Disproportionate Representation of Asian American Students in Special Education: A Systematic Review of the Literature

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ABSTRACT
The disproportionate representation of students of color in special education is a critical issue within the field. To date, however, this issue has been positioned primarily through a Black–White binary. This review contended that Asian American students in the school system have been relatively ignored in terms of representation within special education. The current review aimed to recognize existing rationales for the over- or underidentification of Asian American students within special education. Using search criteria combinations of “Asian American” and “special education” and “disproportionality,” a total of 15 studies were included in this review. These studies indicated the prevalence of over- and underrepresentation of Asian American students for some special education categories. Importantly, the systematic search revealed that a gap still exists in scholarly work related to the disproportionate representation of Asian Americans within special education, particularly as it relates to Asian American student perspectives. The potential cultural implications for Asian American students, their teachers, and future research are emphasized.
important to provide culturally responsive (a) teacher preparation, (b) behavioral management strategies, (c) early intervention and pre-referral procedures, (d) assessments, (e) family involvement, and (f) policy and system reforms.

The phenomenon of disproportionate representation of minority students in special education is deeply embedded in the history of the education system in the United States (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010). Overrepresentation discourse first emerged when Dunn (1968) reported considerable disproportionality in the category of intellectual disability among minority students. Ten years later, the first empirical studies were published, and an increasing number of studies have been conducted to address this issue within last 30 years (Zucker & Prieto, 1977). Although progress has been made in the statistics of representing disproportionality, such progress has done little to influence overrepresentation overall (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006). Over- and underrepresentation among minority students is problematic as it implies an underlying assumption of inequity in our society (Waitoller, Artiles, & Cheney, 2010).

Although much attention has focused on culturally relevant instruction to address diverse learners (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and decrease the referrals and overall representation of some minority students in special education (Artiles, 2011), little attention has been given to underrepresentation, which could benefit from an empirical research review (Waitoller et al., 2010). Specifically, some minority groups have experienced disproportionate representation because of an underidentification for special education services when, in some cases, these services could benefit students’ learning and growth.

This systematic review article focused on the literature around one such CLD group, Asian Americans, and the disproportionate representation of Asian American students. Focusing on the group known as Asian Americans is important for several reasons. First, examining the education of specific Asian American students is necessary to illustrate the diversity within the Asian American community (Pang, Kiang, & Pak, 2003). Second, although this group is representative of a large number of languages and cultures grouped under a single term, research on the disproportionate representation of this group within some disability categories (including both under-identification and over-identification) has been largely ignored with regard to the aggregated definition of “Asian.” Typically, Asian American students are depicted in media and school settings as “model minorities” (Lee, 1994, p. 413). According to this stereotype, Asian Americans consistently outperform other minority students in terms of their achievement because of their hard work and family cultural values, which are said to prioritize education (Lee, 1994). Ogbu (1989) suggested that this differentiation between Asian American students and other minority students is, in part, due to the differences between voluntary versus involuntary immigration. Voluntary immigration occurs when individuals enter the United States in search of economic opportunities and “a better life” (Lee, 1994, p. 413) whereas involuntary immigrants are brought to their destination by force (usually through slavery or as refugees). This situation has created differences in perceptions of schooling, although these differences were not meant to universalize the experiences of all Asian American people. Indeed, the model minority stereotype occurs when assumptions are made about the performance of Asian American students based on commonly held beliefs, ideas, and/or goals of education.

In the mid-1960s, researchers investigated the phenomenon of the model minority myth and its underlying assumption about the American dream (Ngo & Lee, 2007). However, these discourses have overlooked the diversity within the Asian population (Lee, 1994). When Pang, Han, and Pan (2011) disaggregated achievement data on Asian American and White students, they found that there were indeed gaps in math and reading among Asian American subgroups and White students, thus refuting the myth. The model minority stereotype is also problematic because it may prevent Asian students from receiving appropriate services because of their collective successes as shown in large-scale statistical results (Ngo & Lee, 2007). Thus, the model minority myth of Asian American success fails to address the diversity of this racial group.

