

Research Methods

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Case Synopsis

Imagine that you are shopping at a local store. At the cash register, you write a check for your purchase and the sales clerk asks for your ID. Taking a look at your driver's license the sales clerk asks you, "Where are you from?" You answer, "New York," but the sales clerk is apparently not satisfied with this answer. The clerk asks, "No, where are you really from?"

For many Asian Americans, this is an all-too-familiar scene. And for some Asian Americans, being asked this very question evokes feelings of irritation or even anger at being perceived as a foreigner who can't possibly be from New York.

It may feel like their identity as an American and their sense of belonging in America are being threatened: But are Asian Americans truly perceived to be less American? How prevalent are these encounters in which Asian Americans are reminded that others see them as foreigners? And how do Asian Americans react in such situations? In a research paper recently published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, social psychologists Sapna Cheryan and Benoît Monin (2005) reported on the results of a series of research studies to answer just these questions. In this chapter, we use the question "Where are you really from?" and some of Cheryan and Monin's studies as a starting point for our discussion about research methods in Asian American psychology.

Students often become interested in psychology because they are intrigued by people and human behavior. However, as students progress in their study of psychology at colleges and universities, many become disappointed to find themselves taking statistics classes and research methods courses. For students coming from Asian American studies or a humanities background, it may not be immediately apparent why there is so much discussion about research methods in psychology. Why must someone interested in Asian American psychology know research methods? What must we know about research methods in general for psychology, and unique to Asian American psychology? And what good does psychological research do for Asian Americans?

Introduction

This chapter is not intended to teach psychology research methods (see For Further Learning and Suggested Readings at the end of this chapter for such texts). Instead, the goal is to discuss



(From *Boston's Weekly Dig* with permission.)

the unique issues and dilemmas facing researchers in Asian American psychology as well as the underlying assumptions about psychological research. We will first explore the principles that make psychology a science and some assumptions and critiques of the scientific enterprise of psychology. Next, we will discuss some unique challenges that many researchers in Asian American psychology face, including how researchers select and obtain samples, what researchers are studying when they conduct research on Asian Americans (culture? race? ethnicity?), issues regarding studying psychological concepts between or within groups of Asian Americans, and language issues when collecting research data from Asian Americans. Finally, we will look at the big picture by discussing how research is useful and can make an impact on the daily lives of Asian Americans.

Although our lay knowledge about the psychological experiences of Asian Americans is often informed by our personal reflections or experiences, it is through the use of scientific research methods that psychology goes beyond description. Let us return briefly to our example about the question, "Where are you really from?" Suppose your friend Jay, who is a Chinese American born and raised in Texas and fresh out of college, is looking for a job. At every interview he attends, the interviewer starts with questions such as, "Where are you really from?" and "When are you going back to your country?" Jay finds himself emphasizing his American values and his turn as a varsity football player in high school. Is Jay's reaction typical or atypical? What if he hadn't been constantly asked those questions during the job interviews? Would he have behaved differently?

If we were interested only in Jay's behavior, applied psychologists (such as clinical and counseling psychologists) may be called in to conduct a psychological assessment of Jay and systematically gather data that might be relevant to answering questions just about Jay. Psychological research, on the other hand, typically does not answer questions about the behavior of any particular individual, but it helps to move us beyond anecdotal evidence or personal opinions. There are established scientific principles and corresponding research methods in psychology that help us describe, predict, control, synthesize, and explain what we observe about behavior. In doing so, research helps us make generalizations from the data gathered from a small number of research participants to a larger community (this is called **external validity**), so that we can be more confident that what holds for a small group of Asian Americans may hold for a larger community of Asian Americans.

The phenomenon of *identity denial* (Cheryan & Monin, 2005), which is discussed throughout this chapter as an example of contemporary Asian American research has been discussed from other disciplinary perspectives. Many Asian American writers have written about the experience of being asked “Where are you really from?” For example, Meena Kothari (1995) wrote eloquently about her evolving identity as a South Asian American woman in her essay aptly titled, “Where Are You From?” In law, Kenji Yoshino who teaches at Yale Law School and identifies as a gay Asian American legal scholar, discusses this from the legal perspective. Yoshino (2006) talks about the society’s demand for *covering*—the act of downplaying an aspect of self that is stigmatized in society, such as minority sexual orientation or minority racial status, so as to blend into the mainstream—as a threat to civil rights. Yoshino writes of his experience attending an elite boarding school where many students who were racial minorities (including himself) engaged in various types of covering behavior, such as avoiding ethnic organizations, “outprepp(ing) the preps, dressing out of catalogs that featured no racial minorities... Asian Americans got eyelid surgery, African Americans straightened their hair, Latinos planed the accents off their names” (p. 120).

Psychological phenomena of central interest to Asian Americans are found everywhere. What makes Asian American psychology distinct is our commitment to using scientific research methods to document and explain these common experiences.

The Science of Psychology

So what, then, are the scientific principles? According to Stanovich (2004), science is defined by three features: “(1) the use of systematic empiricism; (2) the production of public knowledge; and (3) the examination of solvable problems” (p. 9). What these features generally imply is that in building our knowledge, psychologists engage in systematic, structured, and theory-driven observations so that the results of the observations can say something meaningful about the underlying processes or mechanisms about the mind and the behavior.

