

# Voluntary and Involuntary Minorities: A Cultural-Ecological Theory of School Performance with Some Implications for Education

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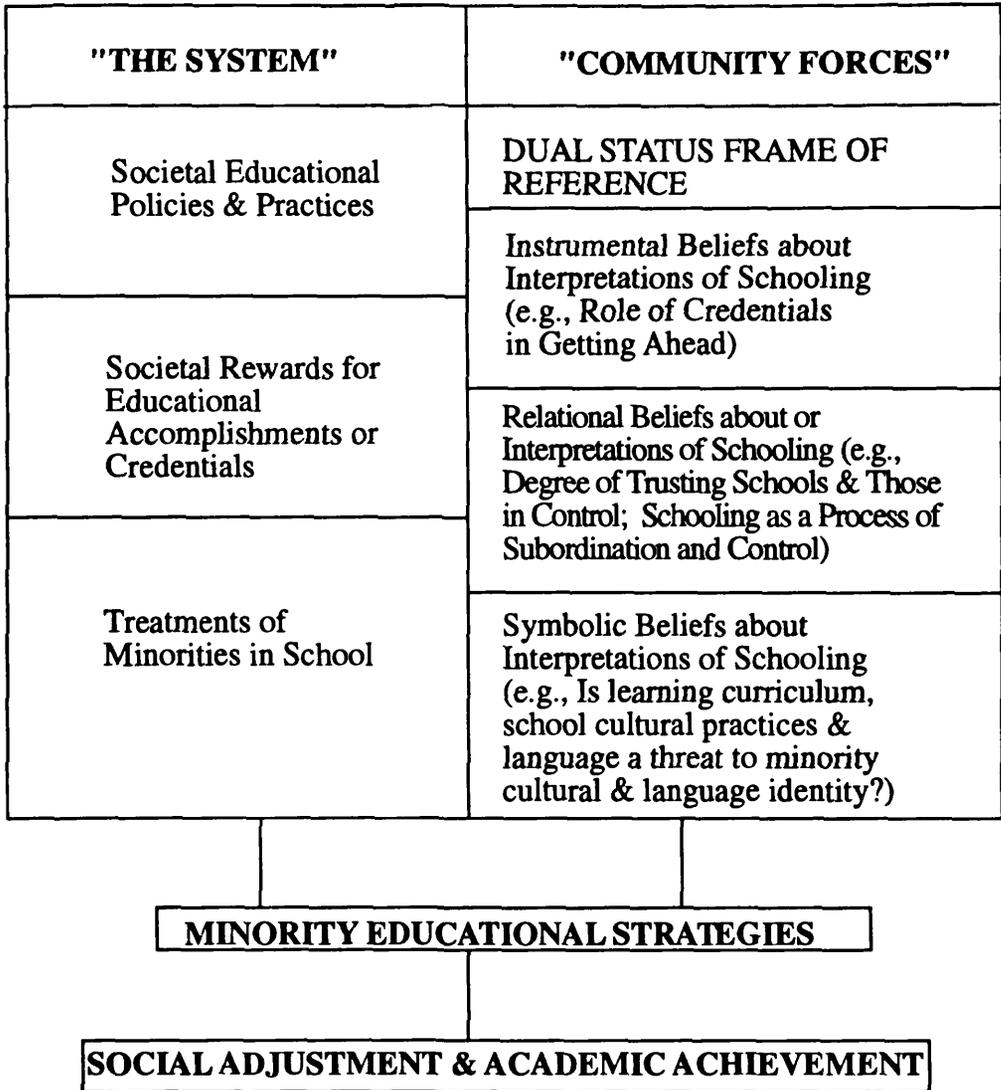
*This article has three objectives. First, it describes Ogbu's classification of minorities: autonomous, voluntary or immigrant, and involuntary or nonimmigrant minorities. Second, it explains Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance. Finally, it suggests some implications of the theory for pedagogy. The authors regard the typology of minority groups as a heuristic device for analysis and interpretation of differences among minority groups in school experience.*

Ogbu has studied minority education in the United States and other societies for almost 28 years.<sup>1</sup> During the first 15 years he concentrated on the differences in school performance between minority- and dominant-group students. He concluded that the differences were caused by the treatment of minority groups in society at large and in school as well as by the perceptions of the minorities and their responses to school due to such treatment (Ogbu 1974, 1978). In the early 1980s the focus of his research shifted toward explaining differences in school performance among minority groups themselves (Ogbu 1987). The focus on differences among minorities has generated a great deal of response from educational anthropologists and other researchers.<sup>2</sup> Some have conducted important research that either supports or challenges his perspective. But in reviewing these works one finds that some of his main ideas are not always understood.

Among those ideas is his classification of minority groups. One objective of this article is to clarify the classification. Some have interpreted his recent writing to mean that minority school performance is caused only by sociocultural adaptation. This is a misinterpretation because Ogbu has always said that "community forces" constitute one of two sets of factors influencing minority school performance (see Figure 1).<sup>3</sup> Thus,

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**Figure 1**  
Two parts of "the problem of minority" schooling.

another objective of this article is to clarify the role of community forces. Finally, we will address the issue that some have complained that Ogbu's work does not address pedagogical issues, although Ogbu has said that his work is not about pedagogy.

### A Brief History

#### *Phase One, 1968–1980*

As we have already noted, during the first period of his research Ogbu tried to explain why minority students perform less well in school than majority students. His search for an explanation began in 1968 with his

Stockton, California, study (Ogbu 1974). A few years later, he published a major comparative work on the same problem in six countries: Britain, India, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, and the United States. The study dealt with the education of *castelike minorities*. He classified these minorities as *castelike* because in every case they were a subordinate group in a stratification system more rigid than social class stratification. In every case, the minorities were historically denied *equal educational opportunities* in terms of access to educational resources, treatment in school, and rewards in employment and wages for educational accomplishments. Ogbu reached the same conclusion as in his Stockton study: namely, that their lower academic performance was a sort of adaptation to barriers in adult opportunity structure (Ogbu 1978).

### *Phase Two, 1980–1997*

Although Ogbu continues to study structural barriers in minority education, his research focus shifted at the beginning of the 1980s to “community forces,” which are products of sociocultural adaptation and are located within the minority community (Ogbu 1983, n.d.a). He hypothesized that the study of community forces would shed light on why immigrant minorities do well in school while nonimmigrants do less well. It is true that during his research in Stockton he had observed that immigrant and nonimmigrant minorities differed in sociocultural adaptation, but he did not explore the implications of this difference for schooling. He continued, however, to encounter the difference in the school performance of immigrant and nonimmigrant minorities in almost all of his subsequent comparative research. Ogbu is currently analyzing the ethnographic data from a comparative study of community forces and educational strategies among African Americans, Chinese Americans, and Mexican Americans in Oakland and Union City, in the San Francisco Bay area. He is also revising a book for publication by the Russell Sage Foundation based on the quantitative part of the study that included some 2,400 students (see also Ogbu 1995a, n.d.b).

Some of the questions that Ogbu asked himself and which others asked him include the following: Why do some minorities do better in school than others? Is it because they are more intelligent or genetically superior? Is it because they come from cultures better at educating their children? Is it because they possess languages or learning styles better suited to formal education?

From his comparative research Ogbu has concluded that (1) no minority group does better in school because it is genetically superior than others; (2) no minority culture is better at educating its children; and (3) no minority language is better suited for learning in school (Simons et al. n.d.). He has argued that from a comparative perspective, one cannot attribute the differences in minority school performance to cultural, linguistic, or genetic differences. This is not to deny genetic differences or to deny that cultural and language differences may have an adverse

or positive effect on minority school performance; but culture and language do not entirely determine the differences among minorities. Consider that some minority groups, like the Buraku outcast in Japan, do poorly in school in their country of origin but do quite well in the United States, or that Koreans do well in school in China and in the United States but do poorly in Japan. Comparative research suggests that we might discover at least a part of the explanation by closely looking at the histories and sociocultural adaptations of these minorities (Simons et al. n.d.). More specifically, to understand why minority groups differ among themselves in school performance we have to know two things: the first is their own responses to their history of incorporation into U.S. society and their subsequent treatment or mistreatment by white Americans. The second is how their responses to that history and treatment affect their perceptions of and responses to schooling.

Structural barriers and school factors affect minority school performance; however, minorities are also autonomous human beings who actively interpret and respond to their situation. Minorities are not helpless victims.

### A Cultural-Ecological Theory of Minority School Performance

Ogbu calls his explanation of minority school performance a *cultural-ecological theory*. This theory considers the broad societal and school factors *as well as* the dynamics within the minority communities. Ecology is the "setting," "environment," or "world" of people (minorities), and "cultural," broadly, refers to the way people (in this case the minorities) see their world and behave in it.