Special education as a set of services and placement options also tends to invoke stigmatization of the students who qualify for it. The stigma of
being identified as disabled is also cultural. Several studies have highlighted the influence of culture on perceptions and understanding of disability within the broadly defined Asian community (Garcia, Perez, & Ortiz, 2000; Hanson & Lynch, 2004; Diken, 2006). Morgan, Frisco, Farkas, and Hibel (2008) explained that the “stigma of classification” can prevent families from participating in the special education system (p. 14), which could lead to lower representation within disability categories.

To date, however, few reviews of research and/or empirical studies have captured the experiences and diversity of Asian American students and their under- or overrepresentation within special education and/or gifted programs. This review aims to highlight the existing literature related to the representation of Asian American students as well as identify the implications for further study.

The following research questions were posed to inform this systematic review:

1. In which special education categories are Asian American students over- and underrepresented?
2. What rationales exist for over- or underidentification?

METHODS

This article analyzed existing literature regarding the disproportionate representation of Asian American students in special education. Search procedures used to gather articles, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and how existing literature data were analyzed to draw conclusions are described below.

SEARCH PROCEDURES

A search was conducted for existing studies using various databases, including the Education Resources Information Center, Education Full Text, PsycINFO, and the EBSCOhost Research Database. Searches were carried out using the following keywords in various combinations: “Asian” or “Asian Americans” and; “disproportionality” or “disproportionate representation” or “identification”; and “special education.” In addition, a hand search was conducted to find articles published between 2010 and 2015 to ensure that the articles reflected the current literature. References were also searched to find any relevant articles by first looking at titles containing keywords of “Asian” or “Asian American” and/or “disproportionate representation in special education” and “gifted education.”

INCLUSION/EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Articles were included as part of the study if they met the following criteria: (a) were peer reviewed; (b) included data on Asian American students; (c) included students in special education (all categories), including gifted and talented (G&T) programs; (d) were published between 2004 and 2015; (e) were either empirical, descriptive analyses of existing data or theoretical articles; and (f) described students of any age/grade level within the public school system in the United States.

Articles were excluded if they (a) did not describe disproportionality, (b) included only the perspectives of Asian and/or Asian American teachers and family members as opposed to students, and (c) included studies that described Asian students in an international context, as our study was focused on the U.S. context.