Psychology research is typically conducted in a way that tests different explanations (or hypotheses) about some psychological phenomenon. Moreover, psychological knowledge produced by research must be publicly verifiable—that is, the findings are presented to the scientific community in a manner that can be replicated, critiqued, and extended by others. And finally, types of questions that psychologists ask in research must be potentially answerable using currently available methods. Questions such as “What is the meaning of life?” or “Is it wrong to act angrily in response to the question, Where are you really from?” are not solvable through scientific means. However, questions such as “Are Asian Americans perceived as foreigners?” “Do Chinese Americans respond better to Traditional Chinese Medicine than to cognitive-behavioral therapy for depression?” are potentially testable questions.

Assumptions and Critiques of Modern Scientific Methods

The basic tenets of modern science just described arise from Western philosophy. Modernist empirical science as an epistemological system values objectivity, **operationalism**, parsimonious theories, logic of control and manipulation (as epitomized by true experiments), and so on. However, Asian American psychology, in its short history, has faced the limits of science-as-usual approach within psychology even while it has embraced its practice. (For one, we cannot randomly assign race, ethnicity, or culture to people!) We take the time now to discuss two

examples of these tensions, because such critiques and internal dialogues within Asian American psychology as to its scientific foundation reveal issues central to the field.

Objectivity

Objectivity is a key assumption of scientific research. In conducting research, psychologists seek to leave out their own personal biases about the people they are studying and let the data speak for themselves. Researchers in psychology also assume that regardless of who is collecting the research data, participants will respond or behave in the same way. Replication of findings, or the process of repeating a study using different participants (and often, different researchers), is valuable in this regard.

However, some critics argue that it is impossible to be objective and bias-free in research. For example, postmodern theories, which have gained ground in Asian American studies and in many of the humanities disciplines, have challenged the notion that modernist science is neutral and value-free. Within Asian American psychology, Laura Uba (2002) has argued that in its allegiance to mainstream psychology's modernist scientific assumptions of objectivity and neutrality, Asian American psychology has failed to pay attention to the subjective voices of Asian Americans themselves. Uba argues that a postmodern approach to psychology may lead to new understanding of psychological constructs central to Asian American psychology such as racial, cultural, and ethnic identity, assimilation, and acculturation.

Research in Asian American psychology then faces a dilemma: At the risk of ignoring Asian Americans' experiences, should the field remain tied to the practice of psychology and its modernist scientific assumptions of objectivity and neutrality? If Asian American psychology focuses its research endeavors on being meaningfully applicable to Asian Americans, does it appear less scientifically rigorous? In an article titled, "Science, Ethnicity, and Bias: Where Have We Gone Wrong?" clinical psychologist Stanley Sue (1999) acknowledged that much of ethnic minority research (including Asian American psychology) is criticized by grant review panelists and journal reviewers for being descriptive (rather than theory-driven, hypothesis-testing), simple in research design, and lacking theoretical sophistication. In other words, Asian American psychological research is often perceived as not rigorous enough to be published in top psychology research journals or to be funded by granting agencies. There is some evidence that research articles on ethnic minority populations are not well represented in top psychology journals. For example, Hall and Maramba (2001) conducted an analysis of psychological research published in scholarly journals between 1993 and 1999 and found that only a very small percentage of publications in what are considered the first-tier academic psychology journals had any cross-cultural or ethnic minority content. Sue asked, "Does this mean that science is biased against ethnic research?" In responding to this question, Sue concluded that the "science and scientific methods are not the culprit" of ethnic minority psychology's state (p. 1070). Instead, Sue argued that psychology has erred in over-emphasizing **internal validity** (or the extent to which conclusions can be made about causal effects of the phenomenon) versus external validity (or the extent to which conclusions from one study can be applied to other populations). He argued that researchers should maintain high internal validity standards; however, we should pay more attention to external validity and make sure that the research we conduct can be applied to ethnic minority populations. We shall come back to this notion of external validity later in this chapter as a challenging methodological issue in Asian American psychology.

Operationalism

The doctrine of operationalism, as applied to psychology, means that concepts in psychological theories must be linked to observable events that can be measured. Translating concepts (such

as anger) into observable and measurable events (such as questionnaire reports, observations of certain facial expressions and bodily postures or actions) allow the resulting knowledge to be publicly verified. In most instances, this is achieved through quantification. Quantification refers to the idea that researchers collect data that can be subjected to numeric qualification. In any field of science, researchers need to share a common language when talking about constructs or variables. Quantification of data gives us that common language and also allows us to easily summarize and make meaning out of similar data across individuals or groups of individuals.

For example, in their investigation of identity denial among Asian Americans, the first question Cheryan and Monin (2005) asked was, "Who is perceived as American?" To show whether individuals with Asian features were indeed perceived as less American than others, the researchers showed pictures of sample faces from four ethnic groups (White, Asian, Hispanic, and African American) to 111 participants, and asked the participants to give a numerical rating (from 1 indicating "not at all," to 7 indicating "extremely") on how American each face looked. The ratings were then averaged and compared, via statistical analyses. Not surprisingly, White American participants rated White faces as more American (with a mean rating of 5.76 out of 7) than the Asian American faces (with a mean rating of 4.20 out of 7). Interestingly, Asian American participants also rated the same set of White faces as more American (with a mean rating of 5.38 out of 7) than the same set of Asian American faces (with a mean rating of 3.92 out of 7)!

