and stereotyping, these students did not believe their Asian identity influenced their academic confidence or ability. As supported by Boyer & Sedlacek (1988), Asian international students maintain high levels of achievement and persistence within higher education even in the face of discrimination and social adjustment. Although high achievement among Asian students exists in this study, we cannot assume an equitable and non-prejudicial environment. Many Asian international students may choose to transfer due to an unwelcoming campus climate. In fact, two participants stated they had transferred from other U.S. institutions for this reason. Program interventions that increase satisfaction and combat negative experiences for these students are still in order. Although discrimination may not directly affect academic confidence, it can influence students' mental well-being. At least two participants indicated that their mental well-being was the most influential factor in their academic success.

International Center and Residence Halls Not Meeting Needs

Although research has shown that providing a wide range of programming interventions increases international student success (Boyer & Sedlacek, 1988), participants found that the campus international center and the residence halls were not meeting their needs. The international center is a potential host for developing support networks, yet the participants were dissatisfied and unclear of its purpose and activities. International centers need to develop a clear mission and directly relate that to their constituent student groups. More importantly, administrators in these offices need to ensure a welcoming environment, as for most international students, it is the first point of contact at the university. Some felt that the center's programs were helpful in establishing connections such as host families and friends, but many others stated little need for, or satisfaction with, the programs offered by the center.

Like international centers, residence halls must also promote a welcoming environment if they are to retain Asian international women students. Dining services must work closely with international students to develop cuisine options that meet their needs. Many participants asserted that living in the halls was unjustly expensive and incompatible with this population's interests and academic needs. Numerous complaints about the noise level in the residence halls and excessive alcohol consumption and parties by American counterparts were voiced. Residence hall systems may wish to market quiet and academic communities to this particular population. If universities could more effectively attract Asian international women students into the residence halls, these women might experience less alienation, improved English, and a smoother and more efficient transition into higher education. Student

affairs professionals must help Asian international women to find campus organizations or residential settings that may better promote campus involvement (Hayes & Lin, 1992). The lack of effective campus programs and environments can magnify social and cultural marginalization from the broader student population.

Conclusion

Based on previous research, it was not surprising that the participants encountered difficulties adjusting to the American college environment. Contrary to our expectations, however, the participants' gender and ethnicity had little impact on their perceived academic confidence. Nonetheless, their ethnicity did influence their college experience in profound ways. Through racial stereotypes, differential treatment, overt and covert discrimination, and difficulty making American friends, these women experienced varying degrees of alienation from the college environment.

These findings present important implications for student affairs professionals in light of the ever-increasing presence of Asian international students on American campuses. In order to provide a welcoming and supportive environment for international students, student affairs practitioners must make efforts to better understand the unique needs and challenges of these students. Campus environments and programs, therefore, need to be tailored to these students' differing academic and social expectations.

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Robert W. Andrews earned his M.S. in Higher Education and Student Affairs at Indiana University Bloomington in May 1999. He received a B.A. in Political Science from the George Washington University in May 1997. His assistantship and practicum experiences have been in the Division of Residential Programs and Services, the Office of Student Ethics and Anti-Harassment programs, and the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Student Support Services.

Jennifer Herman completed a M.S. degree at Indiana University Bloomington in Higher Education and Student Affairs in May 1999. In 1995, she received her A.B. in French and German from Vassar College. While at IU, she served as a graduate assistant in both international programs and student financial assistance.

Jessica L. Osit completed her M.S. at Indiana University Bloomington in Higher Education and Student Affairs in May 1999. She received a B.A. in Political Science from Dickinson College in 1997. Jessica's assistantship, internship, and practicum experiences included residential life, diversity education, and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender student support services.