

# UCLA

## AAPI Nexus: Policy, Practice and Community

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The Other Side of the Model Minority Coin

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Message from the Editor

## The Other Side of the Model Minority Coin

Marjorie Kagawa-Singer

As my inaugural note to the *Nexus* audience as the Senior Editor, I would like to introduce my vision of the role that this journal can play to increase the visibility of the diversity within, the inequalities suffered by, and the potential of the rapidly growing and heterogeneous Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AAPI) populations nationwide. Our mission is to integrate the strengths of research, community action, and policy bringing them to bear on meeting the needs of AAPIs. Thus, each of these groups must speak more clearly and understandably to each other as well as to the larger public. *Nexus* provides that needed platform.

To this same end of greater visibility of both the richness and unmet needs of AAPIs, I have pursued two goals. The first goal is to shed light on the other side of the Model Minority coin—the often invisible side that shows the myth of this damaging stereotype—the ignored and denied problems of our communities. This myth is unwittingly advanced by both academics and the communities themselves.”

The second and related goal is to bridge the community-academia divide. Without collaboration by both sides, little action can be mobilized to build community capacity and form policy that will eliminate the unnecessary suffering borne by AAPIs and bring us to full citizenship in the United States.

I have pursued these two goals by integrating theory, research, and practice in community-based efforts. Fortunately, I travel this road with a growing cadre of academic and public sector colleagues who provide the essential combination of data and action through policy change. *Nexus* gives voice to the confluence of these avenues of action, and, working with the *Nexus* team, we provide a forum

to join these voices together to forge effective solutions to the too often invisible and taboo issues that compromise the well-being of AAPIs.

Many of the theories and frameworks used in research and in the development of policy are based upon flawed assumptions of universality. Through critical thinking that evaluates and critiques these unquestioned assumptions, *Nexus* strives to uncover limitations where they exist, present innovative resolutions, and strengthen community capacity. This issue of *Nexus* presents three articles that bring to light problems that plague our communities, but are hidden on the flip side of the Model Minority coin. Su Yeong Kim and colleagues' article on Filipino youth gang members in Hawaii challenges the commonly held view of racial harmony in Hawai'i. Their findings are consistent with the larger literature on the formation of gangs by immigrant population groups, indicating that racial and social discrimination from peers and authority figures propel Filipino boys to seek out gang membership as a way to protect them from being targets of oppression. The marginalization of the youth also indicates clear avenues of intervention for both prevention as well as resolution.

Matloff and colleagues document the growing epidemic of obesity among Chinese American youth. They also expand the lens of analysis beyond just the children to the mothers' level of acculturation. Their findings support literature showing that the ability of the mother to maintain her more authoritative parenting style is linked to a lower rate of obesity on their children. Immigrant parents who are dependent upon their children to negotiate the new U.S. culture through language, experience a role reversal of authority in the family, and, according to the argument put forward in this study, also abdicate their ability to better control the eating habits of their children who then suffer from greater obesity.

The resource paper by Shimatsu and colleagues provides data on the high rates of alcohol use and unsafe sex practices among Asian American and Pacific Islander college students. Over half of respondents (54.8 percent) are currently sexually active. The median age of first sexual encounter is eighteen years old, and 65.6 percent state that they have engaged in unprotected sex at least once in the past thirty days. One noteworthy finding in this study is that 51.3 percent state that they would not seek help from school

health centers, and 54.3 percent state the same for campus-based counseling and psychological services. Over three-quarters (76.3 percent) state that they would be too ashamed or embarrassed to seek out services, and 65.1 percent state that they would not know where to go to seek help. Alarming, 55.5 percent are uncertain when alcohol use becomes a problem. The article provides practical steps that can be taken to effectively address these disturbing statistics.

The article by Ong, et al. provides a major means to solve the problems exposed by the other three articles: the vote. This timely piece clearly illuminates the hidden power of the growing AAPI population. As we become more sophisticated in understanding this power, we can better wield it to our benefit. Together, these articles continue the vision and mission of *Nexus*. I invite your comments to build the power of this journal as a voice for action.