Using **quantitative methods** also helps us compare psychological phenomena across time points and individuals. For example, a common measure of ethnic identity is Jean Phinney's Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; 1992). Examples of questions from the MEIM include: "I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to" and "I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs." The responses across the 12 items on the MEIM are then summed into a single index of the strength of ethnic identity. Higher scores on the MEIM indicate higher levels of ethnic identity. However, you may wonder whether the MEIM, or any other quantitative measure of ethnic identity, really captures the full range of a person's ethnic identity or if scores are easily comparable across individuals.

Although quantitative research methods can tell us about relative levels of a psychological construct, these methods often cannot tell us detailed information about the phenomenology of a person's experience with the construct, or about the processes through which psychological constructs emerge. For example, what meaning does a person's ethnic identity have for him or her? What experiences lead a person to develop an ethnic identity? These questions may be



(Adapted from Cheryan & Monin (2005).)

better answered through **qualitative methods**, such as through interview narratives, because such methods are better suited for tackling complex and nuanced research questions.

Challenges and Conundrums

Every subfield within psychology has its own research demons that keep researchers up at night. For example, psychologists who study infant cognition must design studies suitable for babies who cannot read, speak, or understand complex instructions. Psychologists who study neurobiological bases of emotion must master the ever-evolving advances in brain imaging technologies, complex mathematical analyses of brain wave data or imaging data, as well as methods for eliciting desired emotions in a laboratory setting. Likewise, psychologists who study Asian Americans face a set of methodological issues that present particular challenges.

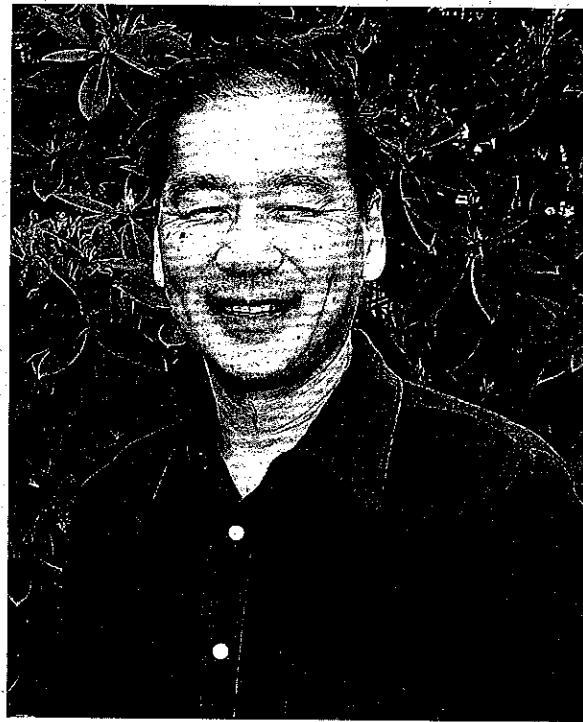
Sampling

Researchers typically cannot collect data from the entire population of interest. Instead, they carefully choose and collect data from a subset of the population—a sample—and use those data to make inferences about the entire population of interest. How one goes about **sampling** in Asian American psychological research is one of the research demons of the field.

Probability Sampling In behavioral science research, there are two broad types of sampling. In **probability sampling**, every person in a given population has some probability of being included in the study, and that probability can be mathematically calculated and the results are weighted accordingly. Probability sampling has the major advantage in that **sampling errors** (i.e., the degree to which a sample differs from the population) can be calculated. An example of probability sampling that may be familiar to many readers may be various opinion polls that one might read in newspapers (e.g., Gallup polls). However, this type of sampling is quite complex, time-consuming, and typically expensive to carry out, and thus it is not commonly used in psychology research or in Asian American psychology. One exceptional example of the use of probability sampling in Asian American psychological research consists of a series of studies on the rates of psychiatric disorders among various Asian American communities conducted by sociologist David Takeuchi and his associates.

Nonprobability Sampling In **nonprobability sampling**, research participants are not selected randomly from the population and the extent to which the research participants represent the population cannot be known. In nonprobability sampling, the degree to which the sample differs from the population remains unknown, and it becomes a judgment call on the part of the researchers (and consumers of the research) about how much the findings can speak to the more general population. One of the most common nonprobability sampling approaches is called a convenience sample where the researcher uses whatever individuals are available (e.g., college students, paid volunteers, prisoners, and so on). “Non-random” and “convenient” does not mean that participants are easy to recruit or that the researchers are being lazy. In fact, the bulk of psychological research uses convenience samples and researchers go about their sampling in a careful, purposive manner.

Selecting and Recruiting Participants What makes Asian American psychology research particularly challenging is the need to balance the limits of convenience sampling with feasibility and access. First and foremost, the Asian American population is extremely diverse. Researchers must be clear about what segment of the Asian American population they wish to address in their study, and why. The researcher must also balance the theoretical questions with the