The theory has two major parts (see Figure 1 above). One part is about the way the minorities are treated or mistreated in education in terms of educational policies, pedagogy, and returns for their investment or school credentials. Ogbu calls this *the system*. The second part is about the way the minorities perceive and respond to schooling as a consequence of their treatment. Minority responses are also affected by how and why a group became a minority. This second set of factors is designated as *community forces* (Ogbu n.d.b).

Understanding how the system affects minority school performance calls for an examination of the overall white treatment of minorities. The latter includes the barriers faced by minorities *qua* minorities. These barriers are instrumental discrimination (e.g., in employment and wages), relational discrimination (such as social and residential segregation), and symbolic discrimination (e.g., denigration of the minority culture and language). Ogbu calls these discriminations *collective problems* faced by minorities (see Figure 2).

To explain the minorities' perceptions of and responses to education, the theory explores *the impact* of the white treatment of the minorities. This impact is expressed in their responses, or their "collective solutions," to the collective problems (see Figure 3). Minorities usually

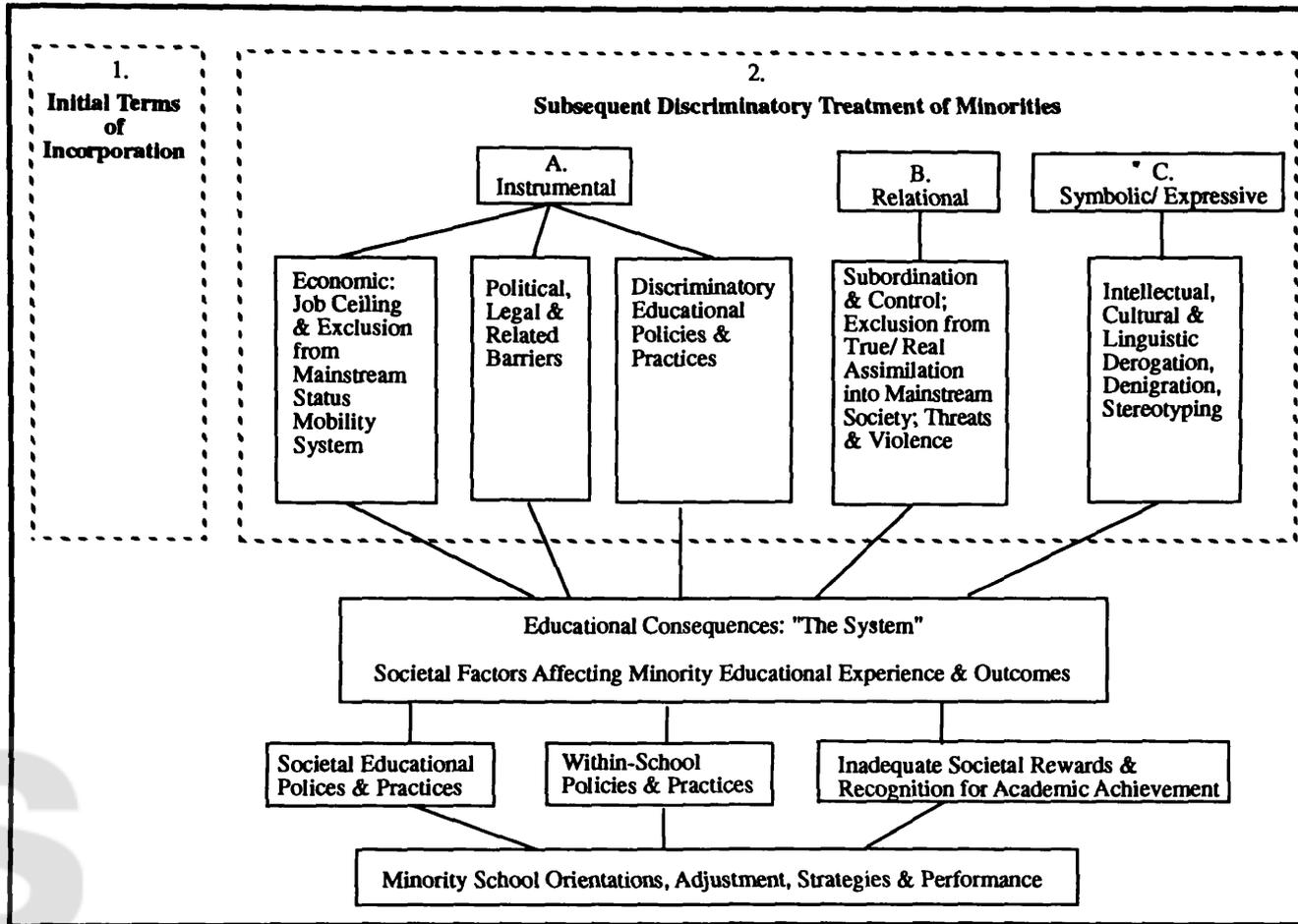


Figure 2. White treatment or "collective problems" faced by minorities.

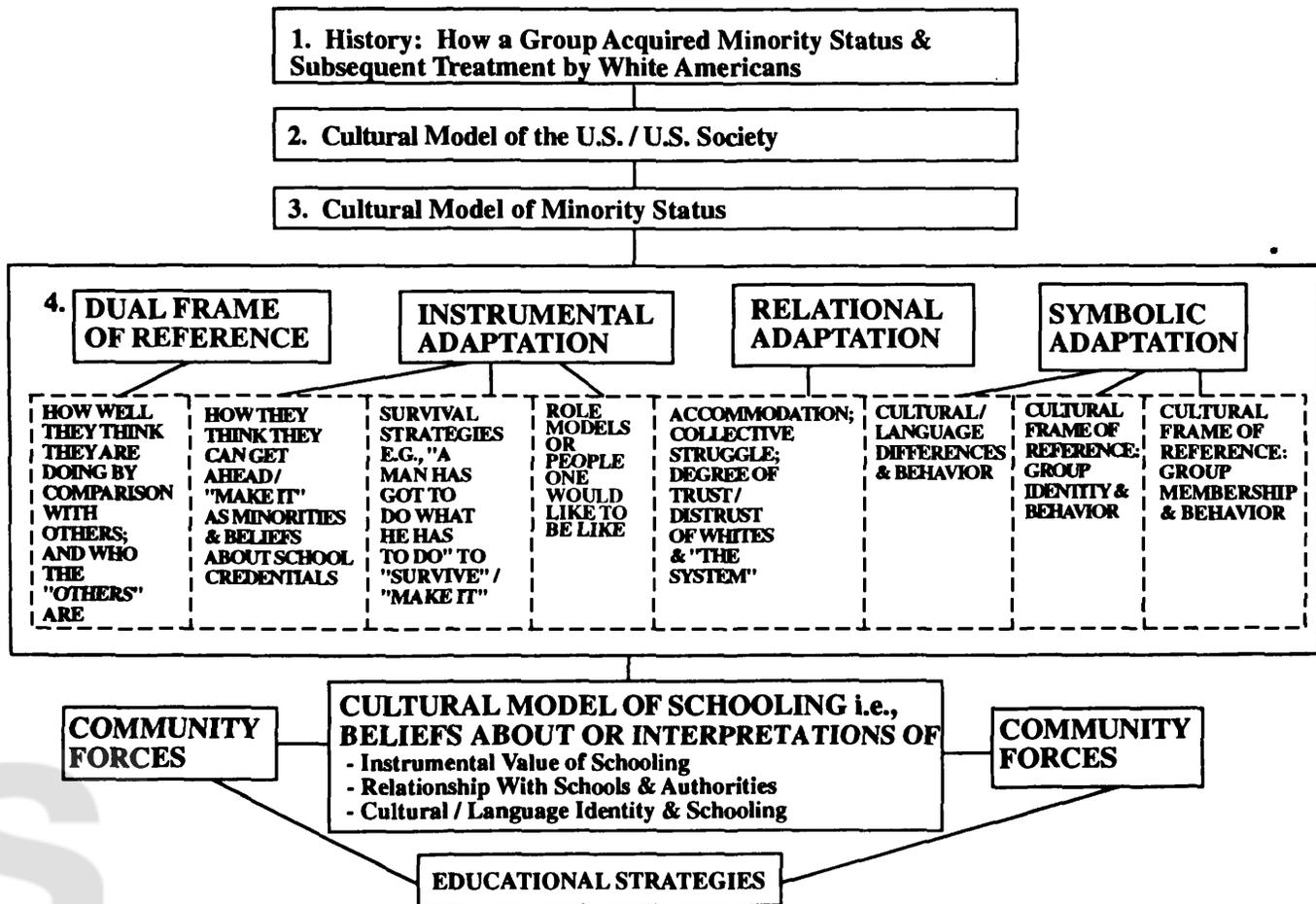


Figure 3. Minorities' sociocultural adaptations or "collective solutions" to "collective problems."

respond or develop collective solutions to the instrumental discrimination (for example, they develop a folk theory of how they can “make it” in the face of economic discrimination), relational discrimination (e.g., they may resort to “collective struggle,” become mistrustful of white Americans and their institutions), and symbolic discrimination (for example, they may develop an oppositional cultural and language frame of reference or selectively adopt “white ways”) (Ogbu 1995a, 1995b).