DESCRIPTION OF SEARCH RESULTS

Using the keywords and the specific inclusion/exclusion criteria, the initial search yielded nine articles. After an initial read-through of all nine studies, three studies were removed due to lack of relevance to the specific topic, leaving six articles. An additional study was subsequently added, yielding a total of seven. A subsequent search for more relevant articles (specifically those from 2010 to 2015) revealed an additional five articles related to disproportionate representation and included rates of Asian American disproportionate representation. From these articles an additional three articles specifically addressing Asian Americans were found using reference sections to yield a total of 15 articles. Descriptions of each of the 15 studies included in this review are provided in Table 1.
**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citations</th>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Data on Over-/Under-Representation of Asian-American Students</th>
<th>Rationales (If Provided)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aud et al. (2010)</td>
<td>National Center of Educational Statistics</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Trends suggest an increase in the number of Asian/Pacific Islanders from ages 3 to 5 (from 2.4% to 4.2%) and 6 to 21 (from 3.8% to 4.8%) who have been identified as having a disability in data from 1998 to 2007. However, these percentages of overall representation in special education are the lowest among all ethnicities reported. When disaggregated by disability category, Asian/Pacific Islanders are still the lowest in terms of representation in each category except for autism, where they are slightly ahead of Native American at both 3–5 (0.55% vs 0.22%) and 6–21 (0.51% vs 0.30%) years old.</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bollmer et al. (2007)</td>
<td><em>Journal of Special Education</em></td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Calculated initial weighted/alternative risk ratios for students of different racial/ethnic groups across three states. Number of districts that could have risk ratios calculated for them was smaller than the total number of districts present in a given state. Initial risk ratios could be calculated more often than weighted, and values for initial risk ratios were generally more extreme than weighted ratios. For Asian-American students in one state, for example, the largest initial risk ratio was 18.02, whereas the weighted ratio was only 5.99. Stressed the importance of understanding the numbers of individuals being counted for racial/ethnic risk ratios.</td>
<td>Risk ratios may be difficult to calculate due to small numbers of different groups in the population. Weighted risk ratio could be used to solve this issue when comparing districts.</td>
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<td>Delgado &amp; Scott</td>
<td><em>Journal of Special Education</em></td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Older research suggests that Asian/Pacific Islander students are underrepresented in almost every category except for speech and language. Odds risk of referral of Asian/Pacific Islander students based on Florida from years 1994 to 1995 was 0.42, lower than that of other races. Odds risk for referral was 2.4 times less likely than with Whites.</td>
<td>Low birth weight, low maternal education, and prematurity were associated with increased odds of referral. When using White children as a comparison, the odds referral for Asian American children was lower. Emphasized that the odds of referral would be helpful in alerting clinicians and practitioner to the existence of biasing factors in the identification of disability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doan (2009)</td>
<td><em>Teacher Education and Special Education</em></td>
<td>Theoretical</td>
<td>Data from 2002 suggested that although Asian Americans represented 3.8% of the population, they were only 1.9% of the special education population and the majority (43%) were classified as having learning disabilities. Male students made up 73% of those identified with learning disabilities in early 2000s.</td>
<td>Rationales included teacher identification, model minority myth/former successes of Asian American students, lack of language proficiency in Asian languages such as Chinese in school districts (which tended to categorize the dominant language as English), group diversity of the term “Asian,” lack of encouragement for parental input, portrayal of Asian success as contrasted with poverty that is typically associated with “at risk” classification, cultural differences related to stigma of disability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Dyches et al.</td>
<td><em>Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders</em></td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander and Black students showed twice the rate of autism identification as Hispanic or Native American students. Racial disparities existed within each label, such that Asian/Pacific Islanders served under autism label equaled approx. 4% while identification and service under other disability labels was around 1%.</td>
<td>Regional differences could exist, with some states reporting numbers of individuals identified differently. Asians and Pacific Islanders have been known to be placed under the same category, thereby raising identification numbers. Cultural differences related to stigma or advocacy of autism label over other disability labels is a possibility. Stereotypes in behaviors of some cultures are linked to particular labels. Resiliency possible in immigrant communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallagher (2015)</td>
<td><em>Journal of Education of the Gifted</em></td>
<td>Theoretical</td>
<td>More than twice the number of Asian American students are represented in G&amp;T programs when compared with other racial groups.</td>
<td>Surplus of Asian students in G&amp;T programs is based on value and insistence on high levels of academic performance from their children and a crystallization of various skills. The onus is on families, schools, and society to create a more favorable environment.</td>
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<td>Hibel et al. (2010)</td>
<td>Sociology of Education</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Asian American students have the lowest rates of identification for special education in all categories including for learning disability where all other categories (White, Black, and Hispanic) are around 6% while Asians are 3%, as reported in 2004 data. Subjectivity in eligibility for special education, culturally biased assessments, teacher judgments for eligibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosp and Reschly (2004)</td>
<td>Exceptional Children</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Asian American students are underrepresented for almost every category except for G&amp;T. For Asian American students, demographic background was a strong predictor for disability identification. Disaggregated data for groups such as Asian Americans are lacking. There is a need to look at conceptual blocks (academic, environmental, and demographic), but traditionally academic issues account for identification and referral.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McBee (2006)</td>
<td>Prufrock Journal</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Using Georgia Department of Education data, the highest identification rates of G&amp;T were for Asian American students regardless of SES. Teacher nominations were the most responsible for higher referrals of Asian Americans for G&amp;T programs; however, student SES was also an indicator for other groups.</td>
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## Table 1 (Continued)