David Takeuchi, professor of Sociology and Social Welfare at University of Washington, has conducted a series of psychiatric epidemiology studies to determine the population estimates of rates of psychiatric disorders among Asian American populations using rigorous probabilistic sampling methods. The first study, the Chinese American Psychiatric Epidemiology Study (CAPES) gathered data from 1,747 individuals of Chinese descent in the greater Los Angeles area (Zheng et al., 1997; Takeuchi et al., 1998). The second study, the Filipino American Community Epidemiological Study (FACES) reported on data from 2,135 Filipino Americans in San Francisco and Honolulu (Gong, Gage, & Tacata, 2003; Kim, Gong, & Takeuchi, 2004). The most comprehensive study of this kind is titled the National Latino and Asian American Study of Mental Health (NLAAS), which Dr. Takeuchi conducted with Dr. Margarita Alegria at Harvard Medical School. NLAAS is a nationally representative survey that estimates the prevalence of mental disorders and rates of service utilization for Latinos and Asian Americans. The NLAAS interviewed 1,554 Latinos (Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, Cubans, and Other Latinos) and 2,095 Asian American respondents (Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipinos, and Other Asians) across the United States in 2002. The data from each individual in the sample were collected in person via a structured interview, and the interviews were offered in Chinese, Vietnamese, Tagalog, or English for the Asian American respondents. In order to find eligible Asian American and Latino adults, the NLAAS project screened 27,026 households across the nation (Pennell et al., 2004). Because the total population of Asian Americans in the United States is still relatively small (4% according to the 2000 U.S. Census), the NLAAS sampled households from Census blocks of moderate to high (5+%) concentration of persons of targeted ethnicity. Still, imagine knocking on doors of houses after houses

specifically selected to meet the probabilistic sampling scheme just to find if the persons living in those houses are Chinese American or Filipino American or Vietnamese American! Compare this to the 13,054 households across the nation screened to find 9,282 adults who completed a parallel survey of psychiatric epidemiology for mainstream American respondents (National Comorbidity Survey Replication) and you see what an extra effort it takes to collect data from Asian Americans and Latinos.

feasibility of recruiting the desired participants. In Asian American psychological research, access to research participants in the target population can be extremely challenging even when one is not studying families of Asian American individuals with schizophrenia (Okazaki, 2000), Asian American veterans of the Vietnam War (Loo, 1994), Japanese Americans whose parents were in the internment camps during World War II (Nagata, 1993), or other very specific segments of the Asian American population.

Say, for example, that you have a burning research question about the relationship between levels of acculturation and the openness with which Asian Indian American parents discuss sexuality with their adolescent children. Do you have access to a large number of Asian-Indian American parents of teenagers? Having or gaining access to many Asian American communities means that you have some type of an insider-status or are properly invited into the community through a relationship with the gatekeeper of the community. However, having access to potential participants does not necessarily guarantee that recruitment of participants would follow naturally. For example, even if you were given permission to make an announcement to a group of Asian Indian American parents at some occasion, how does one recruit them to volunteer in a psychology study that involves questions about discussion of sexuality with their children?

Another decision that a researcher must make is to determine who to include in the research and to set the **eligibility criteria** (or selection criteria) for the participants accordingly. Let us look at examples from two studies in Asian American psychology with different eligibility criteria.

EXAMPLE 1: Here is an excerpt from the description of research participants in a study conducted by Tsai, Simeonova, and Watanabe (2004) to examine cultural differences in the use of emotion words:

Thirty European Americans (EA) and 30 Chinese Americans (CA; 53.3% women) were recruited via flyers and announcements to participate in a study of family relationships. Participants were students from colleges and universities in Minnesota and received \$20 for their participation in the study. To increase the cultural homogeneity of the EA sample, EA participants were required to (a) be born in the United States, (b) have EA parents and grandparents who were born and raised in the United States, and (c) be fluent in English. To increase the cultural homogeneity of the CA sample, CA were required to (a) be born in either the United States, China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong; (b) have Chinese parents and grandparents who were born and raised in China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong; (c) have been raised in households where a Chinese dialect (e.g., Mandarin, Taiwanese, or Cantonese) was spoken; (d) have at least 50% of their friends during childhood or adolescence be Chinese or CA; and (e) be fluent in English. (pp. 1228–1229)

Note the specificity of the eligibility criteria that Tsai and colleagues set for their study and the reason they give for their decision. In this case, it was to “increase the cultural homogeneity”

within each group of participants, which means that the researchers wanted the European Americans in this research to be culturally similar to one another, and the Chinese Americans in this research to be culturally similar to one another with regard to language, national residency status, and family's nation of origin. This level of specificity gives the researchers more confidence that the group differences between EA and CA participants found in this study may be due to their cultural backgrounds (and more specifically, the differences between European American and Chinese cultural elements). It should be noted that there are also downsides to setting strict eligibility criteria for a research study. For one, it makes the data collection much more challenging to identify and recruit participants who meet all the criteria, especially if your research site is not located in an area densely populated by the target research sample. Another downside to strict criteria is that, with a research sample that has very specific sets of demographic characteristics, the research findings may be less *generalizable* to individuals or groups whose characteristics deviate from those of the participants in the study. For example, it is difficult to be certain how much the findings from Tsai et al.'s study about Chinese Americans may generalize to Korean Americans, Filipino Americans, or even other Chinese Americans who differ from Tsai et al.'s inclusion criteria.

EXAMPLE 2: Here is an excerpt from the description of research participants in a study conducted by Okazaki (2000) to examine cultural and family factors that may contribute to the delay of seeking treatment for Asian American patients with severe mental illness:

Asian American patients receiving psychiatric treatment from one of five participating outpatient mental health clinics in the greater Los Angeles area were recruited for the study. All five referring clinics were receiving partial or total funding from the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, and four of the clinics were ethnic-specific or "parallel" services staffed by bilingual, bicultural Asian clinicians and serving primarily Asian American patients. Clinic staff was asked to approach all patients who met the following eligibility criteria: (a) of Asian or Asian American descent; (b) over age 18; (c) diagnosed (by psychiatric staff of the referring clinic) with DSM-III-R or DSV-IV schizophrenic disorder, schizoaffective disorder, mood disorder, or other psychotic disorder involving at least one past psychotic episode; (d) in regular contact with at least one family member; (e) psychosis not due to organic factors or substance abuse; (f) not currently diagnosed with an active case of post-traumatic stress disorder. (p. 59)