Having examined the collective problems faced by the minorities and the minorities’ collective solutions to those problems, analysis now focuses on the implications of both for minority schooling. According to the theory, the treatment of the minorities in the wider society is reflected in their treatment in education. The latter takes three forms, all of which affect school adjustment and performance (see Figure 1 above). The first is the overall educational policies and practices toward the minorities (for example, policy of school segregation, unequal school funding, and staffing of minority schools, et cetera). The second is how minority students are treated in schools and classrooms (e.g., level of teacher expectations, teacher-student interaction patterns, grouping and tracking, and so on). The third is the rewards, or lack of them, that society gives to minorities for their school credentials, especially in employment and wages. All minorities studied by Ogbu have experienced these discriminatory treatments.<sup>4</sup>

Structural barriers or discriminations in society and school are important determinants of low school achievement among minorities. However, they are not the sole cause of low school performance, otherwise all minorities would not do well in school since all are faced with such discriminations. Some educational anthropologists consider cultural and language differences the major cause of the problem (see Emihovich 1995; Jacob and Jordan 1993). It is true that cultural and language differences do cause learning problems. But cultural and language difference explanations do not account for the school success of some minority groups that face similar discontinuities as do others that are less successful. Consider the variation in the school performance of the minorities in Table 1. It appears that the minorities who are doing better are those most distant in culture and language from the public school. It is for these reasons that Ogbu has suggested that the clue to the differences among minorities in school performance may lie in the differences in their community forces.

The study of the community forces is essentially the study of minority perceptions of and responses to schooling. Four factors are hypothesized to constitute the community forces: a frame of minority school comparison (e.g., with schools “back home” or in white suburbs); beliefs about the instrumental value of schooling (for example, role of school credentials in getting ahead); relational interpretations of schooling (e.g., degree of trust of schools and school personnel); and symbolic beliefs about schooling (for example, whether learning school curriculum, language,

**Table 1.**  
**Ethnicity, cultural/language differences, and school performance in a junior high school, Oakland, California, 1994–95 school year**

Ethnic Group	GPA
Vietnamese	3.2
Chinese	3.0
Mien	2.5
Cambodians	2.2
Latinos/Mexican Americans	2.0
African Americans	2.6

Source: Yee et al. 1995

et cetera is considered harmful to minority cultural and language identity) (see Figure 4). As already noted, these community forces tend to be different for different types of minorities.

In developing this part of his theory, Ogbu has found his classification of minority groups useful. The heuristic value of the classification has further been enhanced by the concept of *settler society*. A settler society is a society where the ruling or dominant group is made up of immigrants from other societies who have come to settle there because they want to improve their economic, political, and social status, and so on. White Americans, the dominant group in the United States, are almost entirely immigrants. Other settler societies include Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and Singapore. The dominant groups in settler societies have certain beliefs and expectations in common, including the belief in opportunity in their appropriated territory for self-improvement, individual responsibility for self-improvement, and expectations that people in the society should more or less conform or "assimilate," especially in language and culture. Another feature of settler societies pertinent to the cultural-ecological theory is that within such a society there are often at least two kinds of minorities: those who have come to settle for the same reasons as the dominant group and those who have been made a part of the society against their will.

We now turn to Ogbu's classification of the minority groups to clarify it.<sup>5</sup> Following this, we describe the patterns of adaptations of the minority types and the educational consequences of the adaptations on community forces. In the final part of the article, we suggest some implications for educational practice.

### Different Types of Minority Status

Ogbu defines minority status on the basis of power relations between groups, not in terms of numerical representation. A population is a minority if it occupies some form of subordinate power position in relation to another population within the same country or society.

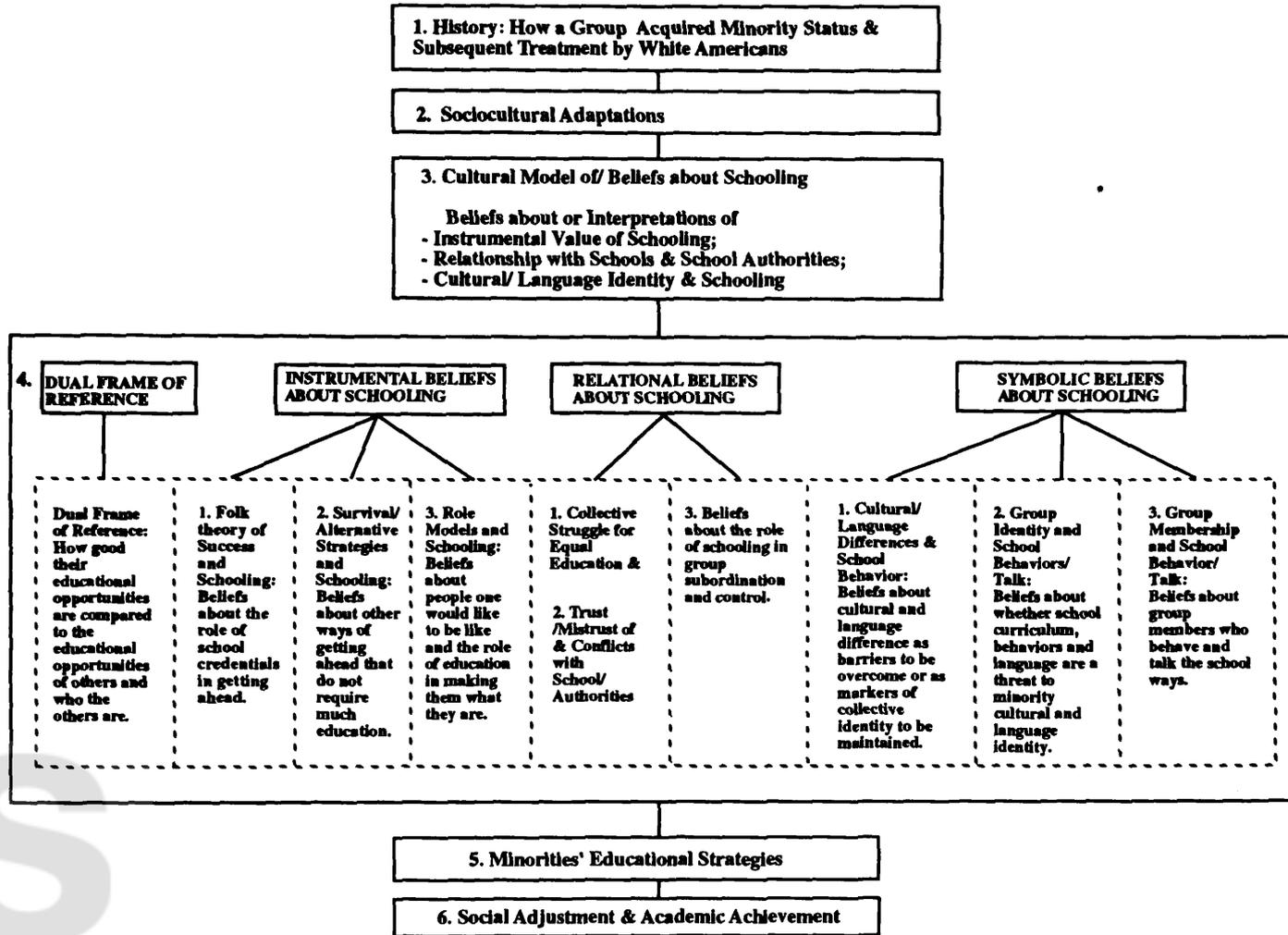


Figure 4. Community forces influencing minorities' schooling.

For the purpose of explaining differences in school performance, Ogbu classifies minority groups into *autonomous, voluntary (immigrant)*, and *involuntary (nonimmigrant)* minorities. The different categories call attention to *different histories* of the people who make up the larger category referred to as minorities.

The *autonomous minorities* are people who belong to groups that are small in number. They may be different in race, ethnicity, religion, or language from the dominant group. In the United States some examples are the Amish, Jews, and Mormons. Although these groups may suffer discrimination, they are not totally dominated and oppressed, and their school achievement is no different from the dominant group (Ogbu 1978). There are no nonwhite autonomous minorities in the United States, and since we are concerned with people of color we will not discuss autonomous minorities further.

The classification of minorities into voluntary and involuntary groups is determined mainly by (1) *the nature* of white American involvement with their becoming minorities and (2) *the reasons they came or were brought* to the United States.