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<tr>
<td>Tincani et al. (2009)</td>
<td>Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Asian students were overrepresented in the autism category (odds risk ratio of 1.17) and underrepresented in mental retardation, emotional disturbance, and learning disability. Asian Americans were found to have similar odds risk ratios of being identified as having autism as Black students in 1999, but Asian students surpassed Black students by 2000. Over time, however, the odds ratio for Asians was closer to 1.0, which was deemed not significant.</td>
<td>Disproportionate representation among CLD groups may shift over time due to diagnostic substitution and changes in assessment practices that lead to identification. Cultural incongruence may exist between practitioners and students, leading to differences in identification.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travers et al. (2011)</td>
<td>Journal of Special Education</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Risk indices from 1998 for Black and Asian students in the category of autism were 11%, which was higher than for White students (10%), but changed such that Asians were slightly higher than Blacks and Whites (15%) in the early 2000s and continued to increase until 2006. When compared to Whites, odds ratio of Asian students being disproportionately represented in autism category was not determined to be meaningful.</td>
<td>Variations in disability definitions/“judgmental disability” and change in placement eligibility over time based on assessment practices, cultural incongruence between practitioners and diverse groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeh et al. (2004)</td>
<td>Behavioral Disorders</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Asian children may be under identified in the emotional disturbance (ED) category in special education. Asian families were significantly less likely than their White counterparts to utilize services (OR = 0.33). Asian American children were less likely to utilize ED services.</td>
<td>Argued that the underrepresentation is partially due to parental beliefs about the etiologies of their children’s behavior. Asian/Pacific Islander families were more likely to attribute disability labels to prejudice or a natural disharmony.</td>
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<td>Yoon and Gentry</td>
<td><em>Gifted Child Quarterly</em></td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Students who identify as Asian and Pacific Islander have been consistently overrepresented in gifted education since 1978. As of 2006, when disaggregated by state, Asian and Pacific Islanders were still overrepresented in 41 of 50 states. Wisconsin and Hawaii had relatively less overrepresentation which may be in part to higher numbers of Asian Americans (Hmong in Wisconsin and Hawaiian born in Hawaii). Each state uses a varied definition of gifted and identified gifted differently. Acculturation may also vary by generations (differences between first- and 1.5-generation and second- or third-generation Asian Americans). Asian American studies of academic motivation have been limited to South and East Asian groups. Authors pointed to the necessity to disaggregate data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang, Katsiyannis, Ju, and Roberts</td>
<td><em>Journal of Child and Family Studies</em></td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Over the 4-year span (2004–2008) the percentage of Asian American students represented as compared with other racial groups was the lowest and relatively unchanged (5.73 to 6.11%). Overall, the trend remained the same over time in different categories of disability (learning disability, intellectual disability, and emotional disturbance), with the percentage for emotional disturbance decreasing slightly by 2008. More information is needed on within-group diversity among racial groups such as Asian cultural differences and issues of English proficiency may also be important. Also, the quality of special education overall needs to be addressed.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1 lists the (a) citation of the article, (b) journal, (c) methodology used, (d) any data provided on over-/underrepresentation of Asian American students in special education and/or G&T programs, and (e) rationales for under- and overrepresentation in these areas, if provided. First, studies were summarized according to these key features. Next, findings related to the research questions were grouped by repeated themes across the studies. Relevant themes are discussed within each of the broader sections related to the overall research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This systematic review examined the education of Asian American students and their disproportionate representation within special education programs. As shown in Table 1, the studies provided a breakdown of over- and underrepresentation of Asian American students in special education categories and/or G&T programs. Most studies also included a series of ideas about the causes of the disproportionate representation of Asian Americans. Finally, a subset of articles highlighted the cultural implications of over- and underrepresentation. Each of these areas is discussed in the following sections.

DISPROPORTIONALITY OF ASIAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

With respect to the disproportionate representation of Asian American students in special education, data tended to be reported according to three major areas: odds and risk ratios of being identified for special education, data across time span, and data across U.S. states. Overall, most of the studies that were reviewed showed overrepresentation of Asian American students in G&T programs, and underrepresentation of Asian American students across disability categories (Bollmer, Bethel, Garrison-Mogren, & Brauen, 2007; Hibel, Farkas, & Morgan, 2010). This prevalence of Asian American students corresponded with Harry’s (1992) conclusion: “Asian Pacific students are generally underrepresented in disability categories and overrepresented in G&T programs” (p. 64). Odds ratios and relative risk for disability identification were also among the lowest for Asian American students when compared with other racial groups (Yeh, Forness, Ho, & McCabe, 2004; Bollmer et al., 2007; Tincani, Travers, & Boutot, 2009; Travers, Tincani, & Krezmiien, 2011). State-by-state comparisons also indicated that Asian American students were underrepresented in disability categories in most U.S. states (Yoon & Gentry, 2009).

Odds and risk ratios for representation. While overall relative risk and odds ratios, showed low risk of Asian American students being identified with a disability, studies demonstrated differentiation between overrepresentation and underrepresentation for CLD students in some categories of disabilities. Specifically, some studies showed that Asian/Pacific Islander students were underrepresented in the categories of intellectual disability and learning disability, but were overrepresented in autism (Tincani et al., 2009). According to Dyches, Wilder, Sudweeks, Obiakor, & Algozzine (2004) and Tincani et al. (2009), Asian/Pacific Islander students were represented in the category of autism at approximately twice the rate of both Native American and Black students. By contrast, Gallagher (2015) explained that Asian American students were also represented at nearly twice the rate of students of other racial groups in G&T programs.

Time span. According to the National Education Longitudinal Study data from 1988, 17.6% of Asian, 9.0% of non-Hispanic white, 7.9% of Black, 6.7% of Hispanic, and 2.1% of American Indian students were included in G&T programs (Ross, 1993). Although the results of this research indicated the disproportionate representation of Asian American students in G&T programs, more research is needed to determine the variables that led these students to be overrepresented in G&T programs.

Finally, studies that included longitudinal data suggested that the rate of identification increased for all groups over time (Aud, Fox, & Kewal Remani, 2010). For Asian/Pacific Islanders, the identification of disability increased from 3.8% to 4.8% between 1998 and 2007 for students in the K–12 system (ages 6–21). Overall, however, this number was still
the lowest among all racial groups and nearly three times less than Black and Native American students sampled (Aud et al., 2010). Therefore, despite increases in identification across groups and time, Asian/Pacific Islander students continued to be underrepresented in special education categories. Researchers would need to conduct additional studies to look at the disproportionate representation disaggregated by subgroups of Asian Americans (i.e., Laotian, Hmong, Chinese, Korean, Asian Indians, and Japanese). This would help create a more detailed picture of how over- and underrepresentation affects Asian American students and their relative risk for identification.

State by state comparisons. Yoon and Gentry (2009) provided state-by-state comparisons of gifted Asian American students in terms of representation. While it was indicated that most states saw an overrepresentation of Asian American students identified as G&T (McBee, 2006), disaggregated data showed a small number of states where this was not the case, including Wisconsin and Hawaii, which both had lower representation indices when compared with other states. The authors explained that the lower representation may reflect the forced migration of Hmong refugee populations and higher poverty rate of this group (Yoon & Gentry, 2009).

McBee (2006) also found that in Georgia, Asian American, and White students tended to be the most referred for G&T programs. He broke down the referral process by person and also found that within this state, teachers were most likely for Asian American and White students, regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds. Teachers were least likely to refer Hispanic and Black students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Thus, as indicated from the literature, Asian American representation tended to be higher in G&T programs than other groups, while representation across disability categories and special education tended to be lower in most categories.

Rationales for Disproportionate Representation

Although the literature offered rationales for the disproportionate representation of Asian American students in special education and/or G&T categories, such explanations were typically limited. For example, Gallagher (2015) suggested that the overrepresentation of Asian American students in G&T programs was a result of family cultural values and a “crystallization of native abilities” (p. 65). Such an explanation replicates the model minority myth about high-performing Asian American students. By contrast, Bollmer et al. (2007) as well as Dyches et al. (2004) and Tincani et al. (2009) all seemed to suggest that overrepresentation and underrepresentation were a product of data-tracking and assessment procedures, which could account for some discrepancies among districts and across particular racial groups.

Yeh et al. (2004) and Tincani et al. (2009) further suggested that cultural differences and prejudicial disparities might exist among nondominant groups. For example, statistically significant findings showed that Asian American families believed that the reasons for their children’s referrals to special education were based on prejudice within the school system (Yeh et al., 2004). This finding could also be a product of discrepancies between students from nondominant backgrounds and practitioners from dominant backgrounds (Tincani et al., 2009). Such disparities also indicated a lack of research on culturally relevant instruction and referral practices, particularly as they relate to Asian American students within the American public school context.

Yoon and Gentry (2009) also pointed out the importance of looking at generational differences and migration patterns to further disaggregate Asian American groups in terms of representation. They found that the experiences of first- or 1.5-generation and second- or third-generation Asian Americans varied, with earlier generations wanting to adapt to Western culture more quickly than later generations. Disaggregation of data, therefore, must also include an understanding of how immigration patterns and generational differences influence academic achievement and the referral process for special education.

Yet overall, although studies indicated overrepresentation of Asian American students in disability categories, such as autism, speech and language, and G&T programs, few were able to indicate why such discrepancies occurred, and most studies did...
not directly address these differences in the data, especially as numbers indicated a rise in identification across all racial groups (Bollmer et al., 2007). Thus, it continues to be imperative that research addresses the cultural implications of disproportionate representation for Asian American and for families to better understand the reasons for these discrepancies.

**Cultural Implications**

Studies that investigated the underrepresentation of Asian American students in special education suggested that parental beliefs may be a reason for it. For example, Hosp and Reschly (2004) argued that children from Asian backgrounds tended to underutilize services and that parental belief partially explained the differences in service use. Chan and Chen (2011) argued that Asian parents tended to consider their children’s disability as a consequence of the sins of their ancestors. Hanson, Lynch, and Wayman (1990) suggested that Asian parents considered the disabilities to be shameful and, thus, tended to take full responsibility for their children. Asian parents might believe that parenting caused their children’s problematic behavior when it came to emotional and behavior disorders, which could account for the underrepresentation of this group. Hibel et al. (2010) also suggested that Asian parents’ high expectations toward academic achievements, as well as the demographic concentration of Asian students in particular schools, might explain the placement patterns. Therefore, parental beliefs could explain underrepresentation of Asian students in special education programs.

The disproportionate representation of Asian American students in special education programs also takes the form of overrepresentation. An earlier study, which investigated Asian students in the G&T program (Kitano & DiJiosia, 2002), indicated that culturally shaped parental beliefs could offer partial explanations of overrepresentation. Such beliefs related to cultural compatibility, parenting strategies, education attainment, income level, years of residency in the United States, and linguistic aspects regarding the diverse representation of Asian/Pacific Islander students in the G&T program.

In sum, studies have articulated parental beliefs to explain both under- and overrepresentation of Asian American students in special education programs. However, the literature did not approach the phenomenon from different perspectives, such as the national education system, state-level policy, school environment, and service providers.

**Methodology of the Studies**

Among the 15 studies, only two articles used a qualitative methodology. The remaining articles were all quantitative or theoretical descriptions of the issue of special education and G&T representation. Studies of the disproportionate representation were predominantly quantitative and relied on large groups of individuals to find counts of students who might be identified for special education or might be at risk of identification. Future research might address reasons for over- and underrepresentation through qualitative or mixed-methods studies. Poon-McBrayer and Garcia (2000) suggested that Asian American students are a complex group, as indicated by the multitude of languages and cultures. Qualitative research might be useful in highlighting this diversity and understanding perceptions of identification for disabilities. Although quantitative research can provide detailed data on the numbers of individuals being identified under the large umbrella of the Asian American demographic, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies may help explain the complexities of this group. As Poon-McBrayer and Garcia (2000) suggested, generalizing results of aggregated data using risk ratios or large-scale school databases may not be generalizable to other Asian populations in locations across the United States.

**Limitations**

This review specifically addressed the disproportionate representation of Asian American students within special education, including G&T programs. While the review highlighted the often overlooked population of Asian American, there were some limitations to this line of inquiry. First, this review highlighted the data and perspectives of Asian American students rather than teachers and family members. The inclusion of these groups would have created a broader review of
Asian populations. Second, this review was done within the limited time frame of 2004–2015. Additional reviews may include a broader sample of studies which include a historical representation of Asian American disproportionality. Finally, the systematic review did not include international perspectives of the Asian population. These areas would have expanded the overall review, but possibly at the loss of specificity of describing Asian American student populations. A future review may include broader populations to understand disproportionality complexities on a global level.

CONCLUSION

The existing literature on the disproportionate representation of Asian American students in special education leaves several important questions unanswered. Primarily, because within-group diversity for Asian Americans is so large, few studies have focused solely on this population of students. In part, the model minority stereotype commonly associated with Asian American students explains why students tend to be overrepresented in categories such as G&T and underrepresented in disability categories. However, this stereotype does not hold for all disproportionate representation. For instance, Van Roekel (2008) suggested that part of the reason that Asian American students might be underidentified is their population within the larger school system is lower than that of other CLD groups. However, Asian American students are one of the fastest-growing categories of CLD students (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

Cultural implications of disproportionality within the Asian American student population suggested that family belief systems and the stigma against disability labels may, in some cases, prevent students from obtaining necessary special education services. In addition, teacher referrals and judgments based solely on student behavior (Yeh et al., 2004) or socioeconomic status (McBee, 2006) may also contribute to areas of under- and overrepresentation. Some authors also highlighted the circular nature of disability within some cultures as being a punishment for past sins (Hanson & Lynch, 2004; Chan & Chen, 2011). These approaches to framing Asian American students are lacking in complexity, treating across-group cultural norms as static. There is certainly a need to move beyond static definitions of Asian American students toward an understanding of within-group differences, particularly at the state, national, and policy levels.

Finally, this research highlighted a need for individual understandings of Asian American students’ experiences in the structure of schools, which privilege white, middle-class students. The current literature only offered risk ratios, aggregated database information, and survey information for large groups of Asian American students in comparison to static demographic groups. There is a great need for qualitative research that can provide local and individual understandings of disability perception as well as more insights into why disproportionate representation exists within this group of students. As the number of Asian American students continues to increase in public schools in the United States, it is imperative to develop new approaches for addressing the support needs of this diverse group.

NOTES

1 The 2004–2015 span was maintained to include relevant, current articles. Articles published more than 11 years ago tended to include information that did not highlight changes in legislation and research trends. These articles were mentioned as supporting literature, but were considered outside the scope of this review.

2 Several articles related to disproportionate representation within special education have utilized large data sets to describe differences among racial groups. It was important to include those articles which analyzed existing data sets to answer the primary research question.

3 Asterisks indicate articles included in review.

REFERENCES


Artiles, A. J., Kozleski, E., Trent, S., Osher, D., & Ortiz, A. (2010). Justifying and explaining disproportionality,


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