Now, the best estimate of the prevalence rate of schizophrenia is 1% of the general population (Regier et al., 1993). We also know from other research that Asian Americans with mental illness may not seek mental health services because of stigma and shame (Sue & Sue, 1999). These facts, along with the fact that Asian Americans still make up only 4% of the U.S. population (Reeves & Bennett, 2004), combine to make recruitment for the study described above quite challenging just in terms of locating participants who meet all the eligibility criteria AND are willing to volunteer in a psychology research study. The data collection for this study—which consisted of conducting individual interviews with 62 patients and 40 family members in 6 different languages (English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese) took two years.

As the above example (Okazaki, 2000) shows, it is quite challenging to conduct research with Asian Americans in the community, especially if the research involves rare or stigmatized phenomena. Consequently, much research in Asian American psychology is conducted with college participants due to the convenience of recruiting these populations. For example, all five studies in Cheryan and Monin's (2005) research on identity denial were conducted with university students. Would you expect the results to be different if the same studies were conducted with people who were not college students?

On a different note, what does a researcher do if he or she is interested in Asian American participants who are not in college, or if he or she does not have ready access to any Asian American participants, perhaps because the research is conducted where there are few Asian Americans? A common method for many researchers who wish to recruit research participants from the community is called **snowball sampling**, whereby a researcher starts with a known group of participants who then recruits others to participate in the study. Often, researchers tap into intact ethnic organizations, such as kinship associations, professional associations, religious centers, and social clubs, for participants. While these organizations provide good sources of participants, they too represent a narrow subset of Asian Americans (Okazaki & Sue, 1995), and therefore the findings generalized from these samples should be interpreted with caution.

Surname-based telephone survey methodology has been used in several studies with Asian Americans. Telephone directories have been found to be reliable in identifying potential research participants because some Asian Americans have unique ethnic surnames that can be associated with specific groups (e.g., "Singh" or "Patel" for South Asians, "Kim" for Koreans, "Chan" or "Wang" for Chinese, "Tanaka" or "Suzuki" for Japanese, "Nguyen" for Vietnamese). Sasao (1994) also suggests that using this methodology can be cost effective (compared to face-to-face interviewing) and reliable as long as researchers use telephone lists with clearly identifiable surnames. He found that this methodology may not be quite as effective with the Filipino American community because many Filipino Americans have Hispanic surnames due to Spanish colonization of the Philippines from the 16th to 19th centuries.

What Do We Mean by "Asian American?"

In reflecting on appropriate research methods for studying the psychological experiences of Asian Americans, Tanaka, Ebreo, Linn, and Morera (1998) asked the following two questions: "What does the researcher assume when he or she sets out to study Asian American populations, and what do Asian American research participants believe about the extent to which their 'Asian Americanness' serves as a guide to their behavior?" (p. 22). These two questions also keep many Asian American psychology researchers up at night.

Pan-Asian American Concepts In heeding Tanaka et al.'s (1998) suggested questions, we must ask ourselves what assumptions we are making by studying Asian Americans. What is it about being "Asian American" that we really care about, and to what extent does being "Asian American" affect how our research participants perform in our research study? When we construct a research study on Asian Americans, what is the "thing" that we are studying? Is "it" culture, race, or ethnicity? Is "it" minority status? One pitfall researchers in Asian American psychology often fall prey to is not being clear about what they mean when using the term *Asian American*. Sometimes researchers use the term as a demographic variable. Other times, researchers use the term as a proxy for something else that goes with "Asian American," such as culture, race, ethnicity, or minority status.

Shih, Pittinsky, and Ambady (1999) wanted to study how performance in a particular domain (in this case, math) is affected when an individual is conscious of a stereotype associated with that domain for the identity group to which they belong. They recruited Asian American women college students to be in their experiment. Before taking a difficult math test, some research participants were asked questions that elicited their ethnic identity in a subtle manner (e.g., "what language do you speak at home?") whereas other participants were asked questions that emphasized their gender (e.g., "do you live in a co-ed dorm?").

Which group of Asian American women do you think performed better on the math test in this experiment? Think about the stereotypes held about the math abilities of Asian Americans.

What about stereotypes about the math abilities of women? You can probably guess who performed better on a math test—those primed with their racial/ethnic identity or those primed with their gender identity. Yes, those who were primed with their racial/ethnic identity performed better than those primed with their gender identity. The authors argue that this is because women are negatively stereotyped as being worse in math than men and Asian Americans are positively stereotyped as being really good in math.

In the example given, what is it about being “Asian American” that the researchers care about? Clearly, the researchers are using “Asian American” as more than just a demographic variable. They know that something about being “Asian American” affects participants’ performance. In the case of this study, being “Asian American” meant more than simply being Asian American but also being aware of the societal stereotypes about Asian Americans’ math abilities and performing according to the stereotypes.

We must also think about the extent to which being “Asian American” affects the participants in our study. In the study presented above, being “Asian American” had a large impact on how participants performed on a math test. Let’s discuss why it is important to consider how being “Asian American” or being, for example, Chinese American, affects research participants. Tsai, Ying, and Lee (2000) sought to understand the variations of meanings attached to “being Chinese” and “being American” among three different groups of Chinese Americans: those born in the United States, those who immigrated to the United States before or at age 12, and those who immigrated after age 12. They found that the three groups, despite all identifying as “Chinese American,” derived different meanings from their Chinese and American identities. For example, whereas the American-born Chinese in the study felt that they could be both Chinese and American, immigrant Chinese Americans felt that being American meant being less Chinese and vice versa. This study shows us that it is important for researchers to understand not only what they mean by “Asian American,” but also what their participants mean by “Asian American.”

Ethnic Specificity You will recall that at the start of the chapter, we mentioned that researchers in Asian American psychology often question whether many of the generalizations made in the field of psychology can be wholeheartedly applied to Asian Americans. As a racial group, Asian Americans represent diverse ethnic groups and cultures—that is to say, Asian Americans are a very heterogeneous population to study. Thus, one consideration researchers must think about is how specific a population they want to focus on in their research study. Do they want to examine Asian Americans as a group, or do they want to examine a specific ethnic group, such as Vietnamese Americans? Again, the answer to these questions depends on what it is that researchers want to study and why. If researchers believe that there is a common element that all Asian Americans share, they might be best served by studying a diverse sample of Asian Americans. If they believe that Asian Americans from one country of origin, such as Chinese Americans, might differ from Asian Americans from another country of origin, such as Japanese Americans, they might want to examine those two ethnic groups separately. Of course, researchers must have a good guess about what it is that makes their sample somewhat homogeneous, such as common cultural elements, religion, immigration status, or socioeconomic status.

It should be noted here that the body of knowledge of Asian American psychology has been built largely on studies that often only included East Asian Americans (especially Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans). A part of this is due to the fact that for the first two decades of Asian American psychology (the 1970s and the 1980s), Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans were most numerous on university campuses relative to other Asian ethnic groups, and thus most accessible to researchers. The demographic of the Asian American population

in the United States, as well as at universities and colleges, in the past decade and a half have shifted to be increasingly diverse. Accordingly, we are starting to see more published research on other Asian American populations such as Vietnamese Americans, Asian Indian Americans, and Korean Americans.

Studying Psychological Concepts Within or Between Groups

Depending on the research question, researchers in Asian American psychology might want to study psychological phenomena within a particular group, or study phenomena across groups to look at similarities and differences. Culture is one of the most important influences on the psychological experiences of Asian Americans. Cross-cultural psychologists study the



E. J. R. David is an assistant professor at the University of Alaska. Born in the Philippines, David immigrated to the United States at the age of 14 and lived in Alaska until graduate school. He is now back in Alaska as a professor, where his research focuses on colonial mentality, a set of psychological processes, and effects of colonization and oppression.

Q: Why are you interested in studying Filipino Americans?

A: Because most studies in Asian American psychology are based either on East Asian samples or on aggregate multiethnic samples that usually fail to capture the unique experiences of Filipino Americans. Filipinos compose the 2nd largest Asian group in the United States, but psychological research on this population is relatively fewer than other Asian groups. More importantly, there are many psychological concerns in the Filipino American community, including high rates of depression, suicide, alcohol and drug use, and school matriculation.

Q: Do you think that research with East Asian Americans can be applied to Filipino Americans?

A: Of course, in some ways, but not all East Asian concepts can be appropriately applied to Filipino Americans. Filipinos have unique historical and cultural characteristics that make their psychological experiences different from East Asians.

Q: What makes Filipino Americans' experiences different from that of other Asian Americans?

A: Well, I think the most important difference is colonial history. Filipinos were colonized by Spain for over 350 years and by the United States for about 50 years, and

the fact that most Filipinos are Catholic and that many of them speak English are good examples of how Filipino culture has been strongly affected by such a colonial history. Colonial mentality, a more general psychological consequence of colonialism, is what I am studying. I believe that colonial mentality continues to exist among modern-day Filipinos because it has been passed along through generations by continued oppression and continued Americanization of the Philippines.

Q: How do you study the effects of colonialism on Filipino Americans? Is that even something that psychologists can study?

A: It is definitely something psychologists can and should study. Because of our rapidly diversifying society, psychology can no longer study people without taking into account people's historical, political, and cultural experiences. This is why I use a multidisciplinary approach in my efforts to understand colonial mentality by combining knowledge from multiple fields such as anthropology, history, sociology, political science, and psychology. In my studies, I use surveys, implicit association tasks, subliminal priming tasks, and interviews to better understand how colonial mentality operates within and affects Filipino Americans.

Q: What strategies do you use to find Filipino American participants?

A: I usually begin by enlisting the help of student and community organizations. From their contacts and influence, Filipino Americans across the country become aware of my projects. Through the Internet, I make sure that my projects are easily accessible so that Filipino Americans everywhere are given the opportunity to share their experiences.

Q: What do you do with your research data?

A: Aside from publishing it in scientific journals for other researchers and students to read, I make sure that I share my findings to the Filipino American community so that they can become more aware of how colonial mentality affects some of them. I do presentations and workshops for community and student groups. Also, I plan on conducting a series of workshops that will "decolonize" Filipino American mentalities.

influences of culture across different cultural groups by transporting and testing out current research knowledge in other, usually non-Western, cultures, examining how the new culture of study adds to existing knowledge about the phenomenon of interest, and attempting to integrate new and current knowledge in order to arrive at a more accurate universal truth about the phenomenon of interest (Segall, Lonner, & Berry, 1998). Thus, many cross-cultural psychologists believe that psychological phenomena are universal across different cultures.

In other cases, researchers may be interested in drawing a contrast between Asian Americans and White Americans with respect to their racial identity. For example, in their fourth study, Cheryan and Monin (2005) wanted to study how Asian Americans react to identity denial in a simulated situation. They recruited 20 Asian American and 26 White American Stanford University students to participate in the study. For half of the participants, a White American experimenter approached the participant and asked, "Do you speak English?" whereas the other half of the participants were not asked this question. Then all participants were asked to complete a questionnaire that asked them to "List as many American TV shows from the 80s as you can remember" (p. 723). The researchers timed how long the participants spent on this task. They

found that Asian Americans spent a longer time generating American TV shows (an average of 3.11 minutes) after being asked "Do you speak English?" than Asian Americans who were not asked this question (an average of 1.34 minutes). However, White Americans who were asked the language question did not spend significantly more time naming the shows than White Americans who were not asked (on average, 2.11 and 2.88 minutes, respectively). In this case, the researchers were not interested in cultural variables associated with being Asian American (e.g., loss of face, collectivistic orientation) but in having their Americanness threatened. Cheryan and Monin suggested that when their identity (as American) was threatened, Asian Americans were motivated to spend more time and effort demonstrating their knowledge and familiarity with American popular culture.

Many times, researchers in Asian American psychology are less interested in how Asian Americans differ from other racial/ethnic/cultural groups. Instead, they are interested in describing or explaining phenomena within the racial group of Asian Americans, a particular ethnic group, such as Korean Americans, or a particular subset of an ethnic group, such as the elderly. For example, Pang (1998) sought to understand how depression is experienced among elderly Korean American immigrants, thus her sample was restricted to only elderly Korean American immigrants. Because Asian American psychology is an accumulation of research knowledge, we can use Pang's study to hypothesize how depression is experienced among other groups and conduct other within-group studies or a between-group study to look at how other groups might be similar or different from Pang's sample.

Etic and Emic Approaches Researchers interested in the influence of culture on psychological phenomena will use **etic** or **emic** approaches. The etic perspective emphasizes the universal nature of psychological phenomena. Thus, psychologists who conduct research using an etic approach would need to study equivalent concepts and use equivalent standards to compare the phenomena they are studying. If two researchers wanted to study the prevalence of depression in two cultures, they would first define what they mean by depression, by, for example, using the definition and diagnostic criteria provided by the American Psychiatric Association's 1994 *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM). They would then apply that conceptual definition to both cultures, using the same measurement tool, such as the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale, or CES-D (Radloff, 1977). Notice that research from an etic approach focuses on the researcher's perspective.

In contrast, researchers oriented to an emic approach believe that psychological phenomena must be studied from the perspective of those within the culture. Emic approaches seek to understand psychological concepts and use measurement tools that are culturally appropriate and specific to their culture of study. Indigenous psychology is a subfield of psychology that emphasizes an emic research approach. Indigenous psychologists argue that each culture has its own indigenous psychology and if we would like to study those within the culture, we must use their concepts and methods rather than transplanting our own (Kim & Berry, 1993).

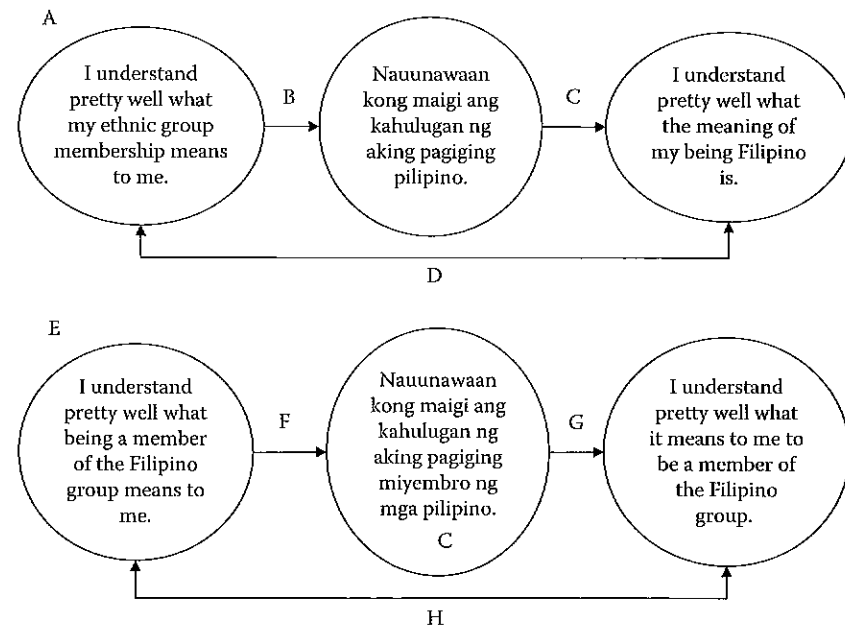
Researchers in Asian American psychology who conduct comparative studies of Asian Americans and other racial/ethnic groups may use both etic and emic approaches, depending on their research question. Deciding whether to use etic or emic approaches often helps researchers figure out which research methods are most appropriate for answering their research questions. Though this is not always the case, etic approaches tend to emphasize quantitative research methods, such as surveys, while emic approaches tend to emphasize more qualitative research methods, such as interviews. Oftentimes, emically oriented researchers will begin with qualitative methods to understand the phenomena and then translate their qualitative data into quantitative instruments.

Language Issues

Many of the established questionnaires used in psychological research are only available in English. However, the 2000 Census indicated that 79% of Asian Americans reported that they speak a language other than English at home (Reeves & Bennett, 2004). Thus researchers who are interested in conducting research with Asian Americans with no or limited English skills are taken to task to translate the material from English to the specific Asian language needed for that study. This is often easier said than done because many psychological terms and concepts do not translate easily across languages and cultures. Thus, when researchers do not have access to existing translated measures and must translate assessment measures themselves, they should use cultural or linguistic experts familiar with both languages to help with the translation in order to ensure translation equivalence. Brislin (1993) suggests that researchers use a multi-step method that involves multiple translations and back-translations. Let's say that we want to translate a 20-item measure of ethnic identity from English to Tagalog. We should have one translator convert the measure from English to Tagalog, and another translator independently translate the measure back into English. Changes should be made to the new English version, and yet another round of translation and back-translation should occur. The end product should be an English version of the measure that is easily expressed in Tagalog.

The Big Picture: What Differences Does Research Make?

You may be wondering whether psychological research makes a real impact on Asian Americans' lives. One area of psychological research that has made an impact is in mental health



- A. The researcher begins with an item in English.
- B. The item, originally in English, is translated into Tagalog by Translator #1.
- C. The item, in Tagalog, is translated back into English by Translator #2.
- D. The researcher compares the two English versions. They certainly are not equivalent. First, the translators can not translate "my ethnic group" from English because there is no equivalent Tagalog term. More importantly, the translation derived from these steps does not quite capture the meaning of the English item, which asks the survey participant to describe what it means to be a part of his/her ethnic group.

service delivery. When Stanley Sue began his pioneering research in the 1970s, very little was known about Asian American psychology and about Asian Americans' utilization of mental health services. In examining the usage data for a countywide mental health system in King County (Seattle, Washington), Sue and McKinney (1975) noticed that Asian Americans were not using mental health services compared to the rate of usage by other ethnic groups. Sue began a program of research examining mental health service utilization and found many obstacles to Asian Americans' help-seeking for psychological problems. Some of these factors included shame and stigma surrounding mental illness, as well as the fact that existing services did not accommodate the linguistic and cultural needs of Asian American patients (Sue, 1993). Due in part to Sue's pioneering work, ethnic-specific mental health agencies that are staffed by bilingual, bicultural staff, have been created in many Asian American communities and have been found to be effective (Lau & Zane, 2000; Zane, Hatanaka, Park, & Akutsu, 1994). Although community activism played a part in the establishment of these culturally appropriate services, it would not have been possible without psychological research.

Summary

At the start of this chapter, we introduced identity denial as something that happens to many Asian Americans (Cheryan & Monin, 2005) and that has recently been studied in the field of Asian American psychology. Researching psychological phenomena that impact Asian Americans, such as identity denial or mental health service utilization, can be both challenging and rewarding. Asian Americans represent a heterogeneous group of communities that require researchers to employ innovative methods of study. This chapter discussed some of the most salient and vexing research challenges facing Asian American psychology research. We hope that as you learn more about research in Asian American psychology, you will be able to think critically about whether each study adequately answers the questions asked, how the researchers used the term *Asian American*, and how each study could be improved or extended to broaden our knowledge about Asian Americans. After all, you as consumers and users of psychological knowledge are essential members of the community.

Discussion Questions

1. Throughout this chapter, we talked about the identity denial research of Cheryan and Monin. How well do you think their studies can be applied to your own experiences?
2. How would you design a study to test the effects of identity denial? What are the advantages and disadvantages of your study's design?
3. Think of a psychological construct that interests you. How would you operationalize this construct so that it can be tested?
4. What are advantages and disadvantages of using quantitative methods? What are advantages and disadvantages of using qualitative methods?
5. If you wanted to conduct a research study at your school, how would you go about recruiting participants? How might the results you find be different if you conducted the same study in another part of the country?
6. If you were a researcher, how would you make your research accessible to the public?
7. If you were a clinician treating an Asian American adult client for depression, how would you apply research to your clinical work? If there was no research directly related to your client, how would you apply available research?

Key Terms

Eligibility criteria: Set of criteria that a researcher sets forth to determine the selection of research participants.

Emic: Focus on culture-specific concepts or processes.

Etic: Focus on culture-general or universal concepts or processes.

External validity: The extent to which conclusions from one study can be applied (or generalized) outside of specific research settings in which the research was carried out.

Internal validity: The extent to which conclusions can be made about causal effects of the phenomenon.

Nonprobability sampling: Method of sampling in which the chance of any given individual being selected for the study is not known.

Operationalism: A doctrine that states that concepts and variables are defined by the specific process or tests used to measure or manipulate them.

Probability sampling: Method of sampling in which random selection is used.

Qualitative methods: Research methods in which data are collected and analyzed without numerical or statistical analyses; often, the types of data that are involved in qualitative research involve interviews and other narrative data, participant observations, focus groups, and case studies.

Quantitative methods: Research methods in which collected data are quantified (converted into numbers) and statistically described or analyzed.

Sampling: Selection of individual observations in research that is intended to produce knowledge about a population of interest.

Sampling errors: Errors in estimation (or deviation from the truth about a population of interest) that occur by chance and that are attributable to the sample in the study.

Snowball sampling: Method of nonprobability sampling in which one participant or a small group of participants who meet the study's eligibility criteria are identified and then asked to refer others who also meet the eligibility criteria to the researcher.

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