### *Voluntary (Immigrant) Minorities*

Voluntary (immigrant) minorities are those who have more or less willingly moved to the United States because they expect better opportunities (better jobs, more political or religious freedom) than they had in their homelands or places of origin. The people in this category may be different from the majority in race and ethnicity or in religion or language. The important distinguishing features are that (1) the people in this category voluntarily chose to move to U.S. society in the hope of a better future, and (2) they do not interpret their presence in the United States as forced upon them by the U.S. government or by white Americans. Voluntary minorities usually experience some problems in school, especially when they first arrive, because of society's discriminatory educational policies and practices (ARC 1982; Low 1982; Wollenberg 1995) and because of language and cultural differences (Wang 1995). However, immigrant minorities do not experience long-lasting school performance difficulty and long-lasting cultural and language problems. Some examples of voluntary minorities in the United States are immigrants from Africa, Cuba, China, India, Japan, Korea, Central and South America, the Caribbean (Jamaica, Trinidad, the Dominican Republic), and Mexico.

### *Refugees, Migrant/Guest Workers, Undocumented Workers, and Binationals*

Refugees who were forced to come to the United States because of civil war or other crises in their places of origin are not immigrants or voluntary minorities. They did not freely choose or plan to come to settle in the United States to improve their status. However, they share some

attitudes and behaviors of immigrant minorities which lead to school success. For example, they come to the United States with already existing differences in languages and cultures and with a *tourist attitude* toward the cultural and language differences. Like tourists, they knew before coming to the United States that to accomplish the goal of their emigration they would have to learn new, that is, white American, ways of behaving and talking. The tourist attitude helps them to learn to behave and talk like white Americans without fear of losing their cultural and language identity. Examples of refugees in the United States are Cambodians, Ethiopians, Haitians, Hmong, and Vietnamese.

Migrant/guest workers are not immigrant or voluntary minorities because they usually do not plan to settle in the United States permanently. Like refugees, they bring with them pre-existing cultural and language differences and are able to adopt the tourist attitude toward learning the culture and language of their host society. However, since the sojourn of migrant workers is temporary, they tend to learn only as much of their host's culture and language as necessary to achieve their temporary goals, which may not include school credentials. In countries where it is permitted, some migrant workers in due course may choose to become immigrants (Hagan 1994).

Neither undocumented workers nor binationals are immigrants or voluntary minorities as defined in the cultural-ecological theory. Since undocumented workers are not an easily identifiable population, we have no way of knowing about whether they came to settle permanently in the United States or about their sociocultural adaptation and their school experience.

Some studies indicate that binationals maintain economic and other ties with their places of origin and that these ties make their sociocultural adaptation different from that of immigrants from the same places of origin (Baca 1994). Thus, the community forces that influence the education of binationals appear to be different from those that influence the education of immigrants. For example, whereas immigrants often operate on the belief that they are preparing their children to live and work in the United States, binationals are not always sure or clear about where they are preparing their children to have a future, in the United States or in their places of origin (Baca 1994).

### *Involuntary (Nonimmigrant) Minorities*

Involuntary (nonimmigrant) minorities are people who have been conquered, colonized, or enslaved. Unlike immigrant minorities, the nonimmigrants have been made to be a part of the U.S. society permanently *against their will*. Two distinguishing features of involuntary minorities are that (1) they did not choose but were forced against their will to become a part of the United States, and (2) they themselves usually interpret their presence in the United States as forced on them by white people. Again, the people in this category may be different from

the dominant group in race and ethnicity or in religion or language. Involuntary minorities are less economically successful than voluntary minorities, usually experience greater and more persistent cultural and language difficulties, and do less well in school.

Involuntary minorities in the United States are American Indians and Alaska Natives, the original owners of the land, who were conquered; early Mexican Americans in the Southwest who were also conquered; Native Hawaiians who were colonized; Puerto Ricans who consider themselves a colonized people; and black Americans who were brought to the United States as slaves.

*Involuntary Minorities versus Castelike Minorities.* Involuntary minorities are a part of what Ogbu called "castelike minorities" in his earlier work (Ogbu 1978). Further research has shown, however, that some immigrant minorities may also have castelike relationships with the dominant group. This seems to have been the case of Chinese immigrants in the Mississippi Delta in the 19th century (Loewen 1988). But unlike nonimmigrant castelike minorities, the Chinese were able to escape from their initial castelike status through beliefs and behaviors more or less typical of voluntary minorities.

### *Descendants or Later Generations*

Children of immigrant minorities are voluntary minorities like their foreign-born parents. For example, second-, third-, or fourth-generation U.S.-born Chinese are voluntary minorities. It does not matter that it was their forebears rather than themselves who made the decision to come to settle in the United States. Ogbu has found that the education of the descendants of immigrants continues to be influenced by the community forces of their forebears.<sup>6</sup>

The exceptions are descendants of immigrants from groups who share affinity with nonimmigrant minorities, that is, with those minorities who were originally incorporated into U.S. society against their will through conquest, colonization, or slavery. Immigrants having such an affinity are usually treated by white Americans as a part of the pre-established nonimmigrant groups. White Americans force such immigrants to reside and work alongside the nonimmigrant group through residential segregation, job discrimination, and other discriminatory treatments. Under these circumstances the immigrants and nonimmigrants intermarry and their descendants grow up with their nonimmigrant peers, tend to identify with them, and assume the same sense of peoplehood or collective identity. This is what has been happening in the United States with black immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean. Their descendants eventually become "Black American."<sup>7</sup> As a result of their assimilation into the involuntary Black American minority group, some descendants of the earlier Afro-Caribbean immigrants have become Black American civil rights leaders.

A similar process of assimilation takes place among Mexican immigrants who, in subsequent generations, become a part of the involuntary Mexican American minority group. However, there is a difference between descendants of Mexican immigrants and descendants of black immigrants: descendants of Mexican immigrants have options not available to descendants of black immigrants. One such option is that an offspring of Mexican-Anglo intermarriage with enough white features can "pass" and become a part of the white majority. One informant told Ogbu that since the civil rights movement of the 1960s, some Mexican immigrants have been using intermarriage with Anglos to enable their offspring to pass into white society and avoid membership in the involuntary Mexican American minority group (David Garza, Personal communication, Austin, TX, November 1996).

### *Further Important Features of the Classification*

*The Classification Is Not Determined by Race.* The distinction between voluntary and involuntary minority status is not based on race. Rather, it is a part of a general framework that explains the beliefs and behaviors of different minorities, regardless of race or ethnicity, and how these beliefs and behaviors contribute to school success or failure. It is not about black Americans as an involuntary minority or Chinese Americans as a voluntary minority group. The distinction is based upon a careful comparative study of ethnic and racial minorities and how the status of a group affects its economic progress and academic performance. The framework is not specifically directed at any particular race or even at any particular country. For example, Koreans are voluntary minorities in the United States (Y. Lee 1991) and China (Weiwen and Qingnan 1993; Yin 1989) but are involuntary minorities in Japan (Y. Lee 1991; Lee and DeVos 1981); Maya Indians are voluntary minorities in the United States but involuntary minorities in Mexico (Hagan 1994); and black Americans are voluntary minorities in Ghana, Japan, France, and other countries but are involuntary minorities in the United States.

It is a group's history—how and why a group became a minority and the role of the dominant group in society in their acquisition of minority status—that determines its voluntary or involuntary status rather than its race and ethnicity.<sup>8</sup> Chinese Americans are voluntary minorities because of the ways and reasons they came to the United States, not because of their Chinese ethnicity. Black Americans are involuntary minorities in the United States because they were brought here as slaves against their will, not because they are black. The fact that black people from the Caribbean and Africa in the United States are voluntary minorities further demonstrates that it is history and not race that determines voluntary or involuntary status. Colin Powell makes this point very clearly:

My Black ancestors may have been dragged to Jamaica in chains, but they were not dragged to the United States. That is a far different emotional and psychological beginning than that of American Blacks, whose ancestors were brought here in chains. [Powell 1995]

*Dominant Patterns of Belief and Behavior as Focus of Analysis.* The framework is about how *groups* operate within a society. It focuses analysis on the *dominant* patterns of belief and behavior within different minority groups. Ogbu's research suggests that some beliefs and behaviors apply to enough members of a minority group or a type of minority group to form a visible pattern. Not all members of a minority group believe the same thing or behave the same way. Some individuals will always believe or behave differently from the dominant pattern in their group. This point can be illustrated with findings from Ogbu's current research in Oakland, California. He found in one black American community that the people speak an English dialect that they call their "regular English." But some members of the community speak standard English, or white people's "regular English," at least when talking with outsiders. He also discovered that Oakland Chinese more or less practice ancestor worship. It is customary for these Chinese to visit their family graves (*ch'ing ming*) to sweep the graves and pay respect to dead ancestors every year between March and April. It does not follow that every Chinese American in Oakland practices it, but enough of them do so for one to speak of Oakland Chinese as ancestor worshippers. There are also class and regional differences in beliefs and behaviors within each minority group.

What the theory does is to provide a framework for understanding the beliefs and behaviors of members of minority groups, including the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of minority students, who follow the dominant patterns of their groups. An analogy is speaking about differences in social class beliefs and behaviors. When we refer to middle-class beliefs or behaviors, we do not usually mean that among white, middle-class Americans everybody believes the same thing or behaves the same way; nor does reference to the lower class mean that among white, lower-class Americans everyone acts alike. The same is true when we speak of the beliefs and behaviors of voluntary and involuntary minorities.

*Beliefs and Behaviors of Voluntary and Involuntary Minority Groups Represent Ends of a Continuum.* Furthermore, the distinguishing patterns of beliefs and behaviors of voluntary and involuntary minorities are more of a continuum than a strict dichotomy. Some beliefs and behaviors that are attributed to voluntary minorities are also found among involuntary minorities, although to a lesser degree and vice versa.

*Differences within Voluntary and Involuntary Categories.* All voluntary minority groups are not alike and all involuntary minority groups are not alike. Among the groups that make up each type or category, there are differences in the degree to which members of a given minority group exhibit the dominant patterns of beliefs and behaviors characteristic of

that category. For example, among involuntary minority groups, black Americans are the most visible. Their beliefs and behaviors show the most conformity to the pattern characteristic of involuntary minorities. The beliefs and behaviors of Mexican Americans, a group with a different and more varied history, circumstances, and skin color, show less conformity to the involuntary minority pattern.

Another source of difference among involuntary minority groups is the degree to which individual members can leave the group and thus escape subordination, that is, the possibility of "passing." Passing is most difficult for black Americans because the caste system under which they have existed defines any offspring of black and white mating, no matter what his or her color, complexion, or physical features, as black and thus prohibited from joining the white community (Burma 1947; Davis et al. 1942). Finally, for voluntary minorities the more recent the immigration, the more they conform to the voluntary minority pattern.

*The Same Treatment Elicits Different Interpretations.* As was noted earlier, the same treatment can be interpreted differently by different minority groups, depending upon their history. For the same reason, when they encounter similar cultural or language differences they tend to interpret and respond to them differently. For example, Ogbu has found in his Oakland study that when asked to learn standard English in school the two types of minorities seem to respond differently because they attach different meanings to speaking standard English (Ogbu 1995b, n.d.d).

With these points in mind, we turn to how minorities, as active agents, interpret and respond to their treatment in U.S. society because of differing histories. Following this, we examine how their interpretations and responses (i.e., beliefs and behaviors) affect their schooling.

### **Minorities' Adaptations: Different Cultural Models (Interpretations) of and Responses to U.S. Society**

Ogbu's research suggests that voluntary and involuntary minorities develop *different cultural models* of U.S. society. Cultural models are the ways that members of a minority group understand or interpret their world and guide their actions in that world. This understanding falls into four types in which voluntary and involuntary minorities differ: frames of reference, folk theories of "making it" (and role models), degree of trust of white people and their institutions, and beliefs about the effect of adopting white ways on minority identity. The description of the general responses of the minorities below follows the schematic representation in Figure 3 above; the description of their responses to education specifically is represented schematically in Figure 4 above.

It is important to keep in mind that the following discussion is about *dominant* patterns of beliefs and behaviors within each category or within each minority group. As we stated before, not all members of a minority group believe the same thing or behave the same way. Some individuals

and some subgroups believe or behave differently from the dominant pattern of the group.

### *Status Frame of Reference*

A frame of reference is the way a person (or a group) looks at a situation. People in different situations differ in their frames of reference. Voluntary and involuntary minorities whose situations are different tend to have differing frames of reference, which suggests why they also differ in their attitudes and behaviors.

Voluntary minorities have a *positive dual frame of reference*, at least during the first generation. One frame of reference is based on their situation in the United States. The second frame of reference is based on their situation "back home," or in their place of origin. For them the comparison is a positive one because they see more opportunities for success in the United States than back home. As a result, they are willing to accommodate and to accept less than equal treatment in order to improve their chances for economic success (Ogbu 1978; Shibusani and Kwan 1965).

Although many immigrants are conscious of the differences that exist between them and white Americans, their comparative frame of reference is the "back home" situation.<sup>9</sup> They became immigrants because they hoped to do better than they did previously in their home countries or places of origin. In comparing their situation in the United States to that of family and friends back home, they often conclude that they are doing better or are seeing better opportunities for their children in the United States. This provides them with motivation to work hard to succeed. Immigrants think that discrimination is temporary and may be the result of their "foreigner status" or because they do not speak English or do not speak it well (Gibson 1988; Ogbu n.d.b).

Although children of immigrants may not have a first-hand experience of limited economic or other opportunities back home, they are likely to have heard of such experiences from their parents and other adults in their community. Consequently, they also tend to believe that there are more opportunities to succeed in the United States than back home. In Ogbu's study of Chinese Americans, Mexican Americans, and black Americans in Oakland, most students of immigrant descent reported that the opportunity to succeed or make "progress" is better in the United States than elsewhere; equally important, they themselves as well as people in their families and communities believed that what makes a person successful in the United States is education and hard work, whereas back home a person succeeds by getting help from friends and relatives, by using contacts ("whom you know"), through favoritism, or "because of your name" (Ogbu n.d.b; Suarez-Orozco 1989).

Voluntary minorities' attitude toward schools is influenced by the "back home" comparison. The immigrants believe that they have more educational opportunity in the United States than back home. Some

immigrated to the United States specifically for the opportunity to give their children an "American education," especially higher education. They see higher education in the United States as providing a chance for professional careers they would not otherwise have attained back home.

Here is how some parents put it:

Oakland Chinese Parent #227C: It is very important [for my children to make good grades] because the purpose for us to come is to let them have a good future and become successful. I sacrificed everything for them [to come and get American education].

Interviewer: What did you tell your children about why they are going to school?

Oakland Chinese Parent #223C: I told them to study hard and have a good future. I always tell them I had sacrificed a lot. The reason for us to come here is for them to have a good education. I always remind them about this. [Minority Education Project n.d.]

Involuntary minorities also have a dual frame of reference. However, their comparison is both different and *negative*, in contrast to that of voluntary minorities. The first frame of reference is their social and economic status in the United States. The second frame of reference is the social and economic status of middle-class white Americans. For involuntary minorities the comparison is a negative one because they see their economic and social condition, as well as their schools, as inferior to those of middle-class white Americans. They believe and resent the fact that whites have more opportunities. They do not believe strongly that the United States is a land of great opportunity where *anyone* who works hard and has a good education will succeed. This negative comparison is also true for middle-class involuntary minorities. The latter do not believe that they are fully rewarded or accepted for their education and hard work when they compare their situation to that of their white peers (Benjamin 1992; Cose 1993; Matusow 1989). Because discrimination against them has existed for many generations, involuntary minorities tend to believe that it appears to be a permanent feature of U.S. society.

Involuntary minorities' evaluation of their schools is influenced by the negative comparison with white suburban schools. To begin with, they do not consider their ghetto, barrio, or reservation schools "better" because they do not have the "back home" educational situation. Instead, they think that their schools are "worse" because they are not like white schools in the suburbs. They see no justifiable reason for the inferior education—except discrimination. They tend to be more critical of the school curriculum and mistrustful of teachers and the school than the immigrants.

### *Instrumental Responses*

Instrumental responses have to do with the means necessary to succeed in the United States; they include folk theories of "making it" and role models.

*Folk Theory of "Making It."* A group's ideas about how to achieve success, folk theories are not the official policies or beliefs of society but the community's or peoples's ideas. They are orally transmitted beliefs about the workings of society. Because of their differing histories and perceptions of opportunities, voluntary and involuntary minorities differ in their views of making it in the United States.

Voluntary minorities' folk theory of making it involves the belief that hard work, following the rules, and most important, getting good education will lead to good employment and success in U.S. society. When they first arrive they are optimistic that with education and hard work they will make it. Their folk theory is partly the product of immigrants' belief about opportunities in the United States *before* emigration and partly due to the fact that they, especially the most recent immigrants, have not yet been exposed to discrimination long enough to have internalized its effects or have those effects become an ingrained part of their thinking (Ogbu 1978). In Oakland, for example, immigrants are more concerned with "language problems" (e.g., not knowing English) than with "racial discrimination" (Ogbu n.d.b).

Immigrants see school success as a major route to making it in the United States. The community, family, and students believe strongly that the same strategies that middle-class white Americans employ for success, namely, hard work, following the rules, and getting good grades, will also work for them in school and in the future job market.

Involuntary minorities have an ambivalent folk theory of making it. True, they believe that hard work and education are necessary to succeed in the United States. But because they have faced employment and wage discrimination as well as other barriers to making it in a white-controlled economy for many generations, they have come to believe that (1) job and wage discrimination is more or less institutionalized and permanent, and (2) individual effort, education, and hard work are important but not enough to overcome racism and discrimination. The ambivalence may not be conscious. Parents and other adults in the community tell children to do well in school because that will help them get good jobs and be successful adults. However, from their personal and group experiences with employment discrimination they know only too well that school success often does not lead to a good job. Moreover, they often engage in various forms of "collective struggle" with whites for more job opportunities. Involuntary minority children are affected by this actual texture of their parents' lives: they observe and hear about their parents' experiences. Eventually they share their parents' ambivalence. Thus, involuntary minorities are less sure that education leads to success or helps to overcome barriers to upward mobility. The community,

families, and students are skeptical and ambivalent about the role of education in getting ahead.

Some studies (such as Mickelson 1990) may provide a clue to this ambivalence. When asked, most involuntary minority parents and students say they believe that education and hard work are the ways to succeed. However, their individual and community's concrete experiences with job and other economic discrimination, combined with their awareness of historical segregation and racism in schools, contradict this abstract belief and serve to reinforce the concrete belief that education and hard work will not necessarily lead to economic success. Furthermore, they believe that schools cannot be trusted to educate their children properly. Mickelson found in her research that parents' and students' concrete experiences predicted school performance, while their abstract beliefs did not. This suggests that it is people's actual experiences with education *and* with opportunity structure or rewards of education that influence their behavior much more than abstract beliefs about the importance of education.

*Role Models.* Role models within the voluntary minority communities are usually people who have fully acculturated, attained a higher education, and achieved economic success. They are hard workers who have played by the rules of the system and succeeded. Voluntary minorities are less conflicted about accommodating to white society, so their role models include people who fully adopt white ways and language (see section on symbolic interpretation). Among the Chinese Americans, successful members of earlier immigrants serve as role models for newer immigrants.

Involuntary minorities' role models include conventional categories—entertainers, athletes, professionals, and the wealthy—as well as nonconventional types—rebels against white society and people of exceptional courage. Unlike voluntary minorities who admire conventional role models (e.g., minority doctors, engineers, executives, lawyers) for working their way up from the inside and playing by the rules, involuntary minorities tend to criticize minority professionals as “unconventional” (from a minority perspective), rule-breakers, people who achieved success because they worked twice as hard, were twice as smart, twice as strong, and sometimes were just lucky. Furthermore, minority professionals, businesspeople, and politicians are not very influential as role models because it is suspected that for them to have succeeded they probably have had to adopt white ways such as speaking standard English, which is seen as giving in to the white oppressor and abandoning their identity (Taylor 1973). Moreover, the professionals among involuntary minorities have few ties to the community and are not visible in it. Athletes and entertainers are admired, but often these are people who did not use education but talent and physical strength as a route to success.

There are interesting differences between black and Chinese parents in Ogbu's Oakland study in the choice of role models for their children. Asked whom they would like their children to be when they grow up, Chinese parents mentioned scientists, astronauts, lawyers, doctors, architects, and so on. Generally they wanted their children to grow up as professionals in technical fields. In contrast, only one black parent mentioned someone in a professional field, a brother whom she said was "a successful executive" with a major department store (unnamed) in New York City. One parent mentioned Jesus Christ; many others named famous celebrities (e.g., Michael Jackson, Bill Cosby, M. C. Hammer) and several athletes. [Minority Education Project n.d.]

### *Trust in White Institutions*

Immigrants have an optimistic, practical attitude when they arrive. This leads them to trust white-controlled institutions like the public schools; at least they trust what the institutions have to offer. Ogbu calls this *pragmatic trust* (Ogbu n.d.c; see also Gibson 1988). But where immigrants are blatantly denied educational opportunity, such as exclusion from or segregation in the public schools as was the case in San Francisco, they have challenged school authorities and become mistrustful of them (Low 1982; Wollenberg 1995). In general, immigrant minorities do not question the authority of schools and other institutions, and they tend to conform to the rules of the schools because they see them as providing a route to success in society. Some immigrants, such as Koreans in Los Angeles (Eu Yum Kim, Personal communication, Berkeley, CA, 1993) and Afro-Caribbeans in New York (Ksinitz 1992) establish their own schools to supplement their children's education where they feel that it is inadequate in the public schools.

In the case of involuntary minorities, their long history of discrimination, racism, and conflict leads them to distrust white-controlled institutions. The schools are treated with suspicion because the minorities, with justification, believe that the public schools will not educate their children like they educate white children (Ogbu n.d.c). Some involuntary minorities, such as black Muslims, have established their own schools, but their rationale differs from that of voluntary minorities (Francine Shakir, Personal communication, Berkeley, CA, 1996).

### *Symbolic Response and Collective Identity*

Symbolic response has to do with the way minorities understand and interpret the differences between their culture and language and white American culture and language. Adopting white ways or crossing cultural/language boundaries has a very different meaning for voluntary and involuntary minorities.<sup>10</sup>

Voluntary minorities come to the United States seeking a better life. They also come with the tourist model or attitude mentioned above toward learning the culture and language of their new society. For this reason, they are willing to learn to speak standard English and to

conform to the rules and mores of the public schools and other societal institutions. This is particularly important because these things are the requirements of an institution, the school, which the immigrants see as holding the key to making it in the United States. However, as we will see below, knowing that standard English and school rules are important for success is not sufficient to enable a minority group to actually learn and behave accordingly. What further helps the immigrants to cross cultural and language boundaries is that they define the cultural and language differences they encounter as barriers to be overcome by learning the differences. Furthermore, they are willing to accommodate because they do not imagine that learning mainstream white ways and language will harm their group identity. They see it as *additive*, that is, they are learning new skills, behaviors, and language that will enable them to succeed in society while still retaining their own culture and language. For example, immigrants see learning English in school as adding another language rather than replacing their native language.

Involuntary minorities did not choose to become minorities in a new society to achieve a desired or better future (e.g., better education, better jobs, et cetera). They do not, therefore, possess the tourist attitude about learning how to behave and talk like white Americans. Like the immigrants, they know and believe that to succeed in school and to get good jobs they have to master standard English and master some white people's ways of behaving. Thus, they consider the cultural and language differences as barriers to be overcome by learning the differences. Yet they have difficulty doing so for two reasons: One is that they feel that these differences or requirements are imposed on them by white Americans. The second and more serious reason is that involuntary minorities interpret the cultural and language differences as markers of collective identity to be maintained, not merely barriers to be overcome. In responding to their forced incorporation into U.S. society and their subsequent mistreatment, they develop a collective identity defined to a great extent by its difference from and opposition to white American identity. Given this interpretation, some individuals feel that if they learn white American ways or "white talk" they will lose their minority identity. For them, adopting white ways and language is a subtractive or replacement process that threatens minority identity and therefore is resisted. The special problem of nonimmigrant minorities is that they hold two incompatible beliefs about school cultural and language requirements (Ogbu n.d.c).

There are both ethnographic and nonethnographic data suggesting that involuntary minorities equate learning white ways with losing their minority identity. Again, we are writing about a dominant pattern, not generalizing for every individual. The dominant pattern existed in the Oakland black community studied by Ogbu. The following response by a black parent is typical:

Parent 25L: I think it's literally insane and stuff for a lot [of] black people who are black [to] see black people who pretend to be white.

Interviewer: Um hum.

Parent 25L: They get very angry. . . . Angry . . . because they're proud of their being black. And to see somebody else who is black actually put it down and try to hide it. I mean it's like . . . because I feel that way, too. It's like . . . feeling that bad about being black that you want to hide it.

Interviewer: Um hum.

Parent 25L: That's what you're gonna be from now until the day you die and ain't nothing nobody gonna do to change it. [That is, you should retain your black identity]. [Minority Education Project n.d.]

A number of minority authors have also addressed the issue of the interpretation of school requirements as a threat to minorities' collective identities. For example, Luster (1992) discovered during her ethnographic study of black women in San Francisco who were attending a GED-preparatory school that the biggest signifier of "acting white" and a source of strong opposition was speaking standard English. This minority also opposes adopting white behaviors or ways of talking because they think that the person doing so is denying his or her minority identity (see also Becknell 1987:36; David Garza, Personal communication, Austin, TX, November 1996; Steele 1992; Taylor 1973).

### Community Forces and Schooling: Attitudes and Behaviors in School

The beliefs and responses of the minorities discussed above affect their attitudes and behaviors toward school. Voluntary and involuntary minorities differ in these attitudes and behaviors (see Figure 4 above).<sup>11</sup> Once again, the reader should keep in mind that what we present in this section are *dominant patterns* of attitudes and behaviors within each category. There are both individual and subgroup variations in school attitudes and behaviors.

#### *Voluntary Minorities*

Due to the way and the reasons they became minorities, their pragmatically positive attitude toward U.S. society and institutions, and the way they interpret cultural and language differences, voluntary minority *communities and parents* are strongly committed to their children succeeding in school. They have high academic expectations of their children and tend to hold the children, rather than the schools, responsible for academic performance. Except where they encounter deliberate and blatant educational discrimination, as in San Francisco, immigrants do not usually blame or even question their children's teachers for problems their children encounter. They are unequivocal in their support

of their children learning English as well as the rest of the curriculum (see the comments by a Chinese parent in the following excerpt). The reason for this unequivocal support is that they see learning these things, especially English, as a necessary requirement for success in school and in the job market. This belief leads them to expect their children to get high grades. Immigrants also seem to have strong control of their children's time, which allows them to make sure that the children do homework even when their parents are not able to help them.

Oakland Chinese Parent #279C: I don't know what they do in school. If they are not good in English their teachers should help them more in English. I wish their teacher should help them as much as possible and encourage them more. Chinese students are usually very hardworking. The problem is that they can't speak English well. If they don't understand [English] they won't get good grades. Teachers should help them more so they can catch up with others. [Minority Education Project n.d.]

Voluntary minority *students* share their parents' and community's positive attitudes and verbal commitment to school. They work hard, strive for high grades, pay attention in class, do their homework, and generally follow school rules. Immigrant minority students are rarely disruptive in class, and they show respect for the teacher. They are anxious to learn English. Their peers support school success, so that they experience minimal peer pressures detrimental to academic achievement.

### *Involuntary Minorities*

Involuntary minority *communities and parents* have ambivalent attitudes toward schools. On the one hand, they strongly endorse learning standard English and other requirements for school success and future jobs. On the other hand, their support for the abstract ideology that education is the key to success in life is contradicted by their concrete experiences with society and by the failure of schooling to lead to economic rewards for them.

Consequently, involuntary minority parents seem to convey to their children contradictory messages about education: they tell their children to work hard in school, but then their own attitudes and comments show a mistrust of schools in terms of quality education and future economic rewards. They hold schools and teachers, rather than their children, responsible for poor academic performance. When their children receive poor grades they blame teachers for not teaching their children properly, for not informing parents in time that their children are not doing well in class, and for treating their children in a discriminatory manner.

In addition to their ambivalence about the instrumental value of education and their mistrust of the schools, involuntary minorities also face identity problems. Ogbu has suggested that involuntary minorities have developed oppositional collective or group identities (i.e., the sense of who they are) in response to their treatment by white Americans. Their

identities are defined to some extent by their difference from the white society (Ogbu 1995a). Because their identities were developed in response to discrimination and racism, these minorities are not anxious to give them up simply because their "oppressors" require them to do so.

Oppositional identity plays a major role in the attitudes of the community, parents, and students toward school because they see the school as a white institution. The requirements for school success, which involve mastering the school curriculum, learning to speak and write standard English, and exhibiting "good" school behaviors, are interpreted as white society's requirements designed to deprive minorities of their identities. For example, teaching standard English at school may be interpreted as a mechanism of language assimilation (Steele 1992). Thus, conforming to school requirements means "acting white" and giving up one's minority identity. Behaving or talking in a manner that leads to academic success is feared as likely to displace one's minority identity. These beliefs create two dilemmas for involuntary minority students. First, they make the students feel that they have to choose between (1) conforming to the school demands and rewards for certain attitudes and behaviors that are definitely "white," especially the mastery and usage of standard English, and (2) the community interpretations and disapproval of or ambivalence toward those attitudes and behaviors.

The second dilemma is that these beliefs make the students feel that they must choose between (1) an instrumental interpretation of schooling as a route to future employment and upward social mobility, and (2) the suspicion of the community that the school curriculum is something designed to displace their minority identity. Steele clearly expresses this identity-transforming role of the curriculum of the public school:

One factor is the basic assimilationist offer that schools make to blacks: You can be valued and rewarded in school (and society), the schools say to these students, but you must first master the culture and ways of the American mainstream, and since that mainstream (as it is represented in school) is essentially white, this means you must give up many particulars of being black—styles of speech and appearance, value priorities, preferences—at least in [a] mainstream setting. This is asking a lot. [1992:68–75; see also Luster 1992; Ogbu 1995a]

Involuntary minorities see the curriculum as an attempt to impose white culture on them. This leads them to question the curriculum for not including information about their minority history and experiences. They want their children to "talk proper" but are uncomfortable when the children speak standard English, because they see this as tending to separate the children from the family and the community or to claim that one is better than other members of the family and community. The double message that involuntary minority parents and communities send to their children is to do well in school, but be wary of your teachers, school officials, and the curriculum because they are a part of white institutions that cannot be trusted (Ogbu n.d.d).

The parents' and community's ambivalence is reflected in the attitude and, most important, the behaviors of *students* in school. Like their parents and members of their community, the students have an abstract belief in the importance of "getting a good education." However, their attitudes and behaviors contradict their verbal assertions. The mixed feelings lead to reduced efforts, which manifest themselves in failure to pay attention in class, do homework, and keep up with school assignments, and in claims that the work is uninteresting and boring. Some students are openly defiant as they challenge the teachers' authority. They do not put much effort into learning standard English because they see it as separating them from their peers, family, and community, thus threatening their minority identity. There is a strong negative peer group influence that more or less stigmatizes academic success and using standard English as "acting white." All of these attitudes and behaviors lead inevitably to poor academic performance.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

One important objective of the cultural-ecological theory is to explain the differences in school achievement between voluntary and involuntary minorities. The theory is not a pedagogical one in that it does not discuss strategies for teachers of voluntary or involuntary minority students. However, by explaining the nature of the problem, it leads to some educational strategies for helping to improve learning.

One point must be kept in mind while thinking about teaching minority students in light of the theory. The theory does not posit explicitly or implicitly that group membership alone determines school success or failure. For any individual student, being a member of a group that can be characterized as voluntary or involuntary does not solely determine that student's school success or failure. What the categories do is to help educators think about the differences that exist between groups, not among individuals. Teachers should avoid basing expectations about an individual's school performance and behavior on group membership. Students should be treated as individuals. The value of the theory is that it will help educators understand why students may behave the way they do inside and outside the classroom when they are following their groups' pattern of behavior. It follows from the cultural-ecological theory that in order to help involuntary minority students succeed in school, the problem of the mistrust of schools and the fear of being seen as acting white (and the subsequent lack of effort) must be recognized and addressed.

*Educating Involuntary Minority Students: Recognize and Deal with Opposition, Ambivalence, and Mistrust*

As we have shown, the fundamental problem for educators is that many involuntary minorities do not trust "white" institutions such as

schools, courts, and government. As a result of a long history of racism and discrimination, many involuntary minorities have developed an *oppositional identity* to white mainstream society which makes them reluctant to cross cultural boundaries and adopt what they consider to be "white ways" of talking, thinking, and behaving because they fear doing so will displace their own minority identity and alienate them from their peers, family, and community. This mistrust is often *accompanied* by an abstract belief in the importance of an education for success which is contradicted by their community's and parents' concrete experiences. The net result is ambivalence about the usefulness of school as a vehicle to success in life. This ambivalence makes it difficult for many involuntary minority students to put in the full effort required for school success.

### *What Teachers Can Do*

*Build Trust.* Since many involuntary minority students come to school with an ambivalence about the value of education and about conforming to the demands of a "white" institution, building trust needs to be the first priority for teachers. While it may not be an easy task to change the student's trust in "the system" as a whole, individual teachers can foster a trusting relationship between themselves and their students. As Erickson (1987) points out, students will trust teachers when they believe that (1) the teacher has the student's best interests at heart and (2) the student's identity and self-esteem will not be harmed. Teachers need to show students by word and deed that they believe in their students, that their culture is worthy of respect, and that succeeding in school will leave their identity intact.

*Culturally Responsive Instruction.* Culturally responsive or appropriate instruction (Au and Mason 1981; Ladson-Billings 1994) is instruction that acknowledges and accommodates students' culture, language, and learning styles in the curriculum and classroom. It is a response designed to close the gap between the students' cultural patterns and the school's institutional requirements and prevent the type of miscommunication that is caused by the conflict between teachers' and students' culturally determined interactional styles. Culturally responsive instruction will also show the students that the teacher recognizes and honors their cultural and personal experiences and will help make school a less alien place.

For black American students, for example, speaking standard English is a major characteristic of "acting white" which is to be resisted. Thus, acknowledging the validity of the use of black English in appropriate contexts can help students acquire standard English without seeing it as threatening their own language and ethnic identity. Students can be taught that different ways of speaking are considered appropriate in different situations. In school and in other formal situations standard English is expected and rewarded, while at home and out of school their

own language is appropriate. Rather than trying to replace students' dialects with standard English, teachers need to encourage the use of code switching by showing them that appropriateness to the situation determines language use.

Culturally responsive instruction requires that teachers understand their students' culture and language. Bringing students' and their community's folklore into the classroom is a particularly effective way to bridge the cultural gap (see Simons 1990). It helps teachers learn about their students' culture and life experiences and communicates to the students that the teacher is interested in their world, which serves to validate their identity.

Culturally responsive pedagogy has been criticized on the grounds that there are many examples of successful schools and teachers of minority students who do not accommodate children's cultures, such as black Muslim schools and Roman Catholic parochial schools (Erickson 1987). There are also voluntary minority groups who are culturally very different from the mainstream culture of the school yet succeed without culturally responsive instruction. Thus, closing the cultural gap does not appear to be a necessary condition for improving minority school achievement. It appears that the underlying factor in successful culturally responsive and nonresponsive instruction is the building of trust. Any type of instruction that builds trust in one way or another, even if not "culturally responsive," between the teacher and the students will increase the chances of improving student achievement.

*Explicitly Deal with Opposition/Ambivalence.* Involuntary minority students may not be fully conscious or have a fully articulated understanding of their own ambivalence and resistance to school. But most are aware of the oppression their groups have faced and still face in life. It is, therefore, important to raise the issue of ambivalence and resistance for discussion because it will help students to think openly about their behaviors (so that they can critically evaluate their own actions). Readings from the autobiographies of involuntary minorities who have faced and resolved their ambivalence about schools and teachers can be used as a basis for discussions and writing assignments.

Teachers can guide writing and discussion so that students can (1) begin thinking consciously about the purpose of schooling; (2) assess their behavior and see how this behavior may handicap them in their academic performance; (3) think about their ambivalence toward schools and teachers; and (4) start to see teachers as allies rather than adversaries in their education.

Another area for class discussion and writing is the equating of school success with "acting white" in which there is peer pressure *not* to exhibit the attitudes and behaviors that lead to school success. Teachers need to find ways to help students see that they can be successful in school and maintain their cultural identity.

*Role Models.* Role models play an important part in student motivation to succeed in school. Role models provide students with an adult to admire and emulate. For many involuntary minorities, academically and economically successful role models are particularly important because they come from communities where, due to poverty and discrimination, there are not enough successful role models. Role models need to be chosen carefully. It is not enough to expose students to successful members of their particular ethnic or racial group. Students need to be exposed through mentoring programs and other ways to members of their own groups who are academically and professionally successful *and* who retain their minority identity. Successful minorities who are seen as having abandoned their cultural identity to succeed in the "white world" will not be very useful role models because they may be seen as Uncle Toms.

*High Standards.* Teachers should have clearly stated high standards and expect students to meet these standards. By doing so the teacher will build trust by conveying the message that he or she believes students have the intellectual ability to do well and that he or she does not share racist stereotypes about the inferior intellectual ability of minorities.

*Parent and Community Involvement.* Because much of the mistrust of schools comes from the community and students' parents, teachers will need to work hard to try enlist parent and community support of their children's education. They need to show parents that they are respected and needed to help their children succeed in school. Personal, individual contacts can help overcome group and institutional stereotypes. Teachers need to try to find ways to make their contacts with parents positive by notifying them about their children's success rather than limiting their contact to informing parents about the students' problems. Enlisting the support of children's communities and parents presents hurdles that are extremely difficult to overcome because teachers are not generally trained to engage in this type of activity and because, more importantly, according to the cultural-ecological theory the community and parents play a substantial if not controlling role in producing the mistrust that students bring to school.

### *Voluntary Minority Students*

For many voluntary minority students the problem of trust is less of an issue. Their pragmatic attitude toward school, as well as high parental expectations, allow many of them to succeed even under poor instruction. The less successful voluntary minority students have different problems than involuntary minority students. Their problems revolve around the excessive pressure from high expectations that parents and teachers have for them. The difficulty of living up to these expectations can result in poor school performance due to anxiety or as an act of conscious or unconscious resistance. Even when school performance does not suffer, there are residual feelings of uneasiness and resentment

about the model minority stereotype and the pressure to succeed. Teachers need to find ways to reduce the pressure by providing opportunities to openly discuss them and to help students develop ways of dealing with these pressures.

### *The Educational Value of the Ogbu Theory*

While the Ogbu theory is not a theory of pedagogy and does not propose educational strategies for teaching minority students, it does have educational value. First, it provides educators with an understanding of some of the sociocultural dynamics affecting minority children's school performance and explains the differences in school performance between voluntary and involuntary minority groups. Second, it highlights the central issues responsible for the school failure of many involuntary minority students, namely mistrust, oppositional identity, and peer pressure not to "act white." Third, it explains in terms of building trust why some types of instruction succeed with involuntary minorities while other types fail. Further, it provides criteria for evaluating the potential for success of educational strategies. Finally, it suggests some instructional strategies, as discussed above, that may work because they are designed to deal with the problems of mistrust, oppositional identity, and peer pressure not to act white.

There is one point to keep in mind. The cultural-ecological theory places great weight on formidable nonschool community forces that affect school success. This focus on out-of-school forces may explain why educators have generally not attempted to use the theory in developing instructional strategies. Since the out-of-school forces are so strong, it is not clear how much can be accomplished in school without changing community beliefs and attitudes. This is an area in which educators have not been very successful in the past or which they see as their responsibility. It remains an open question whether changes in the schools and instructional strategies *alone* can improve involuntary minority students' school success. It may be necessary, as many have advocated, to enlist the support of parents and the community, which will involve earning their trust.

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Corporation of New York, the W. T. Grant Foundation, the Russell Sage Foundation, and the Spencer Foundation.

1. John U. Ogbu is primarily responsible for the description of the theory and Herbert D. Simons is primarily responsible for the part on the implications of the theory for educational practice.

2. Since 1987 there have been 24 doctoral dissertations, four masters theses, and over 20 other studies and articles based entirely or in part on Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory and writings on minority education. These include studies and writers in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Taiwan, and elsewhere.

3. Ogbu initially suggested that there are three sets of factors influencing minority school performance: societal, school, and community (Ogbu 1987:317-320). But in his recent writings, he talks about the "two parts" of the problem, combining the school and societal forces as one part, *the system*, and retaining *community forces* as the second part (Ogbu 1990:17-18; 1995a). Nowhere in his writings has he claimed that minority school performance is determined only or primarily by "community forces."

4. For the Chinese see Low 1982 and Wong 1989; for Mexican Americans see Blair 1972 and Valencia 1991; and for Black Americans see Carnoy 1994 and Ogbu 1978.

5. The clarification is necessary because some readers of *AEQ* continue to misinterpret it. In a recent theme issue of *AEQ* (Gibson 1997), some authors lumped together "economic immigrants," "refugees," "guest workers," "undocumented workers," and "migrants from former colonies" as "immigrants" and used this classification to evaluate Ogbu's theory!

6. Some Asian Americans are currently reassessing the experiences of their forebears as well as writing on contemporary issues of culture, language, and identity (Espiritu 1992; Juan 1994; Min 1995; Wei 1993). However, there is strong evidence that descendants of those immigrants continue to do well in school partly because of community forces.

7. At a conference at Harvard University in July 1997, an immigrant from Jamaica told Ogbu that her son decided to become a "Black American" at adolescence and that he ceased to follow the educational strategies of her immigrant community.

8. The low school performance and oppositional attitudes of Afro-Caribbeans in Canada (Solomon 1992) have been mentioned as challenging Ogbu's theory. On the contrary, their situation is consistent with the theory. Initially, Afro-Canadians were made minorities against their will through slavery. White Canadians have forced subsequent black immigrants to become like the involuntary group (Dei in press; Talbot 1984). Another case said to challenge the theory is Stacey Lee's study of "Asians" and "Koreans" (Gibson 1997). Lee's study is poor for two reasons. First, the study lumps "refugees" from Cambodia and Vietnam together with "immigrants" from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan as "Asians." Her examples of "Asian" students who are not doing well in school and manifesting oppositional attitudes and behaviors are from the refugee group. The cultural-ecological theory is about "immigrants," not refugees. Second, she found that the "new wavers" were not doing particularly well in school. Again, the "new wavers" were not immigrants but "Southeast Asian refugees from working-class and poor families" (Lee 1994:22).

9. Whites working in one woolen industry between 1873 and 1880 were paid three dollars a day, while the Chinese doing the same job in the same factory

were paid one dollar a day. The Chinese felt they had to accept the lower wages partly because it was better than what they would make "back home." (Coolidge 1909:359).

10. Ogbu prefers to talk about "boundaries" in discussing cultural and language differences between mainstream white Americans and minorities. He argues that it is not the "differences" in language and culture per se that are at issue; rather it is the relationship between a given minority's language and culture and mainstream white American language and culture.

11. The discussion in this section is not intended to mean that school and other factors do not contribute to students' positive or negative academic engagement. As we stated earlier, there are two parts to the problem of minority students' school adjustment and performance: "the system" (i.e., societal and school factors) and community forces. However, the focus of the present article is the effects of community forces on school attendance, achievement behavior, and academic performance, since the theory predicts that differences among minorities in school performance are largely due to differences in community forces